

George MacDonald (1824-1905)

7 *The Unseen Model*

Forth to his study the sculptor goes  
In a mood of lofty mirth:  
“Now shall the tongues of my carping foes  
Confess what my art is worth!  
In my brain last night the vision arose, 5  
To-morrow shall see its birth!”

He stood like a god; with creating hand  
He struck the formless clay:  
“Psyche, arise,” he said, “and stand;  
In beauty confront the day. 10  
I have sought nor found thee in any land;  
I call thee: arise; obey!”

The sun was low in the eastern skies  
When spoke the confident youth;  
Sweet Psyche, all day, his hands and eyes 15  
Wiled from the clay uncouth,  
Nor ceased when the shadows came up like spies  
That dog the steps of Truth.

He said, “I will do my will in spite  
Of the rising dark; for, see, 20  
She grows to my hand! The mar-work night  
Shall hurry and hide and flee  
From the glow of my lamp and the making might  
That passeth out of me!”

In the flickering lamplight the figure swayed, 25  
In the shadows did melt and swim:  
With tool and thumb he modelled and made,  
Nor knew that feature and limb  
Half-obeying, half-disobeyed,  
And mocking eluded him. 30

At the dawning Psyche of his brain  
Joyous he wrought all night;  
The oil went low, and he trimmed in vain,

The lamp would not burn bright;  
But he still wrought on: through the high roof-pane 35  
He saw the first faint light!

The dark retreated; the morning spread;  
His creatures their shapes resume;  
The plaster stares dumb-white and dead;  
A faint blue liquid bloom 40  
Lies on each marble bosom and head;  
To his Psyche clings the gloom.

Backward he stept to see the clay:  
His visage grew white and sear;  
No beauty ideal confronted the day, 45  
No Psyche from upper sphere,  
But a once loved shape that in darkness lay,  
Buried a lonesome year!

From maidenhood's wilderness fair and wild  
A girl to his charm had hied: 50  
He had blown out the lamp of the trusting child,  
And in the darkness she died;  
Now from the clay she sadly smiled,  
And the sculptor stood staring-eyed.

He had summoned Psyche — and Psyche crept 55  
From a half-forgotten tomb;  
She brought her sad smile, that still she kept,  
Her eyes she left in the gloom!  
High grace had found him, for now he wept,  
And love was his endless doom! 60

Night-long he pined, all day did rue;  
He haunted her form with sighs:  
As oft as his clay to a lady grew  
The carvers, with dim surmise,  
Would whisper, "The same shape come to woo, 65  
With its blindly beseeching eyes!"

1867

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