

# Love Stories of Greek Mythology

## Pyramus and Thisbe

Pyramus was the handsomest youth, and Thisbe the fairest maiden, in all [Babylonia](#), where [Semiramis](#) reigned. Their parents occupied adjoining houses; and neighborhood brought the young people together, and acquaintance ripened into love. They would gladly have married, but their parents forbade. One thing however they could not forbid — that love should glow with equal ardor in the bosoms of both. They conversed by signs and glances, and the fire burned more intensely for being covered up. In the wall that parted the two houses there was a crack, caused by some fault in the structure. No one had remarked it before, but the lovers discovered it. What will not love discover! It afforded a passage to the voice; and tender messages used to pass backward and forward through the gap. As they stood, Pyramus on this side, Thisbe on that, their breaths would mingle. "Cruel wall," they said, "why do you keep two lovers apart? But we will not be ungrateful. We owe you, we confess, the privilege of transmitting loving words to willing ears." Such words they uttered on different sides of the wall; and when night came and they must say farewell, they pressed their lips upon the wall, she on her side, he on his, as they could come no nearer.

Next morning, when [Aurora](#) had put out the stars, and the sun had melted the frost from the grass, they met at the accustomed spot. Then, after lamenting their hard fate, they agreed that next night, when all was still, they would slip away from watchful eyes, leave their dwellings and walk out into the fields; and to insure a meeting, repair to a well-known edifice, standing without the city's bounds, called the Tomb of [Ninus](#), and that the one who came first should await the other at the foot of a certain tree. It was a white [mulberry tree](#), and stood near a cool spring. All was agreed on, and they waited impatiently for the sun to go down beneath the waters and night to rise up from them. Then cautiously Thisbe stole forth, unobserved by the family, her head covered with a [veil](#), made her way to the monument and sat down under the tree. As she sat alone in the dim light of the evening she descried a [lioness](#), her jaws reeking with recent slaughter, approaching the fountain to slake her thirst. Thisbe fled at the sight, and sought refuge in the hollow of a rock. As she fled she dropped her veil. The lioness, after drinking at the spring, turned to retreat to the woods, and seeing the veil on the ground, tossed and rent it with her bloody mouth.

Pyramus, having been delayed, now approached the place of meeting. He saw in the sand the footsteps of the lion, and the color fled from his cheeks at the sight. Presently he found the veil all rent and bloody. "O, hapless girl," said he, "I have been the cause of thy death! Thou, more worthy of life than I, hast fallen the first victim. I will follow. I am the guilty cause, in tempting thee forth to a place of such peril, and not being myself on the spot to guard thee. Come forth, ye lions, from the rocks, and tear this guilty body with your teeth." He took up the veil, carried it with him to the appointed tree, and covered it with kisses and with tears. "My blood also shall stain your texture," said he, and drawing his sword plunged it into his heart. The blood spurted from the wound, and tinged the white mulberries of the tree all red; and sinking into the earth reached the roots, so that the red color mounted through the trunk to the fruit.

By this time, Thisbe, still trembling with fear, yet wishing not to disappoint her lover, stepped cautiously

forth, looking anxiously for the youth, eager to tell him the danger she had escaped. When she came to the spot and saw the changed color of the mulberries she doubted whether it was the same place. While she hesitated she saw the form of one struggling in the agonies of death. She started back, a shudder ran through her frame as a ripple on the face of the still water when a sudden breeze sweeps over it. But as soon as she recognized her lover, she screamed and beat her breast; embracing the lifeless body, pouring tears into its wounds, and imprinting kisses on the cold lips. "O, Pyramus," she cried, "what has done this? Answer me, Pyramus; it is your own Thisbe that speaks. Hear me, dearest, and lift that drooping head!" At the name of Thisbe, Pyramus opened his eyes, then closed them again. She saw her veil stained with blood and the scabbard empty of its sword. "Thy own hand has slain thee, and for my sake," she said. "I too can be brave for once, and my love is as strong as thine. I will follow thee in death, for I have been the cause; and death, which alone could part us, shall not prevent my joining thee. And ye, unhappy parents of us both, deny us not our united request. As love and death have joined us, let one tomb contain us. And thou, tree, retain the marks of slaughter. Let thy berries still serve for memorials of our blood." So saying, she plunged the sword into her breast. Her parents ratified her wish, the gods also ratified it. The two bodies were buried in one sepulcher, and the tree ever after brought forth purple berries, as it does to this day.

## **Orpheus and Eurydice**

Orpheus is a singer and poet. It is believed that he is the son of Apollo and the Muses. He is married to Eurydice with whom he is madly in love. On one of her walks, Eurydice stumbles across a poisonous snake that bites her and she dies. Orpheus is heartbroken and his sorrowful nature affects the rest of the nature. Trees, birds, fish mourn with him and all listen to his song and playing.

