

PERSEPHONE RISES

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Excerpt

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(The Virgin Grove. PERSEPHONE has just been born in music, when—)

(An arrow zips overhead, and plunges in the tree.)

(All freeze:)

ARTEMIS. Come forth, thou wretch! I see thee!
Stand forth, unwary and unwise,
Or I shall have thy heart tonight for vittles.

(From his hiding place, CUPID himself appears.)

ATHENA. 'Tis Cupid.

PERSEPHONE. O!

ATHENA. Put down your arrows, Artemis. He cannot harm us here.

DEMETER. Yet he harmed me. Keep up your arrows, Artemis.
Athena, keep us safe!

ATHENA. With Wisdom, aye. I bear no spear.
Besides, he is a god like us. We cannot harm each other.

DEMETER. No?

ARTEMIS. Now blind-boy, speak: why hunt you in these woods?

CUPID. Good morrow, aunts! Artemis, Athena.
And...those I do not know. Will hold this, please?
Hunt you for my heart, and not a hind?
My heart no man may have; my hind is yours.

ARTEMIS. A hind, sweet coz? Speak plainly, then: an ass.

CUPID. An ass? Why, as you please. And mine is round.

(PERSEPHONE *giggles.*)

CUPID. But peace, I prithee, peace! Put down your arms.

DEMETER. An' you keep your trousers up.

CUPID. I will!
Indeed, they're soiled now. But that's all one.
You'll pardon me; I'll enter once again.
Good Aunts! What? *Still* with spears?
I'll try once more.

ATHENA. Stay, Cupid. Why have you come?

CUPID. ...I had forgot. I'll enter once again.

ATHENA. There is no need. Your Mother sent you hither, no?

CUPID. She did. "To parlay with the Virgin gods."
I say: she calls you "Virgins," what is that?
There is some lightness to the word: a "Virgin!"
Aye! It bubbles from my mouth. A "Virgin."
O!
I'll be one, too! I pray you: how's it done?

PERSEPHONE. What funny things she says! What is this?

DEMETER. Hush, Persephone.

CUPID. "Persephone," you say? Which one is that?

PERSEPHONE. I answer to that name.

CUPID. Then I am sent to fetch thee!

PERSEPHONE. O!

(DEMETER *shakes the earth.* CUPID *tumbles.*)

CUPID. Aye, that was fun!

PERSEPHONE. What have you done?

DEMETER. Nay, creature, heed me.

PERSEPHONE. No! You've broken her.

ATHENA. No "her," Persephone. This creature is a "boy."

PERSEPHONE. And what is that?

ARTEMIS. A kind of *Man*.

ATHENA. And one I think you'll like.

PERSEPHONE. Then, "Man"—

CUPID. No *Man*.

PERSEPHONE. What...? (*Discovering the word.*) "Boy?" Stand up! And answer: Are you well?

CUPID. I am! Quite well! But better still if I tumble once again?

PERSEPHONE. If I may join you.

CUPID. Always.

PERSEPHONE. Now Mother, shake the ground!

ATHENA. It seems your doting "Daughter" fancies Love.
Demeter, best beware. Love stumbles in
Where he least is looked for.

ARTEMIS. Fool Love god, go.
Your Mother knows my mind; yourself are banished
From the Virgin court. Our bodies are inviolate.
Our wills remain our own. We are not subject
To the Loves or to your golden arrows,
But serve a greater God than you. Your Mother
Knew this once. Then fly. You have no business here.

CUPID. I do, indeed! I'm sent—where is my bow?
Ah, thank you—yes! I am sent to shoot you...
If I can find my arrows. Did I give them you?
No matter. Diana, may I borrow one?

PERSEPHONE. I like this "boy" quite well! They call you... "Cupid?"

CUPID. Aye! And Mother calls me “Tender” when I nap.

PERSEPHONE. A god?

CUPID. Like you.

PERSEPHONE. The lord of—?

CUPID. *Everything.*

PERSEPHONE. O! Why then...you may do much.

CUPID. And more besides! There’s nothing I can’t do.
I caught a comet once, clung to his silver hair
And laughed when he would shake me. You’ll catch one, too!

PERSEPHONE. Were not afraid?

CUPID. What should I fear? The world is beautiful
And made for us to love—Why does she weep?
I spoke the truth. You’ve seen it.

DEMETER. But she has not.

CUPID. O, no? Why’s that?

(They’re silent.)

CUPID. Or nay—nay, tell me not:
I know it. That “Virgin” you spoke of, aye?
That “Virgin” holds the key. That...*Virgin*
Which my Mother bade me break from thee,
That *Virgin* means...To be shut away?
Blinded. Aye!—Imprisoned here.
That word which sang so richly on my lips,
It means: to be Alone.

DEMETER. And that it does.

ATHENA. In part. But not in whole. It means—

CUPID. *(Overlapping.) Alone, sweet coz? Alone!*
There is no worser fate than that! Wilt be a *Virgin*, friend?

PERSEPHONE. It is my Mother’s will.

CUPID. Aye. But what is thine?

