

# ORPHEUS DESCENDING

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Orpheus returned to Thrace full of the sense of adventure his experience on the Argo had given him. The mountains and trees were now moved by a stronger and heartier rhythm, as Orpheus's songs retold all he had seen with the Argonauts.

Yet, something strange happened to him. Whenever he sang of Jason's meeting Medea, he felt sad inside. This sadness prevented him from playing as well as he could, and for a while he completely lost interest in playing at all. His mother offered one possible explanation for the way he felt.

"You are at an age when most young men are considering marriage. Perhaps you should look for a woman to love with all your heart. Then, you will find someone who you will never get tired of playing for."



Orpheus thought this over, but he was not interested in any of the women he knew.

Orpheus was used to people stopping whatever they were doing so that they could listen to his songs. However, each time he walked through one particular village, he noticed a woman who would never look up at him. Instead, she would continue washing clothes, picking fruit from the trees or cleaning up outside her home. Orpheus would stop and play even more beautifully so that she could feel the music more deeply, but she wouldn't respond.

Frustrated, Orpheus stopped playing one day as he stood





before her. She also stopped what she was doing.

“Why did you stop playing?”

“Every day that I come here I see you paying no attention, regardless of the song I’m playing.”

“The music is inside me. If I stopped moving with it, I feel I would lose it.”

Orpheus was surprised at this answer. Slowly, he picked up his lyre and began to play again. This time, he saw that she really did feel every note that he played. The woman’s name was Eurydice, and she was the one Orpheus would marry.



Their wedding took place in the mountains, and hundreds of people came to celebrate with them.

Orpheus picked up his lyre and asked Eurydice to listen closely as he played.

“Only through you does my music show its true joy. I love watching you move to the way I play.”

“I never had to force myself to move to the rhythm of your singing, but do not try to keep me always in your sight. Today, of all days, I feel that I want to move all over this land and be moved as the land moves. So play, my love, and know that I am listening even if you cannot see me.”

And this is what happened. As Orpheus played, Eurydice moved down the mountainside and through the trees. She felt the earth moving as she turned round in circles with her hands held out at her sides. Three of her bridesmaids were with her — two holding the ends of her white dress and one showering her with flowers.

They came to a clearing where the grass seemed to be moving in waves to the distant sounds of Orpheus’s lyre. Eurydice wanted to feel this movement, so she took off her

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*When Orpheus looked inside, he saw that he was standing in front of a river with fire burning on its surface. There was an old man there with wild white hair, standing next to a boat. He was looking down at the water, and Orpheus thought he saw the reflection of the fire in the man's eyes, but when the man turned to look at him Orpheus saw that his eyes were made of fire. Finally, he had met Charon the Ferryman.*

*"No money was put upon your lips on the day you were buried, so I will not take you across the River Styx."*

*"But I did not die. I only came here to talk to Pluton and Persephone. I want to ..."*

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