



The Swan Song

Ladorian Shelton

There was no song he could not play. He was Orpheus, musician beloved of gods and monsters alike. There was no spill of notes beyond reach of his master's fingers, nor lyrics beyond grasp of his beguiler's tongue. There was no song he dared not sing. There was no death his music could not embrace. Not even his own. He would play it, while he still had hands. He would sing it, while he still had voice. He had no fear of death.

It was not his murderers to whom he sang. It was not their writhing, maddened shapes he saw beyond the lyre. The Maenads circled ever closer, their limbs flashing with the mad, blood-lust vitality of a Dionysian revel, dancers to a monster's melody, but it was not to them that his song was offered. Not even when their hands fell upon him. Not even when they began to tear.

She was waiting for him. He saw her. In the shadows behind the dark god's waiting figure. In the Underworld beyond this fading light. His Eurydice. She waited for him. It was to her that he sang. Even still. Ever more. All the fury of all the Maenads in all the world could not silence a single note, not when her ear waited to gather them close. Though hands tore out his throat, smashed his fingers upon the lyre, they could not take this song from him.

He'd lost her once. He'd followed her into death, and lost her still, and returned from Hades empty-handed. That could not be undone, nor all the years since, nor all the jealousies that had sprung up in her wake to kill him now. He could not call back the death-dance that surrounded him. He didn't want to. Safety waited in death's arms, a night eternal beneath which to shelter, and with it waited her smile. Her eyes. Her love. With it waited Eurydice. He ran to her with every note he now played. He sang his blood into the earth, and played his fingers to the bone, one last masterpiece, the greatest song ever sung, for it carried his soul into the night, and brought him home to her. A threnody, a death-song for them both.

Strange, perhaps, that of all the songs he'd ever sang, it was his last that was his greatest. Strange that it was the fractured thing as he lay dying that surpassed all that had come before. Then again, perhaps not.

Were not the last songs, those that sang their souls to sleep, ever and always the greatest?