

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Sir Osbert Sitwell**

**- poems -**

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## Orpheus

WHEN Orpheus with his wind-swift fingers  
Ripples the strings that gleam like rain,  
The wheeling birds fly up and sing,  
Hither, thither echoing;  
There is a crackling of dry twigs,  
A sweeping of leaves along the ground,  
Fawny faces and dumb eyes  
Peer through the fluttering screens  
That mask ferocious teeth and claws  
Now tranquil.  
As the music sighs up the hill-side,  
The young ones hear,  
Come skipping, ambling, rolling down,  
Their soft ears flapping as they run,  
Their fleecy coats catching in the thickets,  
Till they lie, listening, round his feet.  
Unseen for centuries,  
Fabulous creatures creep out of their caves,  
The unicorn  
Prances down from his bed of leaves,  
His milk-white muzzle still stained green  
With the munching, crunching of mountain-herbs.  
The griffin, usually so fierce,  
Now tame and amiable again,  
Has covered the white bones in his secret cavern  
With a rustling pall of dank dead leaves,  
While the salamander, true lover of art,  
Flickers, and creeps out of the flame;  
Gently now, and away he goes,  
Kindles his proud and blazing track  
Across the forest,  
Lies listening,  
Cools his fever in the flowing waters of the lute.

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But when the housewife returns,  
Carrying her basket,  
She will not understand.  
She misses nothing,  
Hears nothing.  
She will only see  
That the fire is dead,  
The grate cold.

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But the child upstairs,  
Alone, in the empty cottage,  
Heard a strange wind, like music,  
In the forest,  
Saw something creep out of the fire.

Sir Osbert Sitwell