

Iphis
By Will Hightower

CAST

Iphis – a youth, born of humble stock.

Lights up on the front porch of Anaxarete. We see several flowers, wreaths, and love letters gathered around the door, propped up on a chair, and hanging from the ceiling beam with rope. They are untouched, unopened, and dying.

Enter Iphis who is carrying another large wreath on a length of rope. He approaches the door and sees all of his gifts right where he left them. He sets down his wreath and rope and knocks on the door. He patiently waits. Nothing.

Iphis

Hello? Anaxarete? It's Iphis. I came to see if you have been getting the messages I sent.... Come on Ana... I know you are home... Everything I told your nurse was true, every word of it but my love is not done justice with the use of words alone. When I saw you that first time I felt the fire of passion in every bone in my body. The very sight of you still ignites my being into a bonfire of bliss. I was so overwhelmed with emotion that I was driven into a madness that led me to this door that first night. I apologize if I frightened you, it was not my intention, but I was previously unaware that the mortal body could experience such sensations. Haunted with the guilt of my misstep and earnest in my apology I showered you with gifts, admiration, and letters of love ... But you will not even see me... Just give me a chance, a conversation, a second look... Anything.

He backs away from the door for a moment and examines a wreath.

Iphis

You have not even taken in my gifts. Your porch is beginning to look like a shrine... or perhaps gravesite. Your nurse, who approves of me and supports our being together by the way, told me you had a preference for wreaths. Fitting, for you are the champion of my love! ... Now you have plenty, yet they go untouched. You desire, I provide; just as a good man is pleased to do! Now, if you would reciprocate I will show you how a relationship should operate. Cast aside your apathy Ana! Open this door; accept the true love I embody and embrace me!

Nothing

Iphis

Instead you sentence these wreaths to death by hanging with your negligence. I assume this is a result of your distaste for me rather than contempt for the wreaths themselves.

He paces the porch in silence then sits with his back against the door.

Iphis

Understand that this is not easy for me either Ana. I fought the urge for as long as I could but I have finally failed and confessed, nay, professed my love for you. Atlas would sooner shrug off the world before I could escape my desire for you. Aphrodite has blessed me and who am I to reject the Gods? Who are you to as well? Do the Gods have no power to persuade your heart? Do you even have that organ, you cruel siren! ... Perhaps it is a curse.

He finds a letter of his on the porch. It begins to crumble in his hand as he stands up.

Iphis

I took the leap; I confided in your nurse and gave her this letter for you. This letter that describes, in brilliant prose, how it is to yearn for you so passionately, love you so tenderly, and devote myself to you so completely. And how am I rewarded for overcoming my fear and swallowing my pride?

He begins to destroy and toss the gifts.

Iphis

I am lambasted! Bombarded with rumors of your disgust and plagued with insults from friends, colleagues, and perfect strangers! Was this public execution necessary? The daggers in my back were not enough for you were they? Of course not! And yet you will not face me for the coup-de-grace.

He collects himself for a moment before

Iphis

Your scathing mockery has cut me deep Ana. My heart was exposed and without a second thought you raised your beautiful yet frigid hand to thrust your rapier of rejection, laced with doubt, despair, and detestation, through my heart and into my soul. I am mortally wounded Ana.... I do, however, have one last letter for you.

He takes a letter out of his pocket and unfolds it.

Iphis

“You have conquered, Anaxarete, and you will not have to suffer any tedium on my account. Devise glad triumphs, and sing the Paeon of victory, and wreath your brow

with shining laurel! You have conquered, and I die gladly: now, heart of steel, rejoice! Now you will have something to praise about my love, something that pleases you. Remember that my love for you did not end before life itself, and that I lose twin lights. No mere rumor will come to you to announce my death: have no doubt, I myself will be there, visibly present, so you can feast your savage eyes on my lifeless corpse.” [1]

He gently folds and lays the letter before the door.

Iphis

I brought a wreath with me as well. Just as everything else I have given you out of nothing but selfless love, it will hang on your porch-- neglected.

He grabs the length of rope and pulls the chair near him. He stands atop the chair and begins to tie the rope around the beam.

Iphis

This wreath will please you.

He thrusts his head into the noose.

Blackout

[1] “Iphis’s Last Words”. Thomas Bulfinch (1796–1867). *Age of Fable: Vols. I & II: Stories of Gods and Heroes*. 1913.