

ORPHEUS' music was joyful and gay, for he was in love with Euridice, a sweet young maiden, and she loved him in return. On the day of their wedding, his songs swelled out, filled with happiness as his bride danced on light feet through the meadow. Suddenly, she trod on a snake and sank to the ground, dead of its poisonous bite. Hermes gently closed her eyes and led her away to the underworld. No more songs came from Orpheus' throat, no more tunes rang out from his lyre. All joy had gone out of his life. He had to have his Euridice back.

Weeping and grieving, Orpheus wandered about searching for an entrance to Hades, and when at the end of the world he found it, he did what no living man had ever done before: he went down to the realm of the dead to beg for the return of his beloved. His music had power to move hard rocks; it might also move the cold heart of Hades. Hope gave him back his songs, and, playing and singing, he walked down the dark, steep path.

His silvery voice floated down through the dark like a gentle summer breeze and its magic moved the iron gates of Hades. They sprang open and let him in, and Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog, lay down at his feet and let him pass. The whole dark underworld stilled and listened to Orpheus' music as he entered the realm of the dead singing about his great love, begging to have his Euridice back. The fluttering souls hushed. Those condemned to eternal pains stopped groaning, and their torturers, the avenging furies, the Erinyes, dropped their whips and wept tears of blood.

Hades, the pitiless king of the dead, sat on his black marble throne with Queen Persephone at his side. Even he was so moved by the music that tears rolled down his sallow cheeks and cold Persephone sobbed. Her heart was so touched that she turned to her husband and begged him to let Euridice go back to the sunny world above. Hades gave his consent, but he made one condition: Orpheus must not look at his bride before they reached the realm of the living. She would walk behind him, but if he turned, and looked at her, she must return to the underworld.

Overcome with joy, Orpheus started up the dark path, and as his music faded into the distance, gloom again descended over the underworld. The way was long, and as Orpheus walked on and on, doubt began to creep into his mind. Had Hades deceived him? Were the sounds he



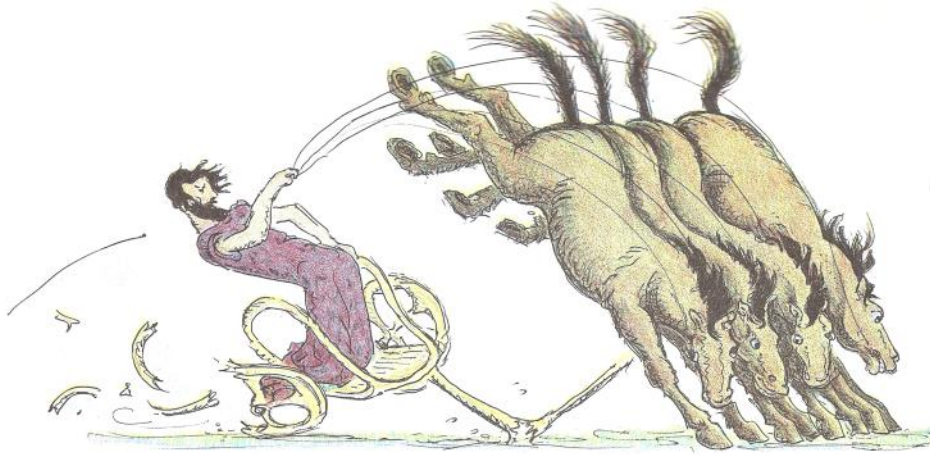
heard behind him really Euridice's footsteps? He had almost reached the upper world, and could already see a dim light ahead, when he could bear his doubts no longer. He had to turn and see if she really was there. He saw her sweet face, but only for an instant, for again Hermes appeared at her side. He turned her about and led her back to the dark gloom below. Faintly, Orpheus heard her whisper farewell. He had lost her forever through his lack of faith.

Orpheus never again found joy on earth. He wandered into the wilderness to grieve in solitude. He sang, but now his songs were so mournful that tears trickled down the cheeks of wild beasts and the willows wept.

A band of wild nymphs stormed through the woods shouting to Orpheus to join them. They yelled and carried on so loudly that they could not hear his silvery voice and were not touched by its magic. They wanted him to dance with them, but he had no heart for their revelry, and in a fury they threw themselves over him. They tore him to pieces and tossed his body into a river. The river stopped its gurgling to listen, for the haunting voice of Orpheus still issued forth from his dead lips as he floated down to the open sea.

The Muses grieved over him. They searched the sea till they found his body on the shores of the island of Lesbos. There they gave him a proper funeral, and at last he could rejoin his beloved Euridice as a flitting ghost in the underworld.



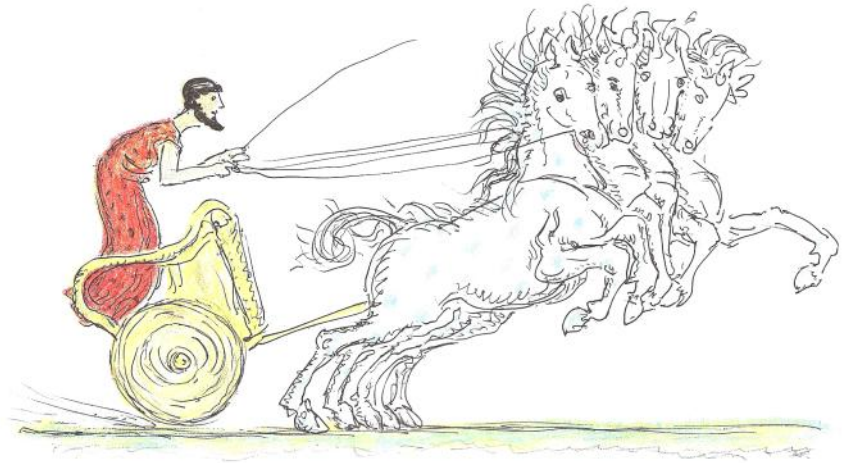


TANTALUS AND PELOPS

THE MUSES sang about Tantalus, condemned to suffer forever in the underworld. He stood in water up to his neck, but could never quench his thirst, for whenever he bent to drink, the water receded. Above his head hung branches loaded with fruits, but whenever he tried to pick one, the branch bent out of his reach.