PERSEPHONE. ...to be a good girl? To make my Mother happy.
To make a vow to be a Virgin, always.
To touch your lips—I know not why I want them, but...
To be a Queen.

CUPID. My Mother's Queen.

PERSEPHONE. And Virgin?

CUPID. I think not so.

DEMETER. Come, Persephone—away.

CUPID. One moment—wait!

PERSEPHONE. Yes, boy!

CUPID. I'd ask a thing of you.

PERSEPHONE. What is it? O—!

(For he has taken her hand, and surprised them both. A beat.)

CUPID. Make this vow tomorrow. Leave to me tonight.

PERSEPHONE. I—*(Another beat.)*

DEMETER. Nay, do not heed him, creature.

CUPID. The world is wide
And full of hidden places. I'll show you how...
To huddle 'neath a toadstool when it rains!,
To snuggle with the long-eared rabbit's mate,
To slip behind the secrets of this world;
Give me your other hand.

PERSEPHONE. I will.

DEMETER. Persephone, no!

PERSEPHONE. One little evening, Mother! What is that?
Should I not see the world I'm meant to rule?
How can a Queen be Virgin and alone,
Shut off from the mortals that...(To CUPID.) you made, or...
Caused to *be* made; in tangent with the Fates—
And there's another word.
I am five minutes old, and yet I fear these...
"Fates." For you, with them, make life. But they, with...
Something else, that I cannot clearly see:
Nay, all is darkness there. Athena, Wisdom:
Counsel me. And Artemis—your veil! Good Mother!
What is this thing I cannot see?

DEMETER. What we would shield you from.

CUPID. What you would keep her from! Persephone—
Arise! And crown thyself!
Be the Queen of Life and I shall be thy Squire,
Crown thee with no winding sheet, but daffodils;
Hide thee not away, but display thee to the world;
And thou and I shall rule as new-made gods—
Away from both our Mothers. Aye, there's a thought.
Shall we usurp them, cousin?

PERSEPHONE. Nay, I must think.

CUPID. So you not think a se'ennight. I will be gone.

PERSEPHONE. But will return?

CUPID. I will.

PERSEPHONE. Your promise, boy?

CUPID. 'Tis this:

(He kisses her.)

CUPID. ...Now you *must* come with me.
I've marked thee, coz. Farewell. Where's my bow?
I thank thee much. Farewell! I shall return!

PERSEPHONE. Good Love, remember me?

CUPID. Sweet Life, I will.

(CUPID flees.)

PERSEPHONE. How sweet he is!
How different from myself—I know not how.
I will discover—O!

(DEMETER grabs PERSEPHONE.)

ATHENA. Demeter, let her go.

DEMETER. Would you run off to your doom?

PERSEPHONE. With Cupid—!

DEMETER. Aye, to your demise!

PERSEPHONE. One little *night*—!
I'll swear tomorrow.

DEMETER. And sleep with him tonight?

PERSEPHONE. O no! I think I will stay up!

ARTEMIS. (*Aside.*) I have no doubt.

DEMETER. One night with Eros ruins all the rest.

ATHENA. Or changes things.

PERSEPHONE. How does it change you?

ATHENA. *Well...*

DEMETER. You'll be no longer Virgin.

PERSEPHONE. I am no Virgin now!
I've made no oath. And if he swears that "Virgin"
Means to be *alone*...but stay. He must be wrong.
For you, my Aunts, are "Virgin." And gather
Altogether...I think the boy's confused.
Tell me, Artemis, Athena—what would I swear
If I become this "Virgin?"

DEMETER. She is too young to understand.
You cannot tell her.

ARTEMIS.

And yet we'll take no oath
'Til it be understood. You begged, Demeter,
To join our new-made Virgin Grove, which we:
Athena, Wisdom-Born, and I who guard the Moon,
Agreed to welcome here. Before you brought this...

ATHENA.

"Daughter."

ARTEMIS.

I did forget me: *Daughter* to the world.
This *thing* that mortals have—this...*(Re: PERSEPHONE.)*
God who should not be—

DEMETER.

She is my flesh.
I know not how I had her. Something...*happened*:
With Poseidon, as I sat along the shore.
I think I saw this Cupid's arrow pierce him,
And then a wave—unnatural and fierce,
Some twelve foot high, and brimming white and sinister,
Like Ares' horses frothing at the mouth
To trample me to death, descend upon me:
Sweep me up so that I could not breathe; toss me,
Turn me, stuff my mouth with water, seaweed thick,
And sticky—so that I could not scream but putrid
Water filled my ears and nose and lower parts—
Shove through me with his triton, and gag me
On a spiny fish and when...my... "Husband?"
Is that the word, Athena? For these mortals
Use that word when they have done what hath been done
To me.—When...my... "Husband," then,
Had done with me, he coughed me on the shore,
With blood between my legs that I did not dare
Wash off with his filthy *water*—but came to thee,
Athena, Artemis. And begged thee for some aid.
Some minutes, years, a century had passed: I swole
—And here you are!
Persephone, the new-made god of Life.

ARTEMIS.

Who should not be.

DEMETER.

And yet who is.
(Revelation.) And who I'll not give up. She's *mine*.

(Scene continues...)