



Frank Schwieger

## I, Zeus, and the Olympic Gang

Gods and heroes from Greek Mythology

Original title: Ich, Zeus, und die Bande vom Olymp  
Götter und Helden erzählen griechische Sagen

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### Outline

Enough already, for Gods' sake! For almost 3000 years people have been telling each other god knows what about the heroes and gods of Greek mythology. It really is high time the truth was brought to light. Here, the Olympians and Heroes take the matter into their own hands—from Achilles to Zeus. So readers discover at first-hand why Achilles, the greatest hero of them all, runs around in girl's clothes and why Apollo is such a tree-hugger; what beauty queen Aphrodite and a golden apple have to do with the Trojan War; why Ariadne is known as the cry-baby of Naxos—and of course what part Big Boss Zeus plays in all this.

**Twenty-four episodes from the lives of the greatest Greek heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses—straight from the Trojan Horse's mouth! Each story is complemented by a wittily illustrated profile of the starring character, detailing their family connections, their likes and dislikes and distinguishing features.**

- extremely imaginative, yet amazingly true to the original
- the Greek gods have been cult material for kids and young teens since Percy Jackson

Frank Schwieger was born in 1968 and grew up in Holstein, in the northernmost region of Germany. He studied Latin and history, and has been working as a grammar school teacher since 1999.



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Sample Translation "I, Zeus, and the Olympic Gang" (F. Schwieger)

# Zeus and I and the Gang from Olympus. Gods and Heroes tell Greek Legends

by Frank Schwieger

Illustrations by Ramona Wultschner

256 pages

Sample translation by Rachel Hildebrandt

## Aphrodite - The Beauty Queen





**Who belongs in my family**

I have never been able to figure out who my parents are. I am married to Hephaestus, the god of the forge, who is a pretty grumpy fellow. Besides that, he spends most of his time in his workshop, which is why he hardly has any time for me. Is it surprising that I don't put much stock in marital fidelity? I have numerous children, most of whom I've had with my countless lovers. My most famous child is Eros, better known as Cupid, the little god of love. He has wings on his back, and anyone who is struck by one of his golden arrows will fall in love forever with the very first person they see.

**My home is**

Mount Olympus, the mountain of the gods, is where my palace is located, but I do not spend much time there. I prefer to travel around with either my son or one of my lovers. I enjoy being on Cyprus, which is my favorite island.

**What I can do especially well**

I bring love into the world. What task could be nicer than that? Wherever I show up, people (and sometimes even the gods) get red ears and sweaty palms.

### **What I dislike more than anything else**

Hatred and arguments, murder and manslaughter, war and violence, cursing and complaining. Absolutely all grouchy, moody and unkind people (and gods), who make life difficult for each other. If it were up to me, the entire world would be full of love. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

### **This is my story**

I will probably never discover who my parents are. I sometimes suspect that Zeus, the king of the gods, is my father. He was once involved with Dione, a minor goddess whom we rarely see up on Olympus. I resemble Dione some, so perhaps she is my mother, but whenever I ask her or Zeus about my background, they just smile and say nothing.

There are people who claim that I was born from sea foam and nothing else, and that I floated to shore on a shell, landing on either Kythira or Cyprus. A strange tale... In any case, my parentage is shrouded in mystery, and the odds are not good that I will solve it.

I don't want to bore you with unsolvable puzzles, though. I would rather tell you a story that will prove the extent of the power of love and its goddess.

It all started on the day that Peleus and Thetis got married. You have already heard about the two of them, since they are the parents of that show-off Achilles. The ceremony took place in Zeus's palace, and he had invited all of the goddesses and gods to attend. All of them except Eris, the goddess of strife. Nobody ever wants her around, especially at a wedding. However, somehow Eris heard about the celebration and about the fact that she had been left off of the guest list. This put her in an even worse mood than the bad one she is always in anyway, and she decided to spoil the celebration. She is especially good at things like this, the dumb cow. What did she do? She had a golden apple made, and on it were written the words: For the Most Beautiful!

Then she slipped up under a ballroom window and tossed the apple onto the middle of the dance floor, where everyone was dancing, in the best of moods. I was the first one to catch sight of the apple, so I thought: Of course, it's for me. I only first found out much later that Eris was behind the whole thing. I was about to slip the apple into one of my puffed sleeves, when Athena suddenly appeared in front of me. She is the daughter of the Zeus, the father of the gods, and a powerful war goddess.

“Give it to me!” she scolded. “It belongs to me!”

