

THE SEDUCTION OF ADONIS

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Excerpt

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

(Midnight. Music dwindles to the pulse of an ancient heartbeat as the world converts to something heavy, hot, and sinister. This is the Love-god's cave. Enter ADONIS, armed and on the hunt.)

ADONIS. This is the place they say that Love resides.
This nettled grove, his Temple. 'Tis very strange:
I should have thought the god of Love—or Passion,
As others call him—should reside in splendor!
In cloudy castle-tops and realms of blinding light!
But here, each bare and twisted branch is pricked,
Like Winter roses, if the branch were only thorn.
 ...I bleed. I think he hunts me first.
Well, I'll respond:
Where are you, Love? Come hither! I call you, Lord!
Appear! Your bridegroom's come to claim you!
 No?
Yet I feel this heated forest heart-beat faster:
What would you then, my Lord? Come now, command!
Bid me do your will, and I'll obey!
I have waited, O so long for thee, my Lord.
Come, Cupid! Now! I beg thee—

CUPID. *(Off-stage.)* Kneel.

ADONIS. And so I shall.

(As the dialogue continues, CUPID'S voice comes from the shadows. Perhaps his outline is dimly seen against the pulsing heart.)

CUPID. I've heard you screaming out my name. You shouldn't be here, mortal.

ADONIS. I come, O god of Love, to be your priest.

CUPID. My...priest? I have no need of priests when every man's my slave.

ADONIS. To worship you, to sing your praise—

CUPID. *(Overlapping.)* How worship me?

ADONIS. Upon my knees.

CUPID. Just so. You're very handsome, mortal. What's your name.

ADONIS. I'm called Adonis, Lord. May I not see your face?

CUPID. You'd find me monstrous.

ADONIS. I think not so.

CUPID. Then you'd think wrong: I'm ugly, toxic and malformed.
My touch is poison. Just ask the pox-plagued whore;
She knows my favor well.

ADONIS. Then she has lied.
For I have read about you in my books,
And know that you are Innocence Himself.

CUPID. Your mortals *write* of me?

ADONIS. If you would see...?

CUPID. Bow your head. And close your eyes.

ADONIS. I will.

(The god of Love descends. A little wild from the wood. He does not approach the book, but examines the man before him. In wonder:)

CUPID. You look like me.

ADONIS. It has been said.

CUPID. I told you: close your eyes!...Is this the book?

ADONIS. It is.

CUPID. O. There aren't any pictures.

(Only slightly peeking, ADONIS turns a page.)

CUPID. ...I never looked like that.

ADONIS. You sound not like a babe.

CUPID. No diaper, aye. And my wings are clipped.

(CUPID takes the book turning it this way and that. As he walks away, ADONIS opens his eyes and gazes on him.)

ADONIS. I love you, Lord.

CUPID. I said you mustn't look!
But with those eyes... Well, here is your god, Adonis!
Is he not fair?

ADONIS. No, my Lord, he's glorious.

(Impulsively, ADONIS lunges forward and kisses him. CUPID comes away laughing.)

CUPID. I thought it might be so. You wicked men!

(Wildly, CUPID kisses ADONIS in return. Passion's hand slips down to rest over—)

ADONIS. My Lord! I would remain...untouched.

CUPID. What? Never touched yourself? I know it can't be so.
What else could you want from a broken thing like me?
You sought the Archer to spring your bow to life—

ADONIS. I swear, I only meant———O!
O...! O—god of Passions! NO—!

(ADONIS falls forward, spent.)

CUPID. Aye. Well. That was fun. Farewell.

ADONIS. I cannot move.

CUPID. I command you, man, begone. Would you have more?

ADONIS. Aye—but not like that!

CUPID. What? Do I hurt you?

ADONIS. Yes. Who should most Tender be—aye, your Mother
Taught me that: your proper name.

CUPID. Be silent.

ADONIS. Why? Good my Lord, you have forgot yourself.

CUPID. I said you mustn't speak—

ADONIS. Yet I'll be heard!
I know You—Love—know You by what I never knew.
What to other men is birthright, myself am much denied.
I know You—by the hollow in my Heart
Which absent Mother, absent Father, absent Lover, Brother, Friend
Could never fill...although 'twas never tried.
And for this face, which is your own: a Mirror
But no more; Incapable of movement or expressure
Except what Thou, Original and Progenitor,
Cast upon this mere Reflection.—I stand
Unworthy, at Thy Feet, and beg Thee—Love:
Remember what Thou art.

CUPID. And what is that?
Would you say “Tenderness?” It is not so.
Would you say “Adoration?” Then come, my priest,
Adore. On bended knee with open mouth,
Receive me.—Ha! What? Do you run away?

ADONIS. I do not fear thee, Lord. But will not take thee, Cupid, whiles thou art not
thyself. Thou'rt more than merely body. Though I do not disdain thy body.
Indeed, it is like mine, as I would see myself. And as thou art my mirror,
so am I thine: and will show thee what thou art.

(Tentatively, ADONIS kisses CUPID again.)

ADONIS. There is no danger here. I will return.

CUPID. To pleasure me?

ADONIS. To fix you, Lord. And remind you who you are.

CUPID. I will remain! With arrows sprung and bow hung tight.

ADONIS. And I'll return tomorrow: with lantern and with light.

(With a bow, ADONIS exits. CUPID remains behind, dappled in moonlight.)

CUPID.

Are all mortals like this man?
Brazen, handsome (much like me!) yet not like me:
Intent on shaping me to the image of themselves,
Ensnaring me within a cage of reckless words
So that ev'ry man who fancies him a Poet
May say what Love "must" be—But *who*
May Cupid love? Indeed:
 May Cupid Love?
...And love a mortal! By all the Elder gods!
To be like Zeus (and yet would not be *Him*—
Who comes most regular, an addict to my arrows,
Or so he says)—What does this...*Adonis*
See in me? What though there's mirrors
In his eyes, reminds me what I am—
Or what the Fates would have me be,
Were I not—

(He rubs his shoulder, where there's only scars. A moment, and then, like the dawn, Love looks on all of us, with joy and recognition.)

CUPID.

There's not a one of you I do not know,
Although we never met. Not one of you
Who hath not longed for me, as I for thee—
Aye, each of you, whom my Mother made,
Siblings to my soul, unique and wonderful.
And if I—if thou—wouldst welcome Me,
Not as you'd recreate me, but as I broken am:
 O—World!
Too long your god's been hid, but he's returned!
And every one of thee, thou silly, short-lived mortals,
Shall Cupid cherish; thy memory Immortal
And Undaunted within this fragile heart.
 O—————
Thou paragon of Animals; thou Beauties of the World:
Thou quintessences of Dust:
 I Bless Thee, mortals. All.

(A benediction. A breath. The heart-cave beats.)