

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE



Orpheus was a famous poet and musician. People came from all over Greece to hear him play his lyre and sing.



His music made wild beasts tame, and trees bend to listen.



Orpheus loved the beautiful nymph, Eurydice. The day they married was the happiest in his life.



Eurydice loved dancing and often went to romp in the fields. But one day, dancing among the meadow flowers, she trod upon a deadly snake.



The snake sank its poisonous fangs into her ankle. Eurydice, overcome by the fatal poison, died instantly.



Orpheus, when he heard the news, was inconsolable and for days would neither eat nor drink. His friends feared for his life.



Then, without a word, he took his lyre and left the house. He travelled to Hades, the land of the dead, to beg for the return of his beloved Eurydice.



At last he came to the River Styx, on the edge of the underworld, where Charon, the ferryman, waited to carry the dead across.



At first Charon refused to take the living Orpheus.



But when Orpheus played to him upon his lyre, Charon relented.

On the other side of the river, Orpheus' journey became a nightmare.



First he had to travel through the asphodel fields – fields that were dark and grey and haunted by ghosts.



Then on he went through Tartarus, where the evil were tortured and where the guard-dog, Cerberus, growled and snapped at his heels.



Finally, Orpheus reached the centre. He knelt before King Pluto and his queen, Persephone, who were amazed that a living person should risk his life to reach their kingdom.



Orpheus then took up his lyre and sang of his love for Eurydice and of his great sorrow. Pluto and Persephone were moved to tears.

They agreed to release Eurydice, on one condition:



Orpheus was not to look back until he reached the world of the living.
So Orpheus departed, without knowing whether Eurydice followed or not.



As he came to the River Styx, he hesitated: if Pluto and Persephone
had tricked him, this was his last chance to go back.



With one foot in the boat, Orpheus turned –
and saw his beloved Eurydice, smiling upon him.



But then her living form faded and Eurydice
became a ghost of the underworld.



And as Charon slowly ferried him into the sunlit world, Orpheus
realized that this time he had lost his love for ever.