Orpheus is driven by Eros (the passionate longing) and decides to fetch Eurydice from Hades in the Underworld. From his homeland Thrace Orpheus walks, singing his mournful song all the way to Peleponnesus where he descends to the Underworld at the entrance found on the peninsula of Tainaron. The darker it gets, the lighter his song becomes.

In Hades the souls of the dead turn to hear his song, the guard dog Cerberus lays down to listen and the merciless ferryman Charon, who never takes anyone across the river without pay, takes him in his barge to see Hades, even in the deep abyss Tartarus those who are to carry out eternal punishments like Ixion, Tantalus and the Danaids stop to listen to Orpheus' song. The judges of the Tribunal cry, moved as they are.

Eurydice is nowhere to be seen among the souls of the dead as she is being received by the goddess of the Underworld, Persephone. Orpheus does not dare look at his beloved before he has spoken with Hades.

Orpheus proceeds with his case. He remarks that he has not been driven to Hades in order to show his courage, strength or heroism as Theseus or Hercules but he has been driven by Eros as Hades when he fetches Persephone from the mortal world. Orpheus begs for Eurydice's life as he can not live without her and if Hades refuses him, he would rather stay in Hades than return to life. Orpheus accompanies his plea with the tones of his lyre thus making his prayer even more moving. Persephone whispers in her husband's ear and Hades agrees on one condition; Orpheus is not to turn around and look at Eurydice before they reach the upper world.

Orpheus is full of gratitude and happiness and sings with joy all the way to the surface. Seeing light at the end of their journey, Orpheus speeds his pace in anticipation thus widening the gap between himself and his beloved. When Orpheus reaches the surface, he turns around to see his beloved but alas Eurydice is still in the shadows of the Underworld and is then forced to return to Hades.

The heartbroken poet returns to the Underworld wanting to plea his case once again but ends up sitting on the shore of wandering souls for seven days and seven nights totally ignored. No one glances his way or takes notice of him. He returns to the mortal world and is influenced by the darker forces of nature, his spirits being low as they are. For seven months Orpheus sits in a cave in Thrace doing nothing but singing about the loss of his beloved.

Orpheus dies when the Maenads, followers of Dionysus, overwhelm him in their frenzied song and dance. They split his body apart and throw the limbs into the ocean from where they drift to Smyrna where the limbs are found and buried in a hero's chapel; some myths say that the Muses bury his limbs.

## Pygmalion and Galatea

**Pygmalion** was a confirmed bachelor; there were so many qualities in women that he despised that he could not bear the idea of marriage. He was a **sculptor**, and had made with wonderful skill a **statue of ivory**, so beautiful that no living woman came anywhere near it. It was indeed the perfect semblance of a maiden that seemed to be alive, and only prevented from moving by modesty. His art was so perfect that it concealed itself and its product looked like the workmanship of nature. Pygmalion admired his own work, and at last fell in love with the counterfeit creation. Oftentimes he laid his hand upon it as if to assure himself whether it were living or not, and could not even then believe that it was only ivory. He caressed it, and gave it presents such as young girls love, - bright shells and polished stones, little birds and flowers of various hues, beads and amber. He put raiment on its limbs, and jewels on its fingers, and a necklace about its neck. To the ears he hung earrings, and strings of pearls upon the breast. Her dress became her, and she looked not less charming than when unattired. He laid her on a couch spread with cloths of Tyrian dye, and called her his wife, and put her head upon a pillow of the softest feathers, as if she could enjoy their softness.

**The festival of Venus** (Aphrodite) was at hand - a festival celebrated with great pomp at Cyprus. Victims were offered, the altars smoked, and the odor of incense filled the air. When Pygmalion had performed his part in the solemnities, he stood before the altar and timidly said, "Ye gods, who can do all things, give me, I pray you, for my wife" - he dared not say "**my ivory virgin**," but said instead - "**one like my ivory virgin**." Venus (Aphrodite), who was present at the festival, heard him and knew the thought he would have uttered; and as an omen of her favor, caused the flame on the altar to shoot up **thrice in a fiery point into the air**. When he returned home, he went to see his statue, and leaning over the couch, gave a kiss to the mouth. It seemed to be warm. He pressed its lips again, he laid his hand upon the limbs; the ivory felt soft to his touch and yielded to his fingers like the wax of Hymettus. While he stands astonished and glad, though doubting, and fears he may be mistaken, again and again with a lover's ardor he touches the object of his hopes. It was indeed alive! The veins when pressed yielded to the finger and again resumed their roundness. Then at last the votary of Venus found words to thank the goddess, and pressed his lips upon lips as real as his own. The virgin, named **Galatea**, felt the kisses and blushed, and opening her timid eyes to the light, fixed them at the same moment on her lover. Venus blessed the nuptials she had formed, and from this union **Paphos** was born, from whom the city, sacred to Venus, received its name.

