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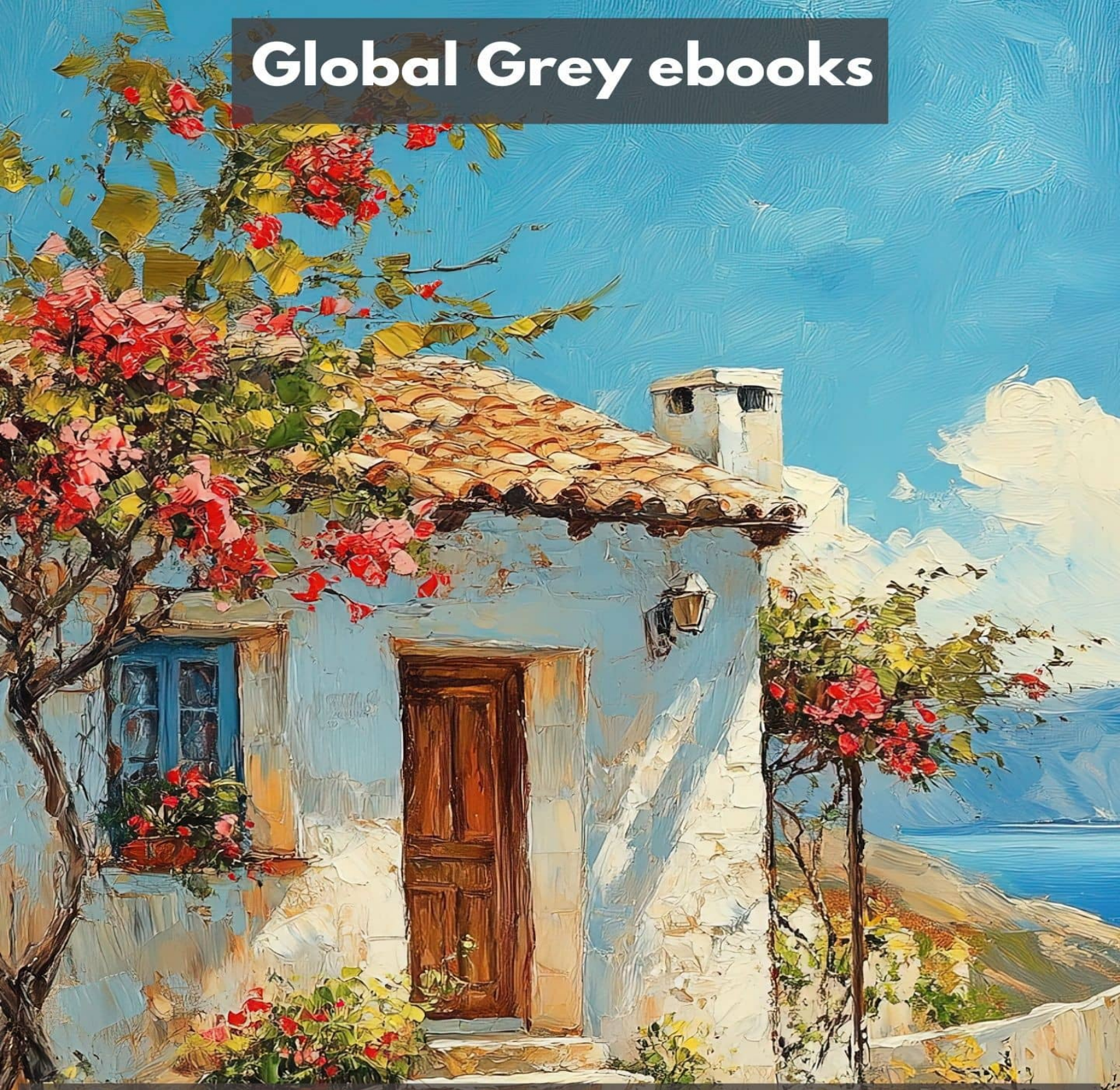

