

Orpheus and Eurydice



Orpheus was given the gift of music by the god Apollo. He played his magic lute wherever he wandered. Wild beasts rested peacefully with each other when they heard his songs. Birds in the forests sang with the lute and rested on his shoulders. Gods and mortals were enchanted by his music.

After he returned with Jason and the Argonauts from their quest for the Golden Fleece, Orpheus fell in love with the beautiful Eurydice. He serenaded her with love songs until she agreed to marry him.

On their wedding day, Eurydice danced across the meadow with the nymphs and muses while Orpheus played his lute. But alas, she stepped on a poisonous snake, and it bit her ankle.

Eurydice cried out in pain. Orpheus ran to her side, but he could not save her. She died and was taken to Hades' Land of the Dead. Orpheus mourned. His sad music brought tears to all who heard his songs.

Overcome with sorrow, Orpheus went to Zeus. He asked the god's permission to go to the Land of the Dead and beg Hades to release Eurydice.

Zeus cautioned him against the journey. "It's a dangerous place," he said. "No mortal has traveled to Hades' realm and returned to Earth."

"I will take that risk," Orpheus answered. "I would rather die there near Eurydice than live on Earth without her."

When Zeus could not persuade Orpheus to give up his quest, he reluctantly gave his permission for the journey.

Orpheus traveled to the river Styx. He played his lute and sang about his beloved bride. The ferryman heard his song, and for the first time, he agreed to take a living mortal to the Land of the Dead. Orpheus continued to play as they made their way across the river. On the other side of the river, at the entrance to the Underworld, the dreaded four-headed dog that guarded Hades' realm stopped Orpheus. No living mortal had ever passed by him before. Orpheus played his songs and lulled the dog to sleep.

Orpheus made his way through caverns and passageways filled with lost souls. He played his lute and sang about his love for Eurydice. He brought happiness to many who had known no rest since they had arrived there. Everywhere he walked, he looked for Eurydice. Finally he came to the throne of Hades and Queen Persephone. He sang to them about his sorrow and asked for the release of Eurydice. Persephone cried when she heard his love songs. They reminded her of the spring flowers and sunlight in the world above them. The songs of Orpheus charmed even the King of the Underworld.

"You must listen carefully," said Hades. "I will see that Eurydice follows you back to the world, but you must not look at her until you have left my kingdom. If you do, she will return to my realm forever."

Orpheus made his way back through the passageways. He heard footsteps behind him. Orpheus wondered if Eurydice had changed since she entered the Kingdom of the Dead. Was she as beautiful as she had been on their wedding day? It didn't matter, of course. No matter what she looked like, Orpheus knew he would never love anyone else.

When Orpheus approached the end of the tunnel and saw sunlight ahead, he turned to call to Eurydice. Eurydice cried out when she saw his face, "Good-bye forever, fair Orpheus. Good-bye." Her hands reached out to him, but she disappeared back into the Realm of the Dead.



Orpheus tried to follow her, but he could not. Even his music didn't help him reenter Hades' kingdom. He lamented the foolishness that had caused Eurydice to be taken back by Hades. He called out, asking Hades to allow him to enter the Underworld again. The earth shook and Orpheus was transported back to the surface. He tried to find the river Styx, but he couldn't. The entrance to Hades' kingdom had closed up and there was no mark to show where it had been.

Orpheus continued to play his lute. His songs about the fate of the beautiful Eurydice were even sadder than before. The music brought tears to all who heard it. Orpheus wandered about the Earth from morning to night, playing his lute in the forests, hills, and towns.

A group of nymphs grew tired of Orpheus's sad songs. They mocked his grief and insisted that he dance with them. Orpheus paid no attention. The nymphs screamed so loudly that no one could hear his music. Still he didn't stop playing and singing.

Angry, the nymphs killed Orpheus and threw his body into a stream. His lute continued to play as it floated in the water. The muses found his body and transported him to the Land of the Dead. There he found Eurydice, and the two were reunited for eternity.

