

Orpheus and Eurydice

There once lived a skilled musician named Orpheus, who could play his lyre so beautifully that his music would enchant all who heard it. It was so powerful that it could turn bad men good and tame even the most wild of beasts.

One day, Orpheus met the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her name was Eurydice and Orpheus was so captivated by her charm and beauty that he immediately fell in love with her. When Eurydice saw Orpheus playing his lyre, her heart melted at once and she too fell in love. The couple were married within a few days and were blissfully happy together.

Eurydice was enjoying a stroll through the woods one day when she came across a shepherd tending to his flock. The shepherd, whose name was Aristaeus, was in awe of Eurydice and he longed to talk to her and find out who she was, but Eurydice was frightened by the man and she began to run from him. Aristaeus, not understanding why she was so scared, pursued Eurydice. He chased her through the woods, calling out to her to stop and speak to him. Eurydice ran on in a panic, eventually tripping over a log and landing with a thud on the ground. Unseen by Eurydice, a vicious snake crawled out from beneath the log and bit her. Its venom was so potent she died at once.

When Orpheus heard what had happened, he was distraught. His wonderful wife had been taken from him so soon and he was inconsolable in his grief. Orpheus played his lyre to help ease his pain and the music that emanated from the instrument was so haunting that it moved the men, gods and even the plants and trees to tears.

Orpheus decided that he must try to bring Eurydice back to him. He set out on a daring quest to beg Hades – god of the underworld - to allow his wife to return to the human world. Hades was deeply saddened by Orpheus' plight and so moved by the poignant music Orpheus played for him, that he agreed to give him the opportunity to get Eurydice back. He presented a challenge to the eager musician.

"I will allow Eurydice to follow you out of the underworld on one condition. Whatever obstacles you may encounter along your journey, you must not look back at your wife. If you do, then she will remain here with me eternally."

Orpheus did not hesitate in accepting the challenge. He was prepared to take on anything to get back his beloved wife and if all he had to do was not look at Eurydice as she followed him back out of the underworld, that would be easy!

Orpheus set off on his journey with hope in his heart and his beautiful Eurydice close behind him, but soon he came to a huge wooden door which was chained shut. Lifting his lyre, Orpheus' quick fingers began to play a magical tune. The chains burst off the door, which swung gently open, allowing Orpheus to slip inside and continue on his

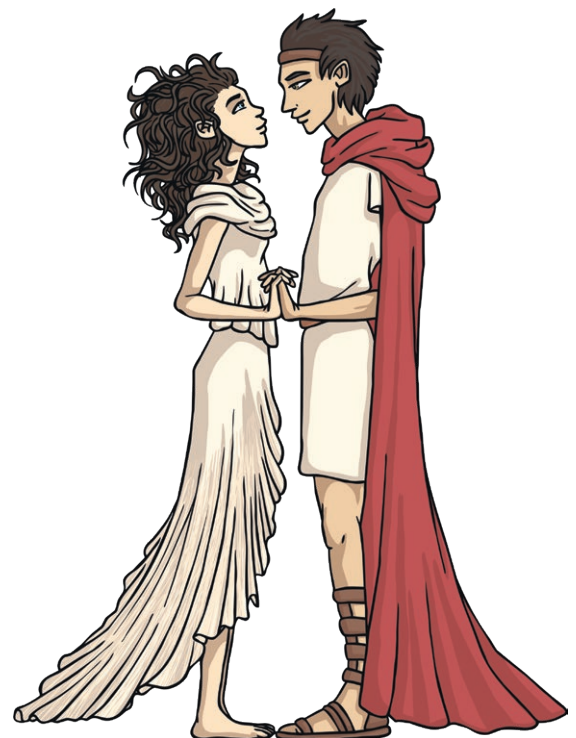


way. The young man longed to turn around to check that Eurydice was still there but he managed to resist and he continued on.

Beyond the wooden door Orpheus found himself inside a dank, dark room. The air was thick and stagnant and Orpheus' eyes watered involuntarily in the putrid atmosphere. As the light was so low, Orpheus pressed his hands against the moist, slimy walls and felt his way along through the room, moving as quickly as he dared. After a few minutes, he became aware of the sound of heavy breathing and a deep, rumbling growl began to resonate off the walls, suddenly bursting into a thunderous roar. Orpheus' heart pounded in his chest and his ears rang painfully. He could just make out the shape of a humongous three-headed dog looming down on him menacingly. Orpheus recognised the beast at once as Cerberus - Hades' grotesque hound. Thinking quickly, Orpheus snatched up his lyre and began to play a soothing melody. Saliva rolled off the creature's three tongues, splashing onto a terrified Orpheus, whose whole body trembled as he played. However, almost at once, the beastly dog began to calm down. It cocked its three heads sideways to listen to the soothing music, then it dropped to the ground, pacified by Orpheus' captivating tune. Orpheus crept on through the room, treading nervously over the dog's monstrous paws while continuing to play his instrument. Finally, he reached the end of the room and was able to slip away unnoticed. He took a deep breath and slumped against the wall, mopping his wet brow with the back of his hand.

In his terror, Orpheus had forgotten about Eurydice following him and he began to panic about whether she had made it through the room behind him or whether she was trapped with Cerberus. Orpheus remembered Hades' words – he had promised that Eurydice would follow unharmed as long as he did not look back at her and he managed to calm down. Ahead of him, in the distance, he could see the inky black waters of the river Styx and he knew that once he had sailed across the river, he would be able to pass safely back into the mortal world and be with his dear wife once more.

Orpheus took large purposeful strides towards the river. He felt giddy with excitement, encouraged by the thought of holding and talking to Eurydice very soon. At the water's edge, two boats were moored, ready to transport Orpheus and Eurydice to safety. Orpheus climbed into the first boat and the magical waters started to ripple, pushing the boat on its way. If he listened carefully, Orpheus could just about make out the sound of the second boat beginning its journey too and he knew Eurydice was following behind. Orpheus smiled happily. His journey was almost complete. His quest would be a success! Suddenly, a huge wave formed from nowhere and crashed heavily against the boat, knocking Orpheus to the deck. Slick black hands and arms which formed from the murky waters began to grab at the boat and then slide over Orpheus' face and body, pulling him towards the water. Orpheus struggled against them but he could not move. He cried out in frustration and anger but the hands moved around his throat and



tightened their grip and Orpheus feared this was how he would die. Orpheus' lyre lay next to him at the bottom of the boat. He scrabbled around, trying to grasp it towards him with his one free hand. Suddenly, he managed to get a grip on it and he strummed it, releasing a single note. At once, the hands relaxed and Orpheus took his chance, grabbing the lyre properly and beginning to play. The hands released him fully and sank back down below the water. Orpheus' music had saved him again!

The boat continued on. Orpheus carried on playing his lyre in case the grabbing hands returned again. He listened for the sound of Eurydice's boat following along but by now he couldn't hear it anymore so he stopped playing his lyre to listen more carefully. Nothing. Orpheus started to worry. Had the hands taken Eurydice? Had her boat stopped moving? He strained to hear even the tiniest sound but there was only silence and Orpheus began to despair that Eurydice had gone. Without thinking, he turned around to look for her. Eurydice was there! Her boat was sailing steadily towards him and she waved and smiled, filling his heart with joy. Then it happened. Eurydice's boat plunged straight down below the water and, in a heartbeat, she was gone. Lost to him for the second time.

Orpheus was devastated. He had almost succeeded in the quest and now his foolishness had cost him dearly.

Orpheus was never able to forgive himself for what had happened and he played bitter, sombre music on his lyre, lamenting her death for the rest of his life on earth.