FAIRY TALES OF MODERN GREECE

Theodore P. Gianakoulis
and Georgia H. MacPherson

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Fairy Tales of Modern Greece
by Theodore P. Gianakoulis and Georgia H. MacPherson

First published in 1930

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GlobalGrey 2025
globalgreyebooks.com

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Foreword

TO the question, “Does any fragment of ancient Greek mythology survive?” the answer is, “Yes, the nymphs.” For among the hills and across the fields and streams of Greece, where the gods were born and dwelt, fairies now dance and play and radiate a subtle charm. Fairies are none other than the modern forms of the dryads, oreads, naiads, nerejds, fates, furies, graces and muses of the ancient myths. They are the nymphs that sang and played with Pan and Hermes, Apollo and the satyrs, but now they play and dance and sing with common shepherds, fishermen and hunters. Their very name is as old as Pontus, their father, and Doris, their mother. Νηρηΐδα or Νεράϊδα and Νύμφη, vernacular Νύφη, have the same meaning, which we may translate “fairy” or “nymph.”

Fairies are the virgin divinities of the earth. They know no heaven, for they take the place of the lower, earth-dwelling gods of the ancient mythology. They were never born; they never grow old; yet they are not immortal. Their beauty is everlasting and their dance eternal. They were created out of the earth and always live upon it, the anthropomorphic spirits of hills, streams, trees and ocean.

The Greek’s conception of fairies springs from his worship of nature, to which he is bound by his constant love of beauty. To his mind they are beautiful maidens, endowed with mysterious power, who inhabit palaces in the clouds, in caves on remote mountain peaks, along wild, rocky shores, or at the bottom of the sea. At noon on sunlit days and moonlit nights they visit the haunts of mortals, often choosing a tall pine tree, a cave or a spring. Sometimes they come singing, playing violins or flutes, or gently beating drums; sometimes they steal silently over hills and fields, seeking beautiful children or youths or maidens to carry away to their palaces for purposes of pleasure.

The fairy world is higher than that of mortals. Its creatures are not subject to the same laws of nature as are binding upon us. Nevertheless, they are not goddesses and their power is not unlimited. They can be frightened and driven away by the firing of a gun. They dare not touch the mortal who wears a *felahtare*, bag of incense, such as many Greeks have suspended

about their necks. The cross, a sign of the cross, and prayer, are protections against them. If a mortal seizes a fairy's handkerchief or veil, a strand of hair or a bit of clothing, the fairy becomes a helpless mortal woman, bound to serve the human being who thus captured her. If the fairy article returns to the possession of its rightful owner, the woman regains her fairy attributes and power, but should the article be burned to ashes, communication between her and the fairy world ceases and she is doomed to die a mortal's death.

Music, laughter and song, play, dancing and love are associated with fairies, but at times these creatures can be cunning and cruel and, when thwarted, revengeful. Occasionally, as in the case of the water fairies, they offer gifts to their prospective captives. By accepting these gifts, mortals place themselves under the fairies' dominion, from which escape is possible only by burning the gifts. Fairies have destroyed the happiness or wrecked the life of many a youth who, having seen them, cannot put the memory of them from his mind, or who, having possessed one of them, has lost her forever. The springs from which fairies drink are called μαγεμένες, bewitched. The mortal who drinks from such a spring becomes μαγεμὲνος, fairy-possessed, and, forgetting home and family, wanders aimlessly like one mad.

The mediator between the fairy and the mortal worlds is the sorcerer or the sorceress. The sorceress is the more common. She is usually an old woman with a practical knowledge of healing and much supernatural lore. She not only cures physical ills, but she ministers also to the troubled mind. By conjuring, murmuring mystic words, and applying magic herbs, she can release a μαγεμὲνον, bewitched mortal, from evil spirits. The sight of an old sorceress with her bag of magics, wandering over lonely hills in search of herbs, is familiar to every villager in Greece. These awesome women live a hermit's life, seeking the unfrequented ways, speaking little, mingling with their fellow beings only when summoned to aid.

