

**PSYCHE**

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Psyche by Louis Couperus

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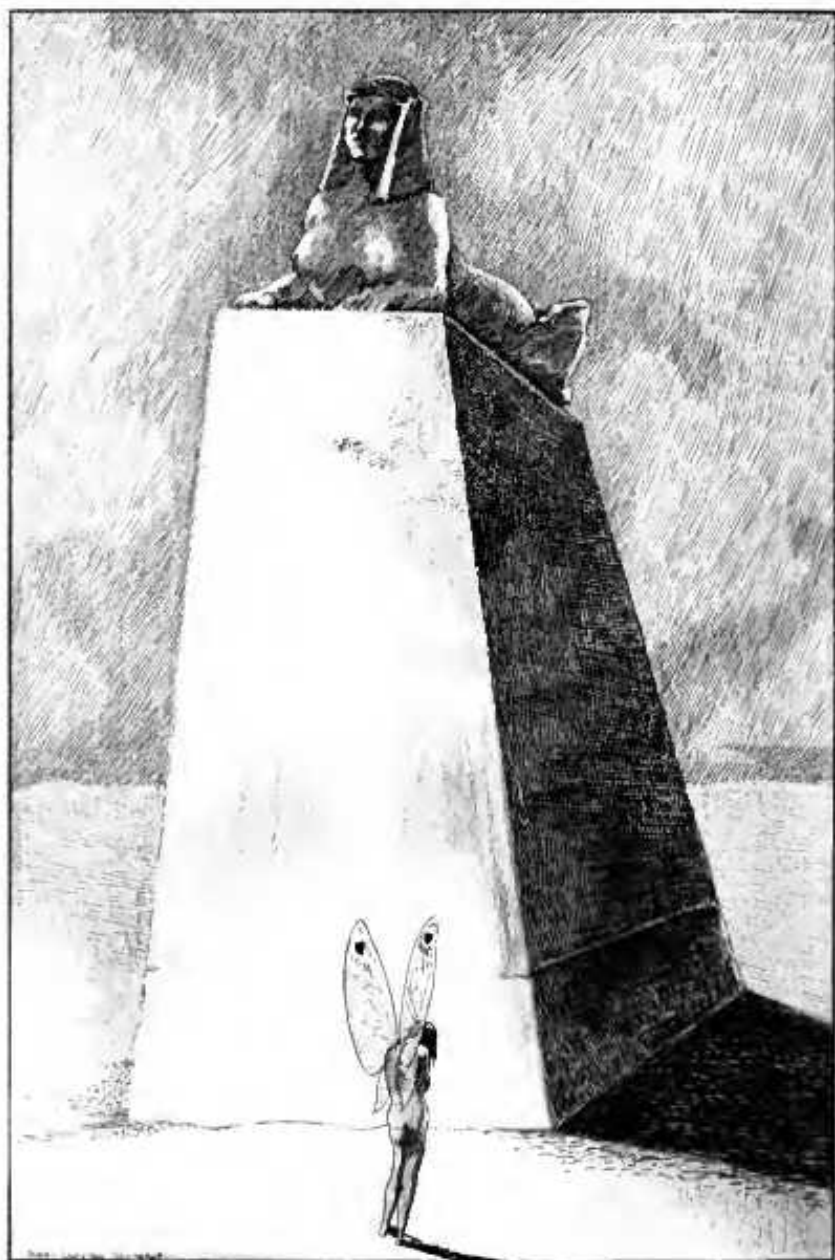
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**LOUIS COUPERUS**

**PSYCHE**





PSYCHE AND THE SPHINX

[Frontispiece

# PSYCHE

BY

LOUIS COUPERUS

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH,  
WITH THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION,

BY

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*With Twelve Illustrations by Dion Clayton Callthrop*



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"CRY no more now and go to sleep, and if you cannot sleep, I will tell you a story, a pretty story of flowers and gems and birds, of a young prince and a little princess. . . . For in the world there is nothing more than a story."

1624995

# PSYCHE

## CHAPTER I

GIGANTICALLY massive, with three hundred towers, on the summit of a rocky mountain, rose the king's castle high into the clouds.

But the summit was broad, and flat as a plateau, and the castle spread far out, for miles and miles, with ramparts and walls and pinnacles.

And everywhere rose up the towers, lost in the clouds, and the castle was like a city, built upon a lofty rock of basalt.

Round the castle and far away lay the valleys of the kingdom, receding into the horizon, one after the other, and ever and ever.

Ever changing was the horizon : now pink, then silver ; now blue, then golden ; now grey, then white and misty, and gradually fading away, and never could the last be seen.



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In clear weather there loomed behind the horizon always another horizon. They circled one another endlessly, they were lost in the dissolving mists, and suddenly their silhouette became more sharply defined.

Over the lofty towers stretched away at times an expanse of variegated clouds, but below rushed a torrent, which fell like a cataract into a fathomless abyss, that made one dizzy to look at.

So it seemed as if the castle rose up to the highest stars and went down to the central nave of the earth.

Along the battlements, higher than a man, Psyche often wandered, wandered round the castle from tower to tower, from wall to wall, with a dreamy smile on her face, then she looked up and stretched out her hands to the stars, or gazed below at the dashing water, with all the colours of the rainbow, till her head grew dizzy, and she drew back and placed her little hands before her eyes. And long she would sit in the corner of an embrasure, her eyes looking far away, a smile on her face, her knees drawn up and her arms entwining them, and her tiny wings spread out against the mossy stone-work, like a butterfly that sat motionless.

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And she gazed at the horizon, and however much she gazed, she always saw more.

Close by were the green valleys, dotted with grazing sheep, soft meadows with fat cattle, waving corn-fields, canals covered with ships, and the cottage roofs of a village. Farther away were lines of woods, hill-tops, mountain-ridges, or a mass of angular, rough-hewn basalt.

Still farther off, misty towers with minarets and domes, cupolas and spires, smoking chimneys, and the outline of a broad river. Beyond, the horizon became milk-white, or like an opal, but not a line more was there, only tint, the reflection of the last glow of the sun, as if lakes were mirrored there ; islands rose, low, in the air, aerial paradises, watery streaks of blue sea, oceans of ether and light quivering nothingness ! . . . .

And Psyche gazed and mused. . . . She was the third princess, the youngest daughter of the old king, monarch of the *Kingdom of the Past*. . . . She was always very lonely. Her sisters she seldom saw, her father only for a moment in the evening, before she went to bed ; and when she had the chance she fled from the mumbling old nurse, and wandered along

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the battlements and dreamed, with her eyes far away, gazing at the vast kingdom, beyond which was nothingness. . . .

Oh, how she longed to go farther than the castle, to the meadows, the woods, the towns—to go to the shining lakes, the opal islands, the oceans of ether, and then to that far, far-off nothingness, that quivered so, like a pale, pale light! . . . . Would she ever be able to pass out of the gates?—Oh, how she longed to wander, to seek, to fly! . . . . To fly, oh! to fly, to fly as the sparrows, the doves, the eagles!

And she flapped her weak, little wings.

On her tender shoulders there were two wings, like those of a very large butterfly, transparent membranes, covered with crimson and soft, yellow dust, streaked with azure and pink, where they were joined to her back. And on each wing glowed two eyes, like those on a peacock's tail, but more beautiful in colour and glistening like jewels, fine sapphires and emeralds on velvet, and the velvet eye set four times in the glittering texture of the wings.

Her wings she flapped, but with them she could not fly.