“Not hardly,” sniffed Hera, Zeus's wife, walking up beside Athena. “I'm the boss here. The apple is mine.”

“We'll see about that,” Demeter, the goddess of fields and meadows, cut in.

“Yes, we will,” screeched Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, as she launched herself at me.

You should be glad you didn't see what happened there on the dance floor. The screeching brawl that followed was totally unworthy of a divine party. It was a good thing that you humans never heard about it. Except for Theseus, no mortals were present. At

some point, it became too much for Zeus. He wanted to get the party back on track, so he ordered the three goddesses who were still fighting over the apple of discord (the others had already given up) to appear before his throne: his wife Hera, his daughter Athena and me. The three of us looked pretty banged up, with disheveled hair and scratched faces, our lovely dresses torn to shreds.

"Papa!" Athena cried. "You have to decide which of the three of us should get the apple? Definitely me, right?"

"Uh... Well... I don't know..." Zeus hemmed and hawed. I knew exactly what he was thinking: He didn't want to ruin things with any of us, so he needed to dump the decision onto someone else.

"I know," he finally said. "All three of you will fly to Mount Ida, which is located close to Troy. Paris, the prince of Troy, is tending to a flock of sheep there. They say that Paris is knowledgeable when it comes to beautiful women. He will decide which of you gets the apple. The losers will accept his decision, got it? My son Hermes will accompany you."

We set off right away for Mount Ida, since the matter needed to be settled. However, before we left, we quickly changed our clothes, and covered our scratches and bruises. There was no way we were going to appear before a mortal in such a tousled state. It would have been too embarrassing. Hermes flew up front with the three of us following him, and a moment later, we were standing in front of Paris.

You can imagine his reaction as early that morning four gods appeared before him, materializing out of thin air. He grew deathly pale and could hardly string a coherent sentence together at first. Just imagine what you would do if the four of us suddenly popped up in your room one morning. You would probably find it hard to say something intelligent, too.

Hermes explained our request: "... and then the father of the gods declared that you should decide the matter, my dear Paris."

The young man nodded in embarrassment. He knew well enough that he wouldn't be able to slip out of this matter and just run away. A mortal against four gods - there was no way he could have won.

"Alright," he finally said. "Which of you should get the apple? All three of you are lovely." He studied us from top to bottom. I put on my most dazzling of smiles, the one nobody can resist, and batted my eyelashes.

Paris gulped. "Um, I would say..." he stammered.

Then Hera interrupted: "Wait! I'd like to have a quick word with you alone. In private."

What was she up to? In surprise, I forgot to bat my eyelashes.

"No problem," Paris replied. "As you wish. There is a stream over there, and we can sit down on the bank and talk."

The two of them vanished, but they returned fairly quickly. Hera's face was all smiles. She pulled Hermes to the side, as Athena and I pricked up our divine ears.

"I promised him," Hera whispered, "that he would be the most powerful king on earth, if he gives me the apple. Now he'll definitely choose me."

"You bribed him?" Hermes asked.

"Of course," Hera replied happily. "Why not?"

My jaw dropped. I had thought this was all about beauty! And a fair judgement. I was about to complain when Athena walked up to Paris.

"Could we have a short chat?" she asked. The same game: She and Paris disappeared for a few minutes, and when they came back, Athena was grinning widely.

"I promised him that he could be the greatest warrior on earth," she whispered to Hermes. "If he picks me."

Hermes shook his head, speechless, as Hera angrily put her hands on her hips. I gasped for air, and Paris was clearly torn. He wrung his hands, as his eyes darted back and forth between the three of us.

Suddenly, I had an idea.

"Come along," I ordered. "I have to talk to you."

I pulled the trembling mortal over to the side. We'll just see, I thought, who the winner turns out to be. And whose offer is the most irresistible.

"Would you like to marry the loveliest woman in the world?" I asked him bluntly. "I mean, the loveliest mortal woman. I'm the loveliest goddess, of course."

Paris's ears began to glow, and I watched as sweat began to bead on his forehead. Two positive signs!

"Of course, I would," Paris replied in a husky voice.

"Then give me the apple. Understood?"

All Paris could do was nod. He was hooked, I was certain. All men are the same, everywhere in the world. They cannot resist either love or beauty.

We rejoined the three others.

"Well?" Hera demanded.

"Out with it!" hissed Athena.

Paris cleared his throat, before visibly pulling himself together and speaking loudly: "Aphrodite is the most beautiful goddess. The golden apple belongs to her."

I smiled triumphantly. I knew it!