The relation of Christianity to this last remnant of mythology is an interesting field of study. As a sacred Christian symbol serves to frustrate the power of a present-day fairy, so has Christianity, adopted as the state religion, dethroned and driven out the ancient gods. In the revolution, the new religion borrowed much from the old worship in church customs and seasonal festivities. It can be truly said that the Greeks are scarcely yet

Christians, for in their hearts linger fragments of pagan nature worship and superstitious awe of the anthropomorphic creatures that are a part of nature.

One can see most clearly the mingling of Christianity and paganism in the *felahtare*. Grandmother Adamis' bag, described in "The Fairies' Theft," page 89, "contained incense from Mount Levanos, a bit of candle that had burned on Easter before the portrait of the Virgin, a leaf from a hundred-petaled rose and an amethyst stone. The bag had been hung about her neck by her godfather on the day of her baptism, to protect her from all evil."

My personal experience with fairies, which is recounted in "The Fairy-Hunter," began and ended in that one venture. But I was to be associated with many who claimed first-hand knowledge of fairies and with many more whose relatives or acquaintances or ancestors said they had been given glimpses of the fairy world or contact with its inhabitants.

In "The Fairies' Theft" is found the story that my Grandmother Adamis related as her own. It was she who told me "The Fairy Ring," "A Fairy Wedding," and "The Fairy Wife." She had heard the latter from the lips of Demetros' mother who went about half mad through Loutro, telling the sad tale after her son's disappearance. Uncle Kostas, "uncle" to the whole village, loved nothing better than to narrate, to anyone who would listen, the story we give in "Fairy Gardens."

Many summer afternoons when I was tired swimming, diving or pulling up traps for fish, I would walk a little way along the Gulf shore to find an old fisherman called Gero Nassos. He was almost sure to be sitting at the water's edge where his fishing boat was fastened, waiting till sundown to cast his nets. Gero Nassos was always barefooted and hatless, with flowing white hair and beard. Like an ancient god of the sea he sat, cynical yet beneficent, and to him came his worshippers, village folk and children, to listen to his violin music or his stories. He was called *alafroiskeotos*, one who is a seer.

"Ho, Theodorake!" he would cry out, on seeing me. "Run up to the fields and bring me some grapes."

Swiftly I would dart up to the vineyards with their green or purple fruit, for I knew well that the reward would be a sea story. Sometimes it was about sea monsters or sea ghosts that Gero Nassos told, but the story I liked best was of sea fairies, because he said it had happened to him.

He always began with his early life on the beautiful island of Psara, one of the cluster of emeralds that gleam in the Aegean Sea. His father owned many trading ships and was very rich. But after his death the ships one by one slipped out of the family's control. At the age of eighteen, Nassos became owner and captain of the last one and was never happy again, he said, except for one moment. His story is related in "The Haunted Ship."

With two of the tales I was indirectly connected, "The Fairies' Theft" and "The Wonder of Skoupa." I was playing in the fields of Petsà with other children, while our parents were threshing wheat, when the shepherds brought Tasoula, fainting, down from the hills. I knew Tasoula, I had often played with her, and I can never forget how white and still she looked as she was laid on her bed. I remember the difference of opinion from the onlookers. Some thought she was dead, others that her spirit was in the possession of the fairies. After she was restored, it was agreed in Petsà that many prayers and offerings had been needed to free her soul from the fairies' evil power and that if she had been more beautiful, her body would have been stolen too and we should never have seen her again.

On the Saint Nikolaos Day that the shepherd boy, Nikolas, disappeared at the Stavrodromos, I was visiting my cousin Nikolas in the village of Skoupa. The old field watchman, Vasilis, burst in upon our festivities to ask breathlessly whether any of us had seen the fairy shepherd on that day. My uncle Kristophoros went out to join him and the other villagers in their fruitless search.

