

***This is an excerpt from my Senior Capstone visual novel, *Eros Purge*, written in Naninovel code. The premise of this scene is that Aphrodite is judging the player based on their lowest stat, out of Pathos, Ethos, or Logos, and giving them a “makeover” based on it. For expediency, this is a filtered and incomplete version of the Pathos route.**

As Aphrodite turns away from Narcissus, you begin to understand your role in this.

The dead are the closest to gods than anything because they can never become more than what they were at the end of life. Gods do not change. Eros may believe that you, Narcissus, Alcibiades, Phryne, and Helen can become...better, in whatever ways he may define the word.

But you'll never escape from who you died as.

You'll never not be the echo of a human, and Aphrodite will never not be a god.

And humans will never not be toys, grasped in spurned, hungry hands.

@goto .LabelAphroditePathos

#LabelAphroditePathos

The entire time that Aphrodite had scolded Narcissus, there had been a smile on her face.

But the moment she looks at you, the smile drops. She takes the sight of you in like bitter medicine.

You swallow thickly, hands slightly shaking as a primal fear spikes through you.

Aphrodite: You know, I despise humans like you the most.

Aphrodite: The ones who lack a heart. The best thing about humans—the *only* good thing about humans—and you scorned it.

Aphrodite: Threw it aside.

Aphrodite: So, I know exactly what I'm going to do for your makeover, {PlayerName}.

Aphrodite: I'm going to dig up your grave, pull your heart out of your corpse, and bring it to you because you seem to have left it on the surface.

Aphrodite: Assuming that you had a heart to begin with!

She allows a few more moments of silence before forcing out a breath of laughter.

Aphrodite: Of course, that's all a metaphor. A hyperbole, if you will.

@if VariableLogos>=2

Those are two entirely different literary devices, but you keep your mouth shut in favor of keeping your life. Well, your...afterlife.

@else

You simply blink and pray to a god that isn't Aphrodite that she won't desecrate your grave.

@endIf

Aphrodite: Let's start with a simple, itty bitty, tiny, insignificant question.

Aphrodite: What do you feel most sorry for?

Player: What?

The question shocks the word out of you.

Aphrodite: Oh, you know. What made you lay awake at night in life, drowning in guilt?

Aphrodite: A topic of conversation that you breeze past, a memory you never revisit because of the way it writhes inside of you.

Aphrodite smiles. It's a cruel thing.

Aphrodite: Does anything come to mind?

@if VariableDesecrateTemple=true

@choice "Sorry for desecrating your temple, I guess." **goto::LabelDesecrateTemple1**

@choice "I really am sorry for desecrating your temple." **goto::LabelDesecrateTemple2**

@endIf

@choice "I'm not sorry for anything." **goto::LabelNotSorry**

@stop

#LabelDesecrateTemple1

@set VariableEthos-=1

Letting out a sigh, you shrug and pick at a stray string on your clothes.

Player: Sorry for desecrating your temple, I guess.

Aphrodite's eye twitches.

Aphrodite: Are you, now?

You shrug again.

Player: Of *course*.

Aphrodite stands. That alone should be a warning.

Aphrodite: No, no. You should say it again. Once more.

Aphrodite: With *feeling*, {PlayerName}.

This feels undeniably like a trap.

@choice "I'm sorry. Really sorry. Actually sorry." **goto:.LabelDesecrateTemple2**

@choice "I'm not really that sorry." **goto:.LabelNotReallySorry**

@stop

#LabelNotReallySorry

@set VariableEthos-=1

@if VariableDesecrateTemple=true

Despite the fact that you know in your unbeating, dead heart that Aphrodite is a real, true god and wielder of divine might, you can't force yourself to feel any shame.

After all, desecrating her temple had just been some fun. A harmless little trick.

So. Despite the threat. Despite Aphrodite.

Player: But I'm just really not that sorry.

@elseif VariableDesecrateTemple2=true

You can imagine the level of shame that Aphrodite is wishing for. Kneeling, bashing your head into the ground. Paying with blood.

Despite knowing this and that Aphrodite is a real, true, and vengeful god...

Player: You'd probably want me to feel very sorry.

Player: But, honestly, the more that I think about it...

Player: I don't.

@else

Despite the fact that you know in your unbeating, dead heart that Aphrodite is a real, true god and wielder of divine might, you can't force yourself to feel any shame.

Player: But I'm just really not that sorry.

@endIf

It's between one blink and the next that you feel as though ten thousand lifetimes have passed.

First, Aphrodite smiles, all with teeth meant to bite, to devour. Second, she lifts a hand that's only done two things: caressed her own face and struck her enemies down.

She's a god of many things, including love; when it comes to passion, you imagine she's only capable of expressing in extremes.

This is why, third, she sends you to Tartarus.

Lava bleeds over the landscape in cracked rivers, sweeping wandering souls into its hungry maw with dripping hands. Screams echo alongside the clatter of metal chains.

You lose your body somewhere along the way and scatter to various corners of the realm.

Your skin melts. Your bones break in different ways, at different times.

When you're eaten (how many times has it been? you've lost count), your torso lingers for weeks, stuck in between the teeth of the world.

You're not sure what happened to your legs. Your arms were last spotted slung around a Cyclops' neck.

Just when you think you've managed to reattach your head to your shoulders and get used to the agony and eternity has passed, the snap of someone's fingers snatches your focus.

Aphrodite: Are you sorry now?

You blink.

Your entire body trembles as you return to it.

The fires are gone. Nothing hurts. Your mind spins as it tries to accept that.

Are you breathing? You're breathing. You haven't breathed in years. Years? Seconds. Moments. Forever. Never.

The sun shines just to shine and not to burn you.

Narcissus stares at you. Vaguely, you remember that that should be more groundbreaking.

Narcissus: What did you do?

He's not saying the words to you.

Aphrodite: Oh, nothing, nothing! Just sent {PlayerName} to Tartarus for a brief visit.

Aphrodite: Yes, Eros forbade me from *banishing* you to Tartarus...but banishing implies that you'll never return.

Aphrodite puts a finger under your chin. You barely feel it.

Aphrodite: And you're here, aren't you, dear?

She grips your face and forces you to nod.

Aphrodite: Yes. You. Are.

Aphrodite: And how lucky you are to be!

Aphrodite: Now. I'll ask again. Are you sorry, {PlayerName}?

@choice "I'm sorry." goto:.LabelTartarusSorry

@choice "I'm sorry." goto:.LabelTartarusSorry

@choice "I'm sorry." goto:.LabelTartarusSorry

@stop