Athena and Hera stared angrily at Paris. "You will pay for this," the queen of the gods huffed, and then she and Athena vanished.

Paris did not seem to catch the threat. "When will I get what you promised?" He shifted impatiently from one foot to the other.

"There is just one small problem," I remarked. "The woman I just promised to you is married."

“Already?” Paris’s face crumpled a little. “A promise is a promise. And it can’t be broken.”

“No, no.” I laid my hand soothingly on his shoulder. “We’ll figure it out. You will just need to be a little patient.”

“For how long?”

I shrugged. “Time is relative. The woman I have in mind is named Helen. She is the queen of Sparta and the wife of King Menelaus. I will send my son Eros to Sparta, and he will enflame her passion with one of his golden arrows. You will lead a delegation to Sparta, which is how Helen will come to fall in love with you. She will leave her husband and follow you to Troy.”

“How do you know all this?” Paris asked, incredulously.

“Divine secret,” I said. “For the time being, find yourself a girlfriend, maybe one of those pretty mountain nymphs who live here in the highlands.”

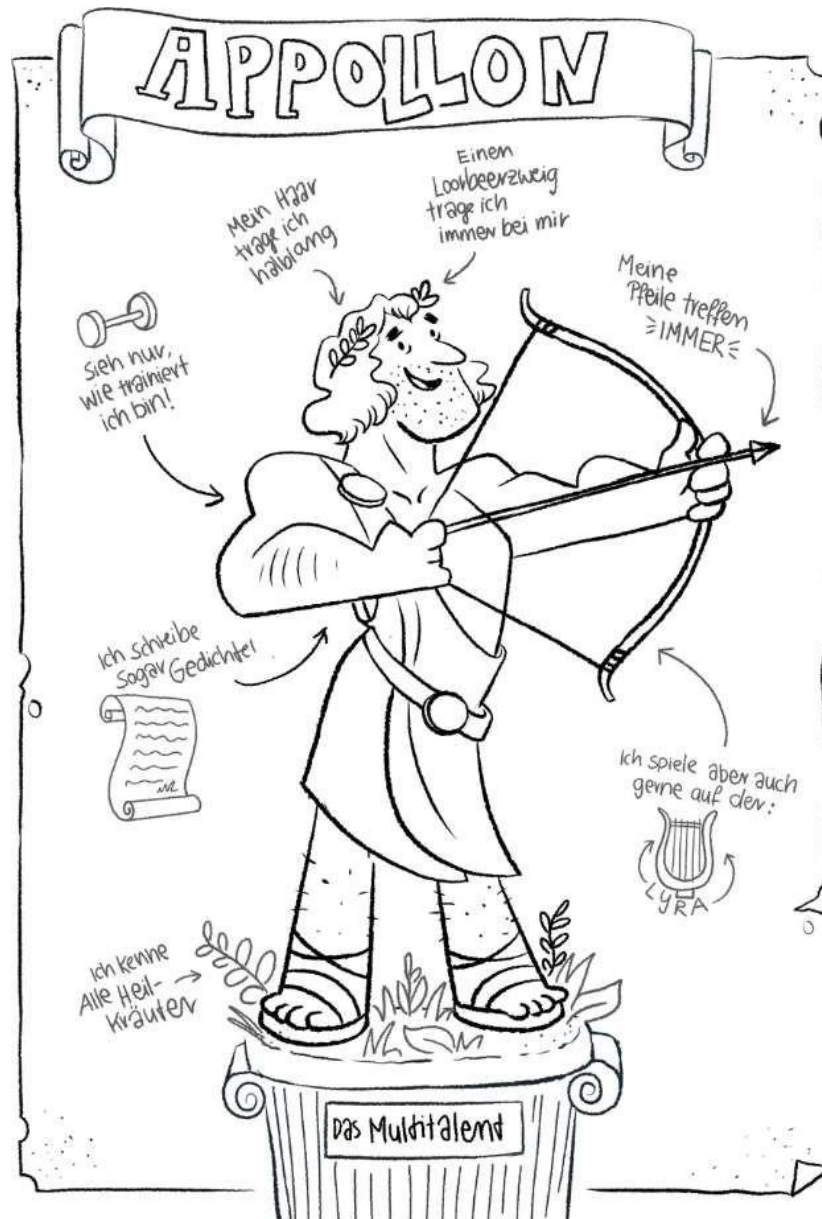
“But after that, I’ll have this lovely Helen, right? A promise is a promise.”

I nodded, and Paris smiled contentedly.

