When Cronus freed the Titans, he injured his father, Uranus, and hurled parts of him backward over his shoulder so that they scattered across the land and seas. Children sprang up, most from blood on the earth, but one from her father's foam mixing with sea foam: Aphrodite. Such a strange birth might not seem the most promising start in life, but this goddess was lovely from her first breath.

And she grew even lovelier. The changeable seas taught Aphrodite nuances of colors and movement, and she used them to inspire love. She could be almost transparent, then so richly hued a god felt he'd dined far too long but couldn't yet stop. She could touch a god like a cool welcome spray on a hot afternoon or slam him like a tsunami that threatened to never let him up for air. She perfected her charms, and all under the guidance of that ancient god, Eros, the one who first led Night into the arms of Erebus, and Gaia into the arms of Uranus. Eros considered Aphrodite his special project.

When Aphrodite was confident of her ability to enchant all the sea and river gods, she moved on to see how she'd fare with land gods. First, she went to the island of Cythera, then the island of Cyprus. Wherever her foot touched
tender grasses sprouted and flowers bloomed, as though the ground itself felt blessed by her presence. And the gods... well, Aphrodite became a master at flirting in words and smiles and glances. She took up little deceits, flattering when necessary, teasing when effective. She never failed; if she wanted a god to love her, he did.

And the goddesses? They envied her at first. But Aphrodite didn’t need every god everywhere to pine after her. So she taught the other divinities how to do what she did. And they practiced these feminine wiles well, but not quite as well as Aphrodite.

Which meant every god wanted her as his wife.

Zeus was alarmed. Discord among the gods could be dangerous. He had to step in and arrange a marriage for the gorgeous goddess quickly. But who? The husband of Aphrodite would be scorned by all others simply out of jealousy. Who could Zeus afford to have the others scorn?

**STAR** Light...Star Bright

Venus is the ancient Romans’ name for Aphrodite. The planet Venus is the brightest object in the sky after the sun and the moon. Venus orbits the sun faster than Earth does. When it comes up "behind" Earth, it is visible after sunset. When it "overtakes" Earth, it is visible before sunrise. So it goes from being the Evening Star to being the Morning Star. The ancient Greeks were the first to recognize that these two "stars" were in fact one object.

The morning star sparkling on the horizon
Aphrodite winced at the very thought of him.
Zeus wouldn’t relent.
Hephaestus waited patiently through this debate, seeing immediately why Zeus had chosen him and, thus, knowing that the deal was sealed. He was overcome by the turn in his luck. Aphrodite was far better than the last wife he’d longed for, the goddess Athena, who had rejected him soundly and talked about nothing but war—why, she was battle-crazed. Aphrodite was totally unlike her. Hephaestus would make this marriage work. He would win Aphrodite’s affections. He went to his forge and made her a gold belt with the most delicate and intricate filigree that anyone had ever seen. Only the slimmest needle could poke through the myriad loops.

Aphrodite took one look at the dazzling belt and donned it. She sensed instinctively that magic wove its way through the intrigues of the curlicues of that belt. Then she walked among the gods. Oh! Incomparable as Aphrodite was, this belt made her more so. She didn’t have to whisper a word or bat an eye. Yes! With this girdle, Aphrodite could tolerate the marriage.

By crafting a glorious belt, Hephaestus finally won a wife, and what a wife—the glamorous Aphrodite. She couldn’t resist the stunning belt; beauty will have beauty, after all.