**OVID’S *METAMORPHOSES***

**BOOK X**

**ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE**

So Hymen left there, clad in saffron robe,

Through the great reach of air, and took his way

To the Ciconian country, where the voice

Of Orpheus called him, all in vain. He came there,

True, but brought with him no auspicious words,

No joyful faces, lucky omens. The torch

Sputtered and filled the eyes with smoke; when swung,

It would not blaze: bad as the omens were,

The end was worse, for as the bride went walking

Across the lawn, attended by her naiads,

A serpent bit her ankle, and she was gone.

Orpheus mourned her to the upper world,

And then, lest he should leave the shades untried,

Dared to descend to Styx, passing the portal

Men call Taenarian. Through the phantom dwellers,

The buried ghosts, he passed, came to the king

Of that sad realm, and to Persephone,

His consort, and he swept the strings, and chanted:

"Gods of the world below the world, to whom

All of us mortals come, if I may speak

Without deceit, the simple truth is this:

I came here, not to see dark Tartarus,

Nor yet to bind the triple-throated monster

Medusa's offspring, rough with snakes. I came

For my wife's sake, whose growing years were taken

By a snake's venom. I wanted to be able

To bear this; I have tried to. Love has conquered.

This god is famous in the world above,

But here, I do not know. I think he may be

Or is it all a lie, that ancient story

Of an old ravishment, and how he brought

The two of you together? By these places

All full of fear, by this immense confusion,

By this vast kingdom's silences, I beg you,

Weave over Eurydice's life, run through too soon.

To you we all, people and things, belong,

Sooner or later, to this single dwelling

All of us come, to our last home; you hold

Longest dominion over humankind.

She will come back again, to be your subject,

After the ripeness of her years; I am asking

A loan and not a gift. If fate denies us

This privilege for my wife, one thing is certain:

I do not want to go back either; triumph

In the death of two."

And with his words, the music

Made the pale phantoms weep: lxion's wheel

Was still, Tityos' vultures left the liver,

Tantalus tried no more to reach for the water,

And Belus' daughters rested from their urns,

And Sisyphus climbed on his rock to listen.

That was the first time ever in all the world

The Furies wept. Neither the king nor consort

Had harshness to refuse him, and they called her,

Eurydice. She was there, limping a little

From her late wound, with the new shades of Hell.

And Orpheus received her, but one term

Was set: he must not, till he passed Avernus,

Turn back his gaze. or the gift would be in vain.

They climbed the upward path, through absolute silence,

Up the steep murk, clouded in pitchy darkness,

They were near the margin, near the upper land,

When he, afraid that she might falter, eager to see her,

Looked back in love, and she was gone, in a moment.

Was it he, or she, reaching out arms and trying

To hold or to be held, and clasping nothing

But empty air? Dying the second time,

She had no reproach to bring against her husband,

What was there to complain of? One thing, only:

He loved her. He could hardly hear her calling

*Farewell!* when she was gone.

The double death

Stunned Orpheus, like the man who turned to stone

At sight of Cerberus, or the couple of rock,

Olenos and Lethaea, hearts so joined

One shared the other's guilt, and Ida's mountain,

Where rivers run, still holds them, both together.

In vain the prayers of Orpheus and his longing

To cross the river once more; the boatman Charon

Drove him away. For seven days he sat there

Beside the bank, in filthy garments, and tasting

No food whatever. Trouble, grief, and tears

Were all his sustenance. At last, complaining

The gods of Hell were cruel, he wandered on

To Rhodope and Haemus, swept by the north winds,

Where, for three years, he lived without a woman

Either because marriage had meant misfortune

Or he had made a promise. But many women

Wanted this poet for their own, and many

Grieved over their rejection. His love was given

To young boys only, and he told the Thracians

That was the better way: *enjoy that springtime,*

*Take those first flowers!*

There was a hill, and on it

A wide-extending plain, all green, but lacking

The darker green of shade, and when the singer

Came there and ran his fingers over the strings,

The shade came there to listen. The oak-tree came,

And many poplars, and the gentle lindens,

The beech, the virgin laurel, and the hazel

Easily broken, the ash men use for spears,

The shining silver-fir, the ilex bending

Under its acorns, the friendly sycamore,

The changing-colored maple, and the willows

That love the river-waters, and the lotus

Favoring pools, and the green boxwood came,

Slim tamarisks, and myrtle, and viburnum

With dark-blue berries, and the pliant ivy,

The tendrilled grape, the elms, all dressed with vines,

The rowan-trees, the pitch-pines, and the arbute

With the red fruit, the palm, the victor's triumph,

The bare-trunked pine with spreading leafy crest,

Dear to the mother of the gods since Attis

Put off his human form, took on that likeness,

And the cone-shaped cypress joined them, now a tree,

But once a boy, loved by the god Apollo

Master of lyre and bow-string, both together.