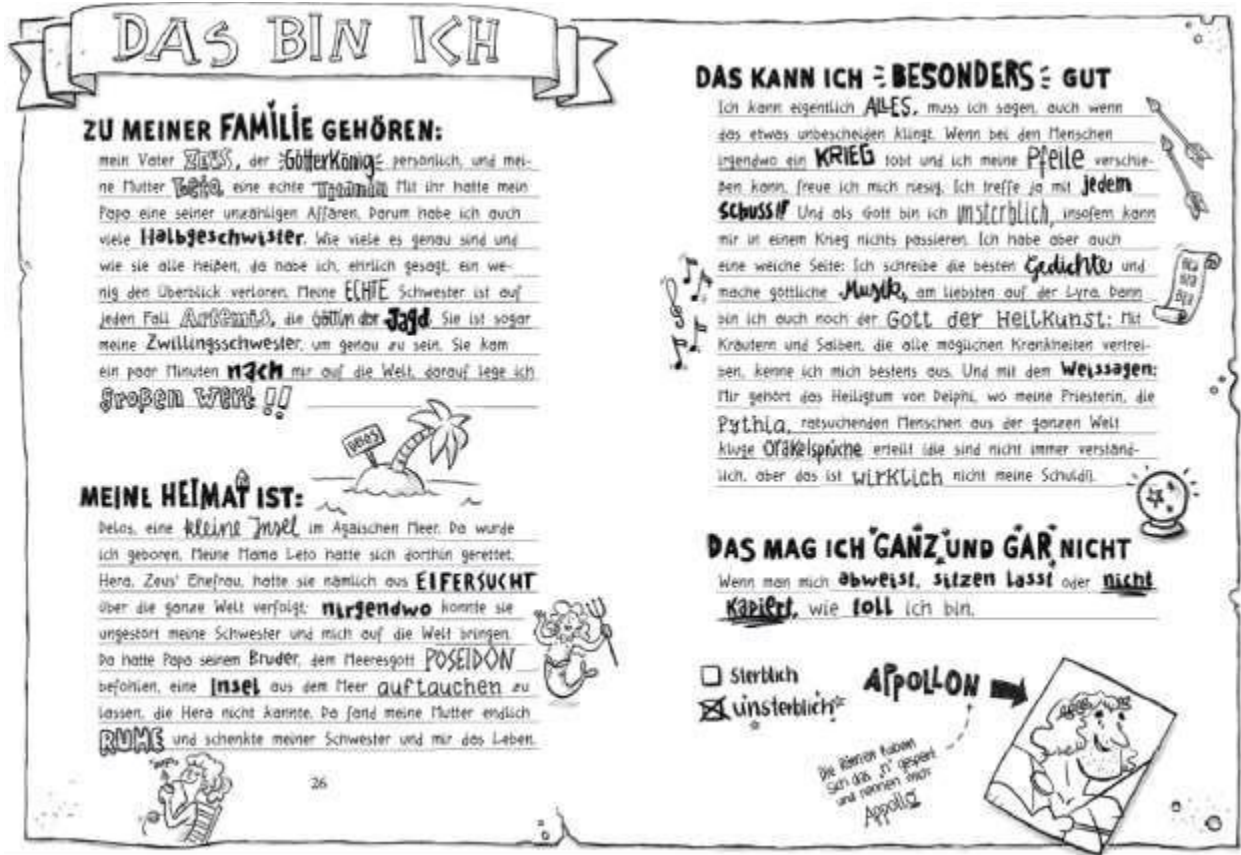
I really had no idea that my offer would end up being so disastrous for Paris’s home city of Troy. Naturally, Helen’s husband Menelaus was really mad when his beloved wife left him and moved in with Paris in Troy. He and his brother Agamemnon drummed up thousands of Greek warriors and declared war against Troy, which would last an entire decade and cause the deaths of countless heroes. But that is another story.

On this particular day on Mount Ida, all that was important was the honor of being declared the most beautiful. I simply had to have this apple. That is understandable, isn’t it?

## Apollo - The Multi-Talented







**Who belongs in my family**

My father Zeus, the king of the gods himself, and my mother Leto, a real Titan. My Papa had one of his countless affairs with her, which is the reason why I have lots of half-siblings. To be honest, I have lost count of them and all of their names. Regardless, my one full sister is Artemis, the goddess of the hunt. She is actually my twin sister, to be precise. I arrived in the world a few minutes before she did, a fact I am quite proud of.

