

# Orpheus and Eurydice

*by* SEHalliday

## I

The sunlit hills conceal a vale in Thrace  
where wandered once and sang a muse's child.  
I rested there, nearby a listless river's bridge  
and weary slept past dusk to wake much late  
and find late babbling light-lit pools  
infesting threat and shadow-gloom.

By arches of this bridge mist poured:  
O'er rock, o'er eddy and o'er the river's flow,  
cataracted horror come 'cross shore.  
Still blanket cloaked-wrapt 'round I backed,  
barely looked nor brooking thought  
of what was there, or not.

I saw two wraiths approach.  
My eyes mistook: t'was one.

*Stay!* I cry. *Halt there and farther not!*  
Though the apparition stands, I flinch,  
fear flooding thought, my heart, my limbs.  
Stay I said and stay he did,  
a wild staring stay. Now fixed on me,  
I never saw such eyes so seeming lost of any hope.

Stricken eyes. Lyre across his chest.  
Fingers spread against the strings,  
slack dribbling mouth, un-voiced,  
eyes looking back. For what?  
Nothing moves within the swirling dark.  
What does he imagine there? A dream?

Then answer comes upon a note,  
a note that echoes 'neath the bridge,  
building bank to bank and up the slopes,  
so purely constant as he sings:  
*Her Orpheus I am. Her Orpheus I am.*  
Oh note, I know you, story too, and well.

## II

Be warned ! few stories go this bad.  
She, near-wed, mad pretty in the rush,  
is serpent-spat against her heel.  
She falls rapt still from Orpheus' kiss,  
is bourne to myrtled bowers' mossy bed,  
fails, lingering whispers un-allowed by death.

His lips drew in her breath, her hair,  
thick body-scented strands, his hands  
about her hips, laying sweating-still before  
the over-warmth of morn' force them apart.  
Barely touching backs for cool,  
their ankles then unlink, prescient of this day.

Near dawn were two, entwined,  
before the noon just one.

It happened quick as oft a dying is:  
no repine, no time for kiss-fluted fare-thee-wells  
or even time to save or savor  
faltering beats, fix the 'membrance  
of a lover's breath upon the lips.  
No. She goes and harshly quick.

Now Orpheus sees all life unmasked:  
sunlit and murmuring streams perhaps,  
kindly no. Spawn's eaten here by frog,  
she by heron, egg by rat, feral cat and violently  
to man, whose sister's fate  
is likely rape beside a brook.

This is hell amongst the bloom and grow.  
Spring's warmth is cruel,  
the feast of unrestraint, that stands  
without the pause that wordly things  
might be undone, redone, or given back.  
Zeus or Hades are the options now.

### III

In his thoughts, Eurydice's are kind.  
She will bring cool water to the senile  
listen with a smile his lonely loons  
and posy scented flowers as her gift.  
To 'Pheo she admits her cares  
and so her hand is on his heart.

Of her self (for 'Pheo's looked at moments  
when her thoughts were somewhere else):  
were she not the same in self he'd judge  
in how she smiled or frowned or stooped,  
but she is constant in her self,  
this suitor's test no more applied.

Of grace: Orpheus saw the girl  
once chase a startled fawn,  
nut brown two limbs matching four,  
leaping, reaching, hoofs snapping, slapping

soles upon the grass. She felled the beast  
to merely pull a hurting thorn.

To his eyes Eurydice's will change,  
one moment hue of spume and winter sea  
next sheen of spring-dewed moss,  
then autumn-down flecked bold by light.  
Clear gazed, orb'd utter white these eyes'  
grow black when 'Pheo's by.

In mingled breath, Eurydice drinks wine  
in meadows, plying her's to 'Pheo's kiss.  
A kiss, a lick of sour breath and wet ripe lips,  
each's kindness cast aside for lust;  
instinct of desire, all within that breath,  
breast, flank and swelling mound.

#### IV

How could she know he'd rivet up  
his hard'ning heart 'gainst this divorce?  
Natural beats constrained by iron,  
forcing blood beyond its real pulse  
to limbs and mind alone, gentleness  
of love forgot, to only rail.

In that final race across the rush  
Eurydice was scent of sun and grass.  
Had he caught her, kissed her, tasted  
lips, freckled cheek and seeded hair,  
could chance, a moment's lull in chase,  
confuse the snake so love might be?

The answer's yes! for Orpheus

though no god, enjoys the mortal gift.  
Chance is all our life! I'll prove the point:  
a die that's thrown a hundred times  
all falls one side yet still permits  
a further cast's apology.

Faithful men make prayer and wait.  
Some hurted, break faith.  
Others linger in the midden pit of hope,  
faith un-guided, so are despaired.  
To Orpheus anger comes,  
illumed by the coldest light of loss.

What he'll never know is this:  
Eurydice is all of certain things,  
dew-fall's wet and warmth of day  
her love for Orpheus undisputed,  
subject to accept the *is* as *will*  
without dispute and no remorse.

## V

Daffodil stands prim midst  
honeysuckle loosely vines  
her scent to lilac, dappled air  
and insect drone above the grove.  
Time-stopped, wine-drowsed to lull  
awhile her lover thrums his song.

Here forest light is dimmed,  
its day-long dusk denying  
tangled groves and unexpected,  
swards to all but nymph,roe or they.  
Here he sings and how he sings:

*Your Orpheus I am.*

## VI

Fixed Orpheus with her coal eye she warns:  
*I will the Hundred-Handed-Ones,*  
*and Titans in Tartarus deep,*  
*unleash to broken vows. Look back before*  
*Eurydice is cast in lights of day*  
*then such or worse will have her soul.*

Alas! rising to that gate  
concealed beneath the Bridge of Thrace  
the Singer's glance is drawn by sound:  
Eurydice's mistep, a heel-raked *pebble-clink*  
that draws his curséd eye and casts  
his lover back to Hell.

Lament! Ten steps yet more,  
such cautions would be void.  
*Look not back!* she'd warned.  
*When 'tis done, whence came she'll go.*  
But back he looked and now  
his fair Eurydice is gone.