Tantalus was a son of Zeus, and he had been so favored by the gods that he had been invited to feast with them on high Olympus. In return, he had asked the gods to come to dine in his palace in Asia Minor. He was a king of vast riches, but nothing he owned seemed good enough to set before his exalted guests. His son, Pelops, was his greatest treasure, and, wanting to give the gods his best, Tantalus decided to sacrifice him. He made a stew of him and set the dish before the gods. But the Olympian gods detested human sacrifice. Outraged, they threw Tantalus to the punishing grounds in the underworld and brought Pelops back to life. But one of his shoulder bones was missing, and the gods replaced it with a piece of ivory. They all gave him rich gifts. Poseidon gave him a team of fast horses and told him to set off and win himself a new kingdom.

In Greece there was a beautiful princess whose name was Hippodamia. She was the daughter of Oenomaüs, the King of Elis, and whoever married her would inherit his kingdom, but her father loved her so dearly that he could not bear to part with her. He had a team of horses given to him by Ares, the god of war, whose son he was, and whenever a



suitor came to ask for his daughter's hand, Oenomaüs challenged him to a chariot race. If the suitor won, he would win the princess; if he lost, he would lose his head. No horses on earth could outrun the horses of Ares, and the heads of twelve suitors already hung at the gates of the palace. When Pelops arrived in Elis to woo the princess, Oenomaüs did not know that Pelops also had a team of magic horses, and the King looked forward to nailing the thirteenth head on the gates! But Hippodamia fell in love with the young prince and wanted to save his life. She asked her father's stable boy to fix the king's chariot so that Pelops would win. The stable boy, eager to please her, did more than he was asked to do. He took out the wooden pins that held the wheels to the axle, and replaced them with pins of wax.

Never had there been such a race! The fiery horses ran neck to neck, and the king, to his surprise, could not pull ahead, no matter how hard he swung the whip. Then suddenly the wax pins gave way. The wheels of the chariot flew off and the king was thrown to his death.

Pelops married Hippodamia and became the King of Elis. He flung the faithless stable boy into the sea, and gave the old king a magnificent funeral feast inviting heroes from all over Greece to take part in athletic games in his honor and offered fabulous prizes to the winners, for Pelops had brought with him the great riches of his father, Tantalus. The games were held on the plain of Olympia, in Elis, and were to be repeated every four years. They were called the Olympic games.



SISYPHUS of Corinth was the cleverest king who ever lived. He was so cunning that he fooled even the gods.

One day Sisyphus saw the river-god Asopus, who was looking for his daughter, Aegina. Sisyphus, who noticed everything that was happening in his kingdom, went after him and said, "I'll tell you what has become of your daughter if you'll give my city a spring." For the only thing his great city lacked was a good supply of fresh water.

Asopus hated to part with any of his water. He twisted and squirmed, but at last he struck the ground, and a crystal clear spring bubbled forth.

"It is Zeus himself who has carried off your daughter," said Sisyphus. "I saw him hurry by with her," and he pointed out to Asopus the way Zeus had taken. The river-god rushed off in a fury and soon caught up with the elopers. Zeus, taken by surprise, had no thunderbolt at hand, so, to save himself and the nymph from the river-god's rage, he changed himself into a rock and her into the island Aegina.

Sisyphus had his spring of water, but Asopus lost his daughter, and Zeus was furious with Sisyphus for meddling in his affairs. He asked Hades to take him to the underworld and punish him severely. Hades

was glad to do his brother Zeus a favor and he went himself to fetch Sisyphus. When the sly king saw the lord of the dead in person, he pretended to be very honored. But why, he asked, had not Hermes, whose office it was to guide dead souls to the underworld, come for him? While Hades searched for a suitable answer, Sisyphus deftly wound a chain around him. And there stood the lord of the dead, chained to a post like a dog.

As long as Sisyphus kept Hades tied up, nobody could die. The Fates got the threads of life tangled and the whole world was in confusion. Finally the gods threatened to make life so miserable for Sisyphus that he would wish he were dead, and Sisyphus then had to let Hades go. Again people could die and life could go on normally. The very first soul to be claimed was, of course, that of Sisyphus himself. This time Hermes came for him. The wily king, who had expected this, had told his loving wife not to give him a funeral feast, and not to put a coin under his tongue. So he arrived in the realm of the dead as a poor beggar. Hades was shocked! After all, Sisyphus was a king and entitled to a funeral feast and a golden coin under his tongue to pay for his passage across the Styx. His wife had to be punished, or she might set a bad example for others. He sent Sisyphus back to earth and told him to teach his wife respect. "Fooled him again!" said Sisyphus when he rejoined his devoted wife. They lived happily for many long years, till at last he died of old age and went to Hades for good. There he was given a task that kept him too busy to think up new tricks. He had to push a boulder up a steep hill, but every time he had almost reached the top, the boulder slipped from his hands and rolled all the way to the bottom again.