**My home is**

I was born on Delos, a small island in the Aegean Sea. This is where my Mama Leto was able to take refuge. Hera, Zeus's wife, had jealousy hunted her around the world, and there was nowhere that she could give birth to my sister and me without being caught. This is why Papa ordered his brother, Poseidon, the god of the sea, to create an island that Hera didn't know. My mother finally found a safe place here, and was able to bring my sister and me into the world.

**What I can do especially well**

I can do pretty much anything, I have to admit, even if that does sound a little arrogant. I am always delighted when humans are waging war somewhere, since it gives me an opportunity to fire my arrows. I never miss a shot. And since I am a god, I am immortal,

so nothing can happen to me in a war. But I also have a soft side: I write the best poems and play music divinely, preferably on the lyre. Besides that, I am the god of healing. I know absolutely everything there is to know about which herbs and salves can heal every imaginable illness. And when it comes to prophecies, the Temple at Delphi belongs to me. This is where my priestess Pythia shares wise oracles with people from around the world who are seeking advice. (These do not always make sense, but that is not really my fault!)

### **What I dislike more than anything else**

Whenever someone rejects me, walks out on me, or does not recognize how great I am.

### **This is my story:**

I have spent a long time thinking about which story to tell. This is one in which - how should I put it - I do not come out looking all that great. At the same time, there are so many incredible tales I could tell you about things I brought to a good end. For example, a few days after I was born, I fought long and hard with the ghastly dragon Python, and I was ultimately able to kill him with my arrows.

That would be a real adventure story, at the end of which I would be the dazzling victor. But a god that defeats a monster - that isn't anything special, is it? Any god can do that. But what about a god who falls hopelessly in love and ends up tricked by a girl? Yes, even we gods have our weaknesses, just like you humans.

It was a gorgeous summer day. I went out for a walk through the fields and woods, not suspecting a thing, when I suddenly came across Eros. This impertinent god of love was sitting on a fallen tree, trying to repair his bow.

“Hey!” I called. “Weapons are for real men, not little boys. Make sure you don't get hurt on your cute little toy!”

Eros got a sly look in his eyes. “No worries. You will see soon enough what I can do with my bow.”

At that moment, he extended his sweet little wings and flew up into the air. I was just wondering why he was flying off, when I felt a piercing pain in my right shoulder. It was already too late by the time I realized that the little wretch had shot me with one of his golden arrows. It was the arrow of love: invisible and darn effective.

You may be thinking that it was my own fault. You should never make fun of anyone, not smaller people and definitely not smaller gods. You're right. I was acting very arrogant that day, in part because I had defeated Python only a short time before that. I bitterly regretted my mocking, and will never do it again. I promise.

If someday you feel a strange pinching in your shoulder that you cannot explain, it would be best for you to not leave your house. Who knows whose path you might cross first? It might be a boy or a girl from your neighborhood. You would see him or her - and be hopelessly lost. You will say all sorts of crazy stuff and do the stupidest things, just like I did. You will see soon enough.

In the meantime, Eros had shot a second arrow: at Daphne, a beautiful girl. But this arrow was made of lead, and it had the opposite effect. Anyone struck by an arrow like this will want nothing to do with love. The pain in my shoulder quickly faded. I forgot about it and continued my walk through the fields and woods, in search of a new adventure. That is when I saw Daphne, as she was picking flowers in a meadow. A lovely girl! An enchanting girl! I was instantly hooked. I had no idea that this was the result of the horrible arrow. I fell in love at first sight, as my face grew flushed. My ears were burning, my heart raced, my hands trembled. I had no choice and broke into a run. I wanted to touch the girl, to hold her in my arms, to cover her with kisses.

I took off like a hunting dog that has just spotted a rabbit. Though still far off, I called out to her: “Hey, girl! I like you. You’re really sweet.”

She turned around and stared at me, her eyes huge. I kept running.

“I’m a god!” I yelled. “Apollo himself. Don’t I look great? With my arrows, I could shoot the sweetest cherries down from the tree for you. Or I could write you a divine love poem. Or sing a little song that will make you melt like snow in the springtime sun.”

“Get lost! Leave me alone!” Daphne dropped her flowers and began to run.

What insolence, I thought. Who did she think she was? I had just told her who I was, and her only reaction was to run away? How insulting! Today I know that there was nothing Daphne could do. It was the arrow’s fault. But back then, I was furious. I dashed after her. She was pretty fast, but I was faster. I had almost reached her - I could hear her breathing as I reached for her flowing hair - when she cried out: “Papa, where are you? Some creep is chasing me. He says he is Apollo, but I don’t believe him. Anyone could say that. He has almost caught me because he is so fast. He has a bow and arrow with him. Papa, help me!”

