

and the earth and that their blood, which was nourished by the corn, could in turn nourish it at need. What more natural then, if a beautiful boy had thus been killed, than to think when later the ground bloomed with narcissus or hyacinths that the flowers were his very self, changed and yet living again? So they would tell each other it had happened, a lovely miracle which made the cruel death seem less cruel. Then as the ages passed and people no longer believed that the earth needed blood to be fruitful, all that was cruel in the story would be dropped and in the end forgotten. No one would remember that terrible things had once been done. Hyacinthus, they would say, died not slaughtered by his kinsfolk to get food for them, but only because of a sorrowful mistake.



4 Of these deaths and flowery resurrections the most famous was that of Adonis. Every year the Greek girls mourned for him and every year they rejoiced when his flower, the blood-red anemone, the windflower, was seen blooming again. Aphrodite loved him; the Goddess of Love, who pierces with her shafts the hearts of gods and men alike, was fated herself to suffer that same piercing pain.

She saw him when he was born and even then loved him and decided he should be hers. She carried him to Persephone to take charge of him for her, but Persephone loved him too and would not give him back to Aphrodite, not even when the goddess went down to the underworld to get him. Neither goddess would yield, and finally Zeus himself had to judge between them. He decided that Adonis should spend half the year with each, the autumn and winter with the Queen of the Dead; the spring and summer with the Goddess of Love and Beauty.