

Jackie Lutz

Prologue:

Women in ancient Greece were considered many things. Child-bearers, trophy wives, runners of the household... Eurydice must've been held to these standards. I've decided to focus on the objectification of Eurydice in Ovid's version of "Orpheus." She is used as a tool to further Orpheus' development as a character, and as a 'gift' to him for charming Hades. The moment that struck me the most was when she was bitten by the snake, for in Ovid's translation she was punished for going to 'dance with the naiads' instead of focusing on the events of her wedding day. I may have interpreted this incorrectly, but I wanted to go into detail about how Eurydice felt waking up in the Underworld, and her reflecting on her thoughts of her supposedly 'special day.' I think of her as a character who is trapped by society and masculinity, and would rather spend her time freely doing as she pleases.

Eurydice's Point of View:

I opened my eyes. The first thing I could see was a thick fog and a dark sky. But there were no stars shining, and no moon to light up my surroundings. The ground I laid upon was soft and plush, much like the cushion that I had sat on during the feast following the wedding. There was no noise besides the light whispers of the wind gently pushing the fog. It was calming. I took a moment to reflect on where I could've been brought, and what had happened.

I had only left the reception for a few minutes. The attention and atmosphere was suffocating. I wanted to go back to the river, where I could dip my feet into the cool water and clear my thoughts. I took the chance to make my escape when Orpheus turned his attention to one of the noblemen who had attended the party. I managed to get to the entrance of the house before Orpheus was alerted to my movements.

“Eurydice, my dear!” He swooped in and seized my arm. “Where are you going? The King has arrived, and he is expecting me to have you on my arm while I greet him. Oh! Then I must play a song for him, I have much to do!” Orpheus attempted to pull me towards said ruler, but I managed to free myself from his hold.

“My love, I am feeling terribly ill,” I feigned innocence, reverting my gaze. “I’ll be fine in a moment, but I must get some fresh air.” Without waiting for an answer, I brushed him off and mustered all of my power to look confident as I walked under the archway. To my surprise, I heard no protest. Perhaps he did not want to bring negative attention to himself on his special day. I loved Orpheus, but he tended to act differently when around guests. When we are alone, he sings and plays the most beautiful songs for me. It is almost... enchanting.

I made my way to the riverbank. The water gleamed underneath the late afternoon sun. The invitation to swim was tantalizing, so I wrenched the tight sandals off my feet and flung them to the side. I lifted my dress up to my knees so the skirt wouldn’t get dirty. On an average day, I may have not worried about getting my dress a little wet, but Orpheus would be upset if I did not uphold my image.

I dipped my feet in and stared quietly at the trickling water. It flowed over various colored rocks. Red, blue, green. They were all slightly sunbleached. I reached down and picked one out of the water, rubbing at its smooth surface with my fingers.

“Hello!” A voice startled me out of my stupor. I looked up and saw three naiads playing in the water downstream. They waved me over. I delicately stepped around the larger rocks in the water until I reached the river nymphs.

“Lovely day, isn’t it?” One of them said, casually braiding flowers into her hair.

“Very!” Said another, who was peering underneath a large stone.

“Magnificent!” Exclaimed the third, who was strangely giving me a quizzical stare.

I smiled politely at the three naiads. “An amazing day indeed, ladies,” I replied. They kept their gazes on me. “May I ask... what are you three doing?”

The flower naiad simply shrugged. “Whatever we please.” She said, gently caressing a particular beautiful petal. The other two nodded. “Yes, yes!” The stone nymph continued, lightly plucking a frog from the water. The amphibian croaked in protest but looked content.

“I see...” I responded. I knew that naiads spent their time by their water sources, doing well... whatever they wished to do on a given day. I thought about my own life, waking up early to look presentable, running the household, and following Orpheus around. A particular memory struck me, one of my mother telling me how extraordinary of a mother I would become, and how many sons I would bear for Orpheus....

I shook these thoughts out of my head. Those duties were for a later time, for now I should enjoy this opportunity to talk with the naiads. They invited me to join them in their explorations and creations and explications about nature and life. We had many wonderful conversations about simple flora and fauna, and splashed in the water until the sun was starting to sink.

My elegant white tunic was soaked with water and mud, but I paid it no mind. Talking to the nymphs was almost freeing, and I felt more myself than I ever had before.

All good things must come to an end though, and I realized that Orpheus would be fairly angry with me for taking this long to come back. I splashed some water on my face, and turned to the naiads.

“I must be on my way now,” I said, straightening up my posture and fruitlessly attempting to wipe off my dress. “This was very enjoyable... thank you, ladies.” They all gave each other looks and hopped out of the stream.

“We will walk you home!” Exclaimed the quizzical one. “It is getting dark, it would be safer to travel in a group.” I laughed.

“I don’t live very far from here,” I replied, wringing the water from my hair. “It is less than three stadions, we can see the light from where we stand!” But the naiads insisted on walking me home. I obliged mostly out of kindness and gratefulness.

As we approached Orpheus’ home, I could see my new husband marching towards us with a torch in his hand.

“Eurydice! Eurydice!” He was shouting. He must’ve missed me, I’ve been gone for a long while. I smiled brightly and walked at a brisker pace, the naiads close behind.

As we got closer, I realized that his shouts were ones of anger, and his face was contorted into an awful snarl. The soft grass that brushed my feet was suddenly coarse, and seemed to scrap against my soles. The wind felt heavy and dense, urging me to go back to the safety of the river.

I opened my mouth to say something, anything to smother Orpheus’ flame of anger. I never got the chance. I felt a sharp pain on my ankle, and I instantly collapsed in a patch of flowers. I turned my head, ignoring the sounds of the panicked nymphs, and saw a black snake slithering angry into the underbrush. I couldn’t feel the worried touches of the naiads as I was starting to lose feeling in my body. I had the sense of my body moving upward, and I could tell that Orpheus was holding me, shouting my name frantically. I ignored his pleas, and turned my head to the river to get one last glance before everything went silent.

That is how I must've gotten here, I mused. I must be dead. I took another look at my surroundings. It was quiet, but I could see a few spirits in the distance, playing in a small stream of black water. I made no move to get up and join them, for I had all the time in the afterlife to spend exploring the nature of this world. I would miss Orpheus and his love, but I felt almost as if my life had been restored to me through my own perishing.