I slowed down. What had she called me? A creep? I almost stumbled. Then I saw the river in front of her. Now I have you, I thought. But suddenly Peneus stepped out of the water. Of course, you don’t know who he is, but each of our rivers, even the tiny brooks, has its own god. They are always dripping wet, because they spend most of their time underwater. And they have long hair and beards. So, Peneus was the god of this river, which bore his name as well. And he got out of the water and planted himself on the riverbank, directly in front of Daphne, his daughter.

She could hardly believe her good luck, as she begged her father once more for help. However, he immediately recognized who he was dealing with. I am one of the most powerful gods on Olympus, and this Peneus was only some river god that I could easily defeat in a fight. At the same time, he was nobody’s fool. That I have to admit. He sized up the situation right away. He looked at me grimly, before giving his daughter a kiss and diving back into his river. What was that supposed to mean? But then I saw what he had done. In order to protect his daughter from me, he had transformed her into a tree. Gods can do that, even river gods. Daphne suddenly sent out roots. She stretched out her arms, and as they grew longer, they began to sprout branches,

followed by leaves. Bark started to encase her body, and a moment later, there was nothing more to see of the beautiful girl I had fallen in love with.

Shocked, I could hardly believe my eyes. Even today, tears spring to my eyes whenever I think about this moment. I was so terribly in love! At first, I tried to reverse the transformation, but that didn't work. (I can do a lot of things, but not everything.) Then I wrapped my arms around the tree trunk and covered it in a thousand kisses, but I eventually grew weary of that. Have you ever kissed a tree trunk? I can tell you that at it leaves a lot to be desired.

I eventually broke off a few twigs, which I have carried with me ever since then. Peneus, that clever old man, had actually turned his daughter into a laurel.

Can you imagine how bitter this day was for me? First off, a little boy shot me with an arrow. Then I was beaten in a race by a girl. And last of all, some third-rate river god tricked me with a cheap transformation. Could there be anything worse than this? As you can see, sometimes even we gods have to put up with defeats.

The next time you see a laurel tree or even a laurel leaf (you surely have a few dried leaves somewhere in your kitchen), then greet it kindly from me, the god Apollo, who will forever be in love with the lovely Daphne.

## Orpheus - The Voice of Greece



### Who belongs in my family

First and foremost, my mother Calliope, one of the nine muses. My mother refuses to reveal who my father is, but I suspect it is Apollo, the god of music. And of course, Eurydice, my most beloved wife, is part of my family.

### My home is

The Rhodope Mountains in Thrace, which are located in northern Greece. This is where I was born and grew up.

### **What I can do especially well**

I am a star, the greatest singer of all time. My songs not only beguile people, but I can also cast a spell over animals.

On more than a few occasions, dozens of animals have gathered around me. The wolf rests beside the sheep, the lion beside the deer, the snake beside the mouse - they all cuddle up side by side and listen to my music, without trying to eat each other. Sometimes the stones and trees also come to hear me play. Once, during a particularly sad song, two hard blocks of granite began to cry. You should have seen that: two howling boulders!

### **What I dislike more than anything else**

It is especially terrible for me to be separated from my wife Eurydice.

### **This is my story:**

Do you enjoy stories that are sad and suspenseful and even scary, all at once? And that have a happy ending? If so, keep reading!

As I already said, I'm a huge star - one of the biggest, to be honest. Every girl and woman, every nymph and even some of the goddesses are in love with me. Or they used to be, to be more exact, until I... But I will tell you what happened. All of that incessant screaming at my concerts had really started to get on my nerves, not to mention the countless stuffed animals that flew up onto the stage and the fainting nymphs who had to be carried out of the way...

I didn't want to have anything to do with these hordes of admirers. I was already head over heels in love with Eurydice, a stunning nymph, a real hottie from the forests near where I lived. I met her one day when I was out taking a walk, strumming my lyre and singing. She also fell in love with me, which wasn't really all that surprising since this was what always happened to the women I met. We decided to get married, but the gods obviously did not approve: On the morning of our wedding day, an owl landed on the ridgepole of my house, where it proceeded to sing its eery song. We Greeks believe that this bird brings bad luck. Besides that, the torches we wanted to set ablaze for our celebration did not want to burn well. They just hissed and smoldered. Our guests watched us with concern as I led Eurydice between the hissing torches to my house.

