

BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

PYRAMUS & THISBE

In Babylon two families lived under a single roof, their two living quarters separated by a single wall. A boy of one family, Pyramus, fell desperately in love with Thisbe, a girl of the other. Apparently, being neighbors had made enemies out of the adults. When Pyramus and Thisbe announced their love, both sets of parents objected and forbade the couple from seeing one other. This only made the love of Pyramus and Thisbe grow stronger. The teenagers discovered a fault in the wall that separated the two living spaces. While their parents slept, the lovers would sneak to the wall and whisper words of passion through the crack.

After weeks of secret meetings, they decided they could stand their separation no longer and agreed to run away together. Pyramus instructed Thisbe to meet him at the Tomb of Ninus, a local landmark, after nightfall. From there they would escape into happiness. The night came, and Thisbe stole silently from her home. She arrived at the tomb. Something stirred in the darkness of the mulberry bushes, but it was not Pyramus. She saw two glowing eyes. The girl turned to flee, and as she did, the lioness (for that is what was hiding in the bushes) moved toward her. Thisbe's cloak caught upon a branch. The lioness licked its blood-stained muzzle and crept closer. Jerking violently, Thisbe tore from the branch, leaving the outer cloak behind. The girl disappeared into the night, and the lioness, who had a full belly from a recently kill, curiously examined the cloak, nuzzling it with her bloody muzzle. After the lioness lost interest, she sauntered back into the wild.

Pyramus arrived soon after. He had been delayed by his parents, questioning where he was headed at such a late hour. When he found Thisbe missing, he desperately searched the thicket. What he found there forced him to his knees: Thisbe's bloody cloak and the footprints of a beast. The pieces of the puzzle formed quickly in his mind. Some beast had slaughtered Thisbe and dragged her body away to its den. In a frenzy, Pyramus drew forth his dagger and, calling out the name of Thisbe, drove it into his breast.

You might guess what happened next. Thisbe returned to the tomb, suspecting the lioness was now gone. There she found Pyramus, dead by own hand, his blood staining the ground and bushes. As she interpreted the scene before her, she took up the dripping dagger that had pierced her lover's heart and plunged it into her own.

The blood of the two lovers had stained the fruit of the nearby mulberry tree. As a testament to Pyramus and Thisbe, the gods turned the white berries of the mulberry tree eternally red.



BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

CEYX & ALCYONE

Ceyx and Alcyone were king and queen of Thessaly. Ceyx journeyed over the sea on business, but on his return he was shipwrecked and drowned. For months there was no word of what happened to the king and his crew. The gods sent the spirit of Ceyx to Alcyone in a dream, where he told his wife the fate that befell him. The next morning Alcyone journeyed to the beach where she discovered her husband's body washed ashore. Leaping toward the ocean,



intending to drown herself, Alcyone was shocked to discover that she was flying. The gods had transformed her and her husband into birds. There are seven days a year when the seas are perfectly still out of respect for Ceyx and Alcyone. These days are called Halcyone days.

BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

BAUCIS & PHILEMON

Frequently, Zeus would take it upon himself to journey through the mortal world, rewarding the kind and punishing the evil. On this particular trip, he took his clever son Hermes along and disguised them both as penniless travelers. The first country they journeyed through was very inhospitable. When they knocked on doors to ask for food and shelter, they were denied. Only one household showed them hospitality. Philemon, an elderly country farmer, and Baucis, his wife, let the disguised gods sit next to their warm fire while they prepared the dinner. But when Baucis went to fetch the goose for dinner, she couldn't catch it. No matter how quickly she moved, it was always quicker. She returned inside, exhausted.



Philemon asked where the goose was, but she only motioned for a drink. To his astonishment, the old man realized that the pitcher they had just emptied was completely full. The elderly couple whispered to one another. There could be only one explanation for these things: their guests must be gods. Zeus and Hermes happily admitted that this was so and thanked Baucis and Philemon for their generosity. There was a flash of light, and the couple's humble dwelling was transformed into a magnificent temple. All the land around, where their neighbors' houses had been, lay covered in water. Zeus asked Baucis and Philemon to serve in his temple the rest of their days. In return for this, he said, he would grant them one request. They immediately agreed. They requested to never be separated from one another. They wished to die at exactly the same time. Zeus consented. After years of happy servitude, the time came for Baucis and Philemon to die. As their souls slipped down into the Underworld, their bodies changed forms, turning into two trees that grew from a single stump.

BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

NARCISSUS & ECHO

Narcissus was born the most beautiful boy the world had ever seen. As he grew closer to manhood, his looks only improved. Flocks of admirers followed him wherever he went. But Narcissus only had one love— himself. Echo, a simple-minded nymph, also fell under the spell of Narcissus' beauty. She knew she needed help to win his heart though. One of Echo's nymph sisters was the lover of Zeus, and the god would often come to earth to visit her. While Zeus was visiting one day, Echo saw Hera stalking through the woods, looking for her unfaithful husband. Now was Echo's chance. She ran to where Zeus and the nymph were hiding and warned him of his wife's approach. Without the thanks Echo was expecting, the god disappeared. Hera was soon on the scene though and screeched at Echo for her tattling. To make sure the nymph never tattled again, the goddess forever cursed Echo's speech. She would never have words of her own. She would only repeat the last few spoken near her. Now Echo's plans were ruined. How could she ever tell Narcissus about her love? He came walking through the woods one day, and she fell into step behind him. The boy heard her footsteps behind him. "Who is here?" he asked. "Here, here," she answered. He turned toward the sound of her voice, but when he saw the nymph, he only sneered and continued his walk. Heartbroken, Echo slipped away into the mountains and disappeared into the caves there. Some say you can still hear her there, sadly repeating your final words. As for Narcissus, he went on to discover his true love. One day while he bent to drink from a still pool, he saw the most beautiful face he had ever seen looking up at him. He was transfixed. At last his stomach growled, his body ached, but he couldn't remove himself from such beauty. Days passed. Only death could break the spell that Narcissus held over himself. At last he died, with a smile upon his lips. His last sight had been of his love. When his admirers came to bury his body, they found only a flower, the Narcissus, growing on the riverbank.



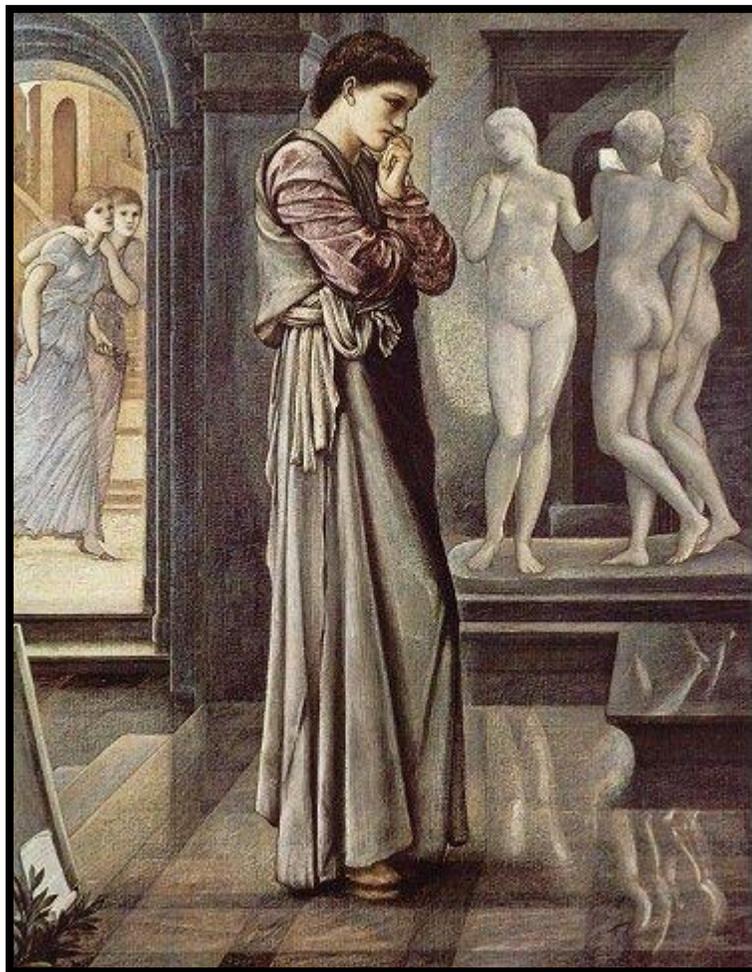
BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

PYGMALION & GALATEA

Pygmalion was the greatest sculptor on the isle of Cyprus.

From his earliest days, he had no use for women, scorning them for their simple-minded ways. Since he was surrounded by *imperfect* women, he decided to use his art to create the perfect woman. His statue was a labor of love. He sculpted its delicate features with the greatest care. As he worked the statue became more and more lifelike. Pygmalion began to fantasize: what if it really did come to life? Oh, how he would love it! His frenzied work led to what his friends considered insanity. He would bring the statue gifts, dress it in clothes, and lay with it beside him, cradling it in his arms. When his masterpiece was complete, Pygmalion realized that he had truly made the perfect woman, but he wept for he knew it would never live. The goddess Aphrodite saw the love that the sculptor put into his creation,

and in recognition of his talents, she breathed life into his stone maiden. When Pygmalion returned to his workshop one day, he noticed that the statue's skin felt warm, and its chest moved with breath. With a cry he realized that his statue had come to life. Now it would be his wife, the beautiful Galatea.



BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

ALPHEUS & ARETHUSA

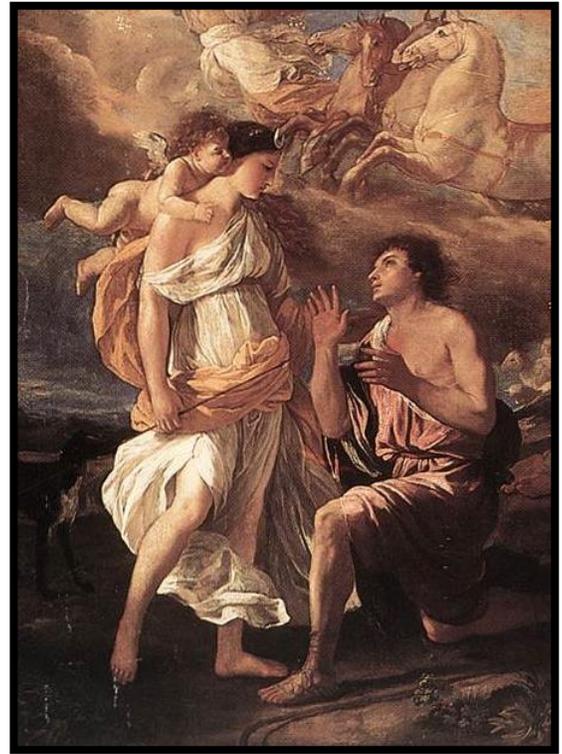
Alpheus was a river god, and one day he saw the huntress Arethusa stopping by his banks for a drink of water. He was instantly consumed with passion. As the maiden paused on the shore, Alpheus rose from the water and tried to embrace her. The frightened Arethusa began to run, and the river god took after her. She cried out to the goddess Artemis to save her from her pursuer. The goddess answered her prayer, and Arethusa melted, covering the nearby rocks with her new form, a bubbling spring. Alpheus laughed at this choice and dove into her waters, transforming himself back into a roaring river. Now the two are forever linked, the spring and the river.



BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

SELENE & ENDYMION

Selene was the moon herself and spent her time in lonely travel across the sky. In the mountains there dwelt a shepherd boy, Endymion, and Selene fell in love with him. Every night she would come to earth and kiss his cheeks while he slept. As time went on she realized that he would one day have to grow old and die. So she placed a spell on the boy, one that would put him into an eternal sleep. Now they say Endymion still sleeps on the side of the mountain, forever still, and at night the moon holds him in her arms.



BRIEF TALES OF LOVERS

ORPHEUS & EURYDICE

Orpheus was the supreme master of the lyre and the most magnificent musician the world had ever seen. The muse Calliope was rumored to be his mother, while others claimed he must be the son of Apollo. Whatever the source of his talents, everyone agreed that his music had the ability to move even the hardest of hearts.

But it was the heart of Orpheus who was first moved. He had found his reason for living in a beautiful maiden named Eurydice. His music moved the girl to return his love, and the two were soon married. Unfortunately, his story did not end with a *happily ever after*. As the newly-weds walked hand-in-hand through a meadow, an adder bit Eurydice on the heel.

Orpheus watched the snake's poison strip away the life of his beloved.

He had found love only to lose it. Now Eurydice was gone forever—or was she. Taking up his lyre, Orpheus began to walk. The world would know of his sadness. As he sang of his loss, the grass, the trees, and the flowers wept for the young man. The rocks, in pity, rose up to meet his feet and urged him forward. The bushes in his path parted for him, and he passed unhindered. All the earth was moved by the music of Orpheus.

At last he reached a deep cave—a cave that the locals said led all the way down into Hades itself. Orpheus didn't miss a step and walked boldly into its mouth, his mournful song echoing in the darkness. He passed many horrors as he journey downward, yet he was never resisted. Even the guardians of the Underworld melted when they heard the notes of Orpheus. Charon, the aged boatman of the Underworld, ferried him across the dark river, and Cerberus, the three-headed hell-hound, hung his head in sadness as the musician passed. At last, still strumming amid his tears, the mortal boy stood before the throne of Hades himself.

For once in his cold, empty existence, Hades was moved. A bit of moisture appeared beneath his eye, and brushing it roughly away, he declared that he would allow Eurydice to return to the surface with her love. For the first time, Orpheus stopped his song and looked hopefully up. Hades raised a cautious finger. There was one stipulation. The spirit of Eurydice would follow behind her husband, all the way back to the world above, but Orpheus must trust that she is there. If he turns to look behind him before she truly returns to earth, she will stay in the Underworld forever.

Orpheus agreed and began the dark trek back to the surface. But doubt began to gnaw at him. Had he been tricked? Was the spirit of Eurydice actually behind him?

The light of day could be seen far ahead. The earth was welcoming him back. But his doubt pulled fiercely at his brain. What if he was really leaving Hades *without* his love, never to return?

As his foot touched the first patch of sunlight, he turned.

There was the face of Eurydice, floating in the air like a dim reflection of her former self. Her spirit was still in the darkness. She had not yet set foot on earth once again. He heard the air whisper, "Too soon." Her lips formed a silent farewell, and she disappeared—forever.

Orpheus tried in vain to return to the deep. No song of his could sway the eternal guardians. This time, they barred his way. He had had his chance and failed.