## Apollo and Daphne

**Daphne** was an independent-minded, love- and marriage-hating young huntress, a follower of **Artemis (Diana)**. Her father, the river god **Peneus**, wished her to marry and have children, but all Daphne that wanted was to hunt alone in the deep woods, rejoicing in her freedom.

One day **Apollo** saw her. She was hunting, her dress short to the knee, her arms bare, and her hair in disarray. She was enchantingly beautiful and Apollo thought, "She is lovely now, but what would she look like properly dressed with her hair nicely arranged." The idea inflamed him, and he started running after the nymph. Daphne fled, and she was an excellent runner. Apollo was hard put to overtake her, although he grew steadily closer. He cried out, "Do not fear, stop and find out who I am. I am no rude rustic or shepherd but the **Lord of Delphi**, and I love you!" But Daphne flew on, even more frightened than before. She knew she could never outrun Apollo, but she was determined to resist to the end. She could almost feel Apollo's breath on the back of her neck when she saw her father's river ahead of her. She screamed to him, "Help me father, help me." At these words a dragging numbness came over her, and her feet seemed rooted in the earth. Bark was enclosing her body, and leaves were sprouting from her arms. She had been changed into a **laurel tree**.

Apollo sadly watched the transformation as he held her in his arms. "Oh, lovely tree," he mourned, "you will always be mine. I will give you the gift of eternal life. Your leaves will always be green and victors will wear your leaves as wreathes upon their brows." Poets also write that Apollo took a limb from one of her branches and made a musical instrument, the **guitar**.

Another version of Apollo's instant love for Daphne was the cause of a trick played by Cupid who struck Apollo with one of his **golden arrows** when he first saw the nymph, and her with a **lead arrow** when she noticed his advancement.

## ECHO & NARCISSUS

Echo was a beautiful nymph, fond of the woods and hills, where she devoted herself to woodland sports. She was a favorite of Diana, and attended her in the chase. But Echo had one failing; she was fond of talking, and whether in chat or argument, would have the last word. One day Hera was seeking her husband, who, she had reason to fear, was amusing himself among the nymphs. Echo by her talk contrived to detain the goddess till the nymphs made their escape. When Hera discovered it, she passed sentence upon Echo in these words: "You shall forfeit the use of that tongue with which you have cheated me, except for that one purpose you are so fond of- reply. You shall still have the last word, but no power to speak first."

This nymph saw Narcissus, a beautiful youth, as he pursued the chase upon the mountains. She loved him and followed his footsteps. O how she longed to address him in the softest accents, and win him to converse! But it was not in her power. She waited with impatience for him to speak first, and had her answer ready. One day the youth, being separated from his companions, shouted aloud, "Who's here?" Echo replied, "Here." Narcissus looked around, but seeing no one, called out, "Come." Echo answered, "Come." As no one came, Narcissus called again, "Why do you shun me?" Echo asked the same question. "Let us join one another," said the youth. The maid answered with all her heart in the same words, and hastened to the spot, ready to throw her arms about his neck. He started back, exclaiming, "Hands off!

I would rather die than you should have me!" "Have me," said she; but it was all in vain. He left her, and she went to hide her blushes in the recesses of the woods. From that time forth she lived in caves and among mountain cliffs. Her form faded with grief, till at last all her flesh shrank away. Her bones were changed into rocks and there was nothing left of her but her voice. With that she is still ready to reply to any one who calls her, and keeps up her old habit of having the last word.

Narcissus's cruelty in this case was not the only instance. He shunned all the rest of the nymphs, as he had done poor Echo. One day a maiden who had in vain endeavored to attract him uttered a prayer that he might some time or other feel what it was to love and meet no return of affection. The avenging goddess heard and granted the prayer.

