

The Love Story of Pyramus and Thisbe

“Pyramus was the most handsome of young men and Thisbe was the fairest beauty of the East.” ~Ovid in *Metamorphoses*

Pyramus and Thisbe lived in Babylonia and from the time they were young, were neighbors. They played together daily as children and fell in love as they grew older. Although neighbors, their families were hostile to one another so the love between Pyramus and Thisbe remained a secret. They had a special meeting place at a wall between their houses. This particular wall bore a scar. A large crack marred its smooth surface as a result of an earthquake long ago. Pyramus and Thisbe communicated through this crack when it was risky to see one another. One particularly magnificent day, they arrived at their usual meeting place. The beauty of the day made them lament their situation all the more. They cried as they watched two hummingbirds fly over the wall together. Suddenly they came to the decision that they would not be stopped from being together any longer. They decided to meet that night outside the city gates under a mulberry tree filled with white fruit. This particular tree grew near a stream next to the local cemetery. Thisbe, hidden by a veil, arrived at the appointed spot first and waited patiently for Pyramus to come. All of a sudden, a lioness fresh from a kill, her jaws covered in blood, slunk out of the brush to satisfy her thirst at the stream. Thisbe, frightened by this disturbance, ran to a nearby cave. In her haste, she dropped her veil and the lioness grabbed it and shredded it with her bloody jaws. Meanwhile, Pyramus had arrived at the meeting place. As he approached the tree he could not help but notice the large paw prints of the lioness. His heart beat faster. As he approached the stream, his fears were confirmed upon seeing Thisbe's veil torn and bloodstained. Unable to find Thisbe and fearing that she was dead, Pyramus was unable to contain his sorrow. He

drew his sword and plunged it deeply into his side. As he removed the sword from his side, blood sprayed the white fruit on the tree, turning it a dark purple color.

Meanwhile, Thisbe, recovered from her fright, came back to the meeting place by the stream. There she saw Pyramus' body lying in a crumpled heap on the ground. Racked with uncontrollable agony, she took his sword and threw her body onto it. With her dying breath, she pleaded with the gods that their bodies be buried in a single tomb and that the tree in the special meeting place would always bear fruit in the color of a dark and mournful color in memory of their unrequited love. To this day, the berries of the mulberry tree always turn dark purple in color when they are ripe.

Story Location Clue: The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is remembered in the mosaic displays of Paphos. This city is located west of the Troodos Mountains on the coast of Cyprus.