After the banquet, my young wife was playing with some of her nymph friends in the meadow behind my house. I was standing close by with some of the other guests, happily sipping a cocktail, when it happened: Eurydice stepped on a poisonous snake that was lying hidden in the grass. She screamed loudly, before crumpling to the ground. I rushed over to her, but there was nothing I could do. She died in my arms on our wedding day.

Can you imagine a worse day than this? Our guests were just as horrified as I was. They tried to comfort me: I was still young and would soon find another young

woman. There were so many out there, and they were all in love with me. I just needed to pick one out. This was not what I wanted to hear. I loved Eurydice and no one else!

After her funeral, I made a decision. It was way out there, as far as ideas go: I decided to travel down to the underworld to visit Hades and Persephone, play for them a musical tearjerker, and ask them to give me Eurydice back. I’m a star, so I’ll get her back, I thought. No one has been able to resist my love songs before now.

Fortunately, I found a passageway down to the dark kingdom of shadows. (Thanks to a tip from another nymph, Eurydice’s sister.) I brought my lyre along and descended the path, deeper and deeper down into the earth. I eventually reached the Acheron, the river that the shadows of the dead have to cross before they can actually reach the underworld. The only way to cross it is on the small boat rowed by the gruesome ferryman, Charon.

When he caught sight of me on the riverbank, he snarled at me in his deep voice: “What do you want? There is nothing for the living here. Get out of here, or I’ll make you get a move on!” With this, he shook his fist at me, threateningly.

I had figured this might be how things would go, and I was prepared. I have more than one sappy song in my repertoire. Instead of saying something, I sat down on the ground, tuned my lyre, and began to sing. The song was about a ferryman, who falls in eternal love with a beautiful girl, whom he poles across the river every day. The girl does not return his love, and the ferryman is so depressed by this that one day he jumps into the river and drowns.

Once the song was over, I glanced over at Charon. It had worked: Charon was sitting on the thwart of his boat and sobbing. He wiped the tears from his face with his black cloak and asked huskily: “Would you like to go to the other side?”

I nodded.

“Then, come on,” he said. “Just this once. And without the obol this time. Just make sure you don’t cause any trouble down here, alright?”

“Of course,” I said. “I only want my wife back.”

“You’ll have to discuss that with the boss,” responded Charon. “And the missus. You will find them in the great hall. I will take you over and give you the directions. Get in the boat. The rest of you will have to wait!” He squinted grimly at the shadows who were waiting impatiently behind me. “You have eternity anyway.”

It was a creepy path, let me tell you. There were shadows everywhere. They slipped past me and studied me with curiosity. Curiosity and envy. They wished that they were just as alive as I was. It seemed to me that some of them even wanted my autograph. They probably recognized me from the upper world, but I didn’t have time for this. Besides, I had nothing to write with on me...

I finally reached the great hall. It was tremendously tall, and I couldn’t even see the ceiling. It was a little brighter here, so I could at least make some things out. Hades and Persephone were sitting on their thrones on the other side of the room. They were

surprised to see me, and my knees wobbled, when I came to a stop a few steps in front of them. I bowed and came right to the point:

“Your majesties, my name is Orpheus. In the upper world, I am a mega superstar, and people call me THE VOICE.”

Hades and Persephone furrowed their brows, but said nothing. It was pretty quiet down here anyway. The multitude of shadows that were gradually gathering behind me did not have all that much to say. And when they did, they whispered to each other.

“Your kingdom is certainly great,” I continued, “but I have no plans to look around, at least not yet. I do not intend to abduct anyone, neither Cerberus nor you, dear queen.”

Persephone looked shocked, while Hades sniffed grimly. Don’t just babble stupid stuff, I told myself.

“I have come to give you a small, private performance. And to fetch back my beloved wife, Eurydice. A poisonous snake ended her young life much too soon. I have tried to turn my thoughts to other things, but it just doesn’t work. My love for her is too great. You can understand that, right? After all, love is what brought the two of you together.”

Hades smiled and nodded. Persephone frowned.

“Then you can understand how great the power of love can be. Eurydice will come to you, sooner or later. All we are talking about is the difference of a few years. Everybody ends up coming to you, and you are the most powerful of the gods. Give her back to me, I beg of you.” At this point, I dropped down on my knees. This is what I do in my concerts during especially dramatic songs. “And so you can have some idea of how great the love is between me and Eurydice, I would like to sing you this song.