There was a clear fountain, with water like silver, to which the shepherds never drove their flocks, nor the mountain goats resorted, nor any of the beasts of the forests; neither was it defaced with fallen leaves or branches; but the grass grew fresh around it, and the rocks sheltered it from the sun. Hither came one day the youth, fatigued with hunting, heated and thirsty. He stooped down to drink, and saw his own image in the water; he thought it was some beautiful water-spirit living in the fountain. He stood gazing with admiration at those bright eyes, those locks curled like the locks of Bacchus or Apollo, the rounded cheeks, the ivory neck, the parted lips, and the glow of health and exercise over all. He fell in love with himself. He brought his lips near to take a kiss; he plunged his arms in to embrace the beloved object. It fled at the touch, but returned again after a moment and renewed the fascination. He could not tear himself away; he lost all thought of food or rest while he hovered over the brink of the fountain gazing upon his own image. He talked with the supposed spirit: "Why, beautiful being, do you shun me? Surely my face is not one to repel you. The nymphs love me, and you yourself look not indifferent upon me. When I stretch forth my arms you do the same; and you smile upon me and answer my beckoning with the like." His tears fell into the water and disturbed the image. As he saw it depart, he exclaimed, "Stay, I entreat you! Let me at least gaze upon you, if I may not touch you." With this, and much more of the same kind, he cherished the flame that consumed him, so that by degrees he lost his color, his vigor, and the beauty which formerly had so charmed the nymph Echo.

She kept near him, however, and when he exclaimed, "Alas! Alas!" she answered him with the same words. He pined away and died; and when his shade passed the Stygian river, it leaned over the boat to catch a look of itself in the waters. The nymphs mourned for him, especially the water-nymphs; and when they smote their breasts Echo smote hers also. They prepared a funeral pile and would have burned the body, but it was nowhere to be found; but in its place a flower, purple within, and surrounded with white leaves, which bears the name and preserves the memory of Narcissus.

## **Andromeda and Perseus**

Perseus, continuing his flight, arrived at the country of the Aethiopians, of which Cepheus was king. Cassiopeia his queen, proud of her beauty, had dared to compare herself to the Sea-nymphs, which roused their indignation to such a degree that they sent a prodigious sea-monster to ravage the coast. To appease the deities, Cepheus was directed by the oracle to expose his daughter Andromeda to be devoured by the monster.

As Perseus looked down from his aerial height he beheld the virgin chained to a rock, and waiting the approach of the serpent. She was so pale and motionless that if it had not been for her flowing tears

and her hair that moved in the breeze, he would have taken her for a marble statue. He was so startled at the sight that he almost forgot to wave his wings. As he hovered over her he said, "O virgin, undeserving of those chains, but rather of such as bind fond lovers together, tell me, I beseech you, your name, and the name of your country, and why you are thus bound." At first she was silent from modesty, and, if she could, would have hid her face with her hands; but when he repeated his questions, for fear she might be thought guilty of some fault which she dared not tell, she disclosed her name and that of her country, and her mother's pride of beauty. Before she had done speaking, a sound was heard off upon the water, and the sea-monster appeared, with his head raised above the surface, cleaving the waves with his broad breast. The virgin shrieked, the father and mother who had now arrived at the scene, wretched both, but the mother more justly so, stood by, not able to afford protection, but only to pour forth lamentations and to embrace the victim. Then spoke Perseus; "There will be time enough for tears; this hour is all we have for rescue. My rank as the son of Jove and my renown as the slayer of the Gorgon might make me acceptable as a suitor; but I will try to win her by services rendered, if the gods will only be propitious. If she be rescued by my valor, I demand that she be my reward." The parents consent (how could they hesitate?) and promise a royal dowry with her.

And now the monster was within the range of a stone thrown by a skilful slinger, when with a sudden bound the youth soared into the air. As an eagle, when from his lofty flight he sees a serpent basking in the sun, pounces upon him and seizes him by the neck to prevent him from turning his head round and using his fangs, so the youth darted down upon the back of the monster and plunged his sword into its shoulder. Irritated by the wound, the monster raised himself into the air, then plunged into the depth; then, like a wild boar surrounded by a pack of barking dogs, turned swiftly from side to side, while the youth eluded its attacks by means of his wings. Wherever he can find a passage for his sword between the scales he makes a wound, piercing now the side, now the flank, as it slopes towards the tail. The brute spouts from his nostrils water mixed with blood. The wings of the hero are wet with it, and he dares no longer trust to them. Alighting on a rock which rose above the waves, and holding on by a projecting fragment, as the monster floated near he gave him a death stroke. The people who had gathered on the shore shouted so that the hills reechoed with the sound. The parents, transported with joy, embraced their future son-in-law, calling him their deliverer and the savior of their house, and the virgin, both cause and reward of the contest, descended from the rock.

Cassiopeia is called "the starred AETHIOP, queen" because after her death she was placed among the stars, forming the constellation of that name. Though she attained this honor, yet the Sea-Nymphs, her old enemies, prevailed so far as to cause her to be placed in that part of the heaven near the pole, where every night she is half the time held with her head downward, to give her a lesson of humility.