I pulled out my plectrum and began to play my lyre. It was a song that I had written for Eurydice shortly before our wedding. I had wanted to sing it to her on our wedding night, but unfortunately, I had been unable to do that. The song was about two lovers, a singer and a nymph, whose love was so extraordinarily great that even the gods on Olympus envied them. The song had numerous verses, and I knew them all by heart. I sang more emotionally, more passionately, than ever before. This was probably the finest performance I had ever given. It was a shame that the audience was so gloomy. I couldn’t get that real concert feeling going down there. There was no applause, no cheers or screams, no flying stuffed animals.

As the last note faded, it was deathly quiet at first. I got to my feet and stared expectantly at Hades and Persephone. The queen was blowing her nose in her black handkerchief, while the king’s face was drained of all color and his eyes glistened. This was the moment that I first noticed the Furies, the killjoy avenging spirits who can make the lives of humans a living hell. They were standing behind the two thrones and sobbing uncontrollably.



“Alright,” Hades growled, as he cleared his throat. “You can take her. The power of love.. Yes, yes. Your song was simply too lovely.” He sighed deeply. “But I have one condition: You are forbidden from turning around to look at your wife. Eurydice’s shadow will follow you on the way back. You are not permitted to look at her until she reaches the upper world. If you cannot control yourself, you do not deserve her, and she will glide back to my kingdom. Trust me and control yourself, since you will not be given a second chance.”

“I’ll do just what you say,” I replied. “Where is she?”

“Behind you,” Persephone declared, as she tucked her handkerchief back into her cloak.

I was just about to turn around, but was able to catch myself at the last second.

“That’s the way out,” Hades directed, pointing toward the exit out of the giant hall.

“Thank you so very much, your deathly majesties,” I said, standing up and leaving the hall.

Just don’t look back, I reminded myself. Stay cool and don’t turn around for anything! The path was long and dark. The countless shadows that hemmed us in stared at us wordlessly out of dark eyes.

*And what if she isn’t even behind me?* I kept wondering. *Of course, she’s behind me. Hades said she would be, and I have to trust him.* However, with every step, my doubts grew. I couldn’t see or even hear her. I finally reached the Acheron and waved at the ferryman. Charon let me step into his boat, and even at this point, I did not look back. Was Eurydice also on board? I didn’t trust myself to ask Charon. He scowled darkly (his face was still puffy from crying), as he silently rowed the boat across the black water.

And then there was this unbelievably long staircase that went up into the light. I had not heard a single footstep behind me this entire time. Suddenly I felt panicked. After I had climbed over a hundred steps, I thought: *They shafted you. You can’t trust the god of the dead. There’s nobody behind you!*

With that, I turned around - and saw Eurydice’s shadow right behind me! She gazed at me with widened eyes. *What have you done?* is what she seemed to want to ask me. But all she did was glide backward. I tried to grab hold of her, but it was in vain. The shadow was already gone, having slipped back down to the kingdom of the dead.

I dashed after her, taking three steps at once. I reached the river out of breath and waved at Charon, but he ignored me, refusing to even look my way. He did not respond to my pleas and entreaties, but instead let the nameless shadows board his boat before taking them to the other shore. In despair, I collapsed to my knees and could hardly believe my misfortune. What had I done? We had almost reached the top!

I no longer recall how long I stayed down there. How long I blubbered and pounded the ground with my fists. I eventually hauled myself back to the upper world, a broken man. I was totally finished, doner than done. Trust me. My songs, my voice, my

career, my fans - none of it mattered to me anymore. I wallowed in self-pity and yearned constantly for my Eurydice!

In the upper world, I lead an unhappy life for several years. I avoided the villages and cities of men, and retreated to the forests of Thrace. Here I performed for only the plants and animals. One day, I was murdered by a pack of frenzied women. They were furious that I had rejected all of them in no uncertain terms, because I didn't want to marry any of them. But that this would have driven them all crazy...

In any case, I immediately set off for the underworld. I could hardly wait to be finally transported by Charon across the river. I had the obol with me this time, the small coin with which you have to pay the ferryman. I don't think that Charon recognized me in my current shadow form. I rushed to Hades and asked him where Eurydice was - and found her once more.

Since then, we go for walks, day in and day out, in the dark gardens of the underworld. We play hide-and-seek with the Furies, feed Cerberus, watch Sisyphos at work, chat quietly with the other shadows. And upon occasion, I give concerts down here, since Hades and Persephone have asked me to. I play my greatest hits, and the shadows sway arm in arm in time to my music, humming softly along. But the best thing of all is that nothing and nobody, whether above or below the earth, can separate me any longer from my Eurydice. No misfortune, no snake, not even death. For eternity. That is a pretty good happy ending, don't you think?