During my years in America, I have listened to many narratives about fairies told by my countrymen from all parts of Greece. These tales can be found in any section, from Thrace to the Peloponnesus and from the Aegean Sea to the Ionian, with variations in names, perhaps, and details. They came to me in fragments which have had to be pieced together.

Fashions in fairy tales differ as much from section to section as do customs and dialect. There are, however, certain universal fairy characteristics of which every Greek has heard and which are never disputed. These are the supernatural beauty of fairies; their love of the beautiful which makes them seek to carry away beautiful youths and maidens; their power over mortals; and their transition to a human, powerless state when an article belonging to them is in the possession of a mortal. The authors have tried to catch these universals and clothe them in characteristic form.

It is not at all times that a Greek will speak of fairies.

The mood of the unreal, of the idealistic, the mood of poetry and of dreams, must be evoked before he can unveil his soul and talk of the mysterious, elusive beings that are part of his native land, almost of his religion. It is in some such mood as this, forgetting the world of logic, of material things and of everyday thinking, that I hope our readers will enter our world of Faery.

T. P. G.

1. The Fairy-Hunter

I HAD never heard of fairies until one autumn evening in our summer home on the highlands of Petsà, which, eagle-like, watches over olive groves, raisin fields and the blue Corinthian Gulf. Laughter and voices raised in greeting woke me from my early sleep and told me that my Grandmother Adamis was being welcomed to the group of neighbor women who had gathered in our garden to tell stories in the moonlight.

“Is it about the Fairy Wife you are going to tell us tonight, Grandmother Adamis?” I heard someone ask.

“Or the Fairy Ring? I thought it was the Fairy Ring!” cried another voice.

“Oh, the fairies’ palace, Grandmother! You promised to tell us about their palace!”

Grandmother Adamis laughed. Rising on my elbow, I could see the younger women hurrying to make a place for her and pass her wine, nuts and cheese. In the center of the group a fire glowed red, in contrast to the clear, silver light of the full moon above. During the autumn months, after the corn is gathered, the grapes crushed and the barrels filled with wine, the villagers spend the evenings out of doors. The older women talk while the girls knit and sing. Now, on Grandmother’s arrival, the girls dropped their work and all grew silent to listen. Grandmother knew more *paramythia*, myths, than any woman in Eurostena, and she was a born story-teller.

In wonder and a breathless, ecstatic fear, I strained my ears to catch what snatches I could. As the strange stories followed one another, forms, *pentamorphes*, five times beautiful, seemed to glide before me: maidens in white with flowing, golden hair, handsome youths on horseback, chariots of cloud, seas shimmering with jewels, palaces light as foam and lovely as dew in sunshine. Oh, if I could see these things which Grandmother Adamis described! If I could hear the flute-like voices and silvery music which she said rang through the Fairy Hills!

But the fairies, it seemed, had some terrible, mysterious power. One must beware. One must not venture alone too high among the mountain tops. The fairies might—Grandmother’s voice would sink to a whisper and the circle

of heads draw closer about her. I could learn only that all places are safe for him who carries a loaded gun, the highest hills and even the palaces of the fairies. With this thought, as the moon paled and the dawn came and the group in the garden dispersed, I slept.

A gun! That was my first idea on waking. I must have a gun. I intended to see fairies and visit fairy palaces, but where to find the gun? Then I remembered. As soon as I had learned to write at school, an old lady who lived in the neighborhood asked me to write letters for her to her son in America, because she could not write. The first time I went to her house, I noticed a huge, old-fashioned gun hanging on the wall. It had been used, she told me, by her grandfather in the War of 1821, and was called a Karabena. It was very clumsy and had grown rusty, but now as I pictured it, it seemed the most priceless of treasures. There remained only the question of how to make it mine.

For months, whenever I was in the old lady's house, I gazed longingly at the Karabena every moment that I was not writing, and wondered how I could approach the subject. Then one day the following spring, the lady told me that I had been very good and that she wished to give me something in return for what I had done.

"Will you give me that gun?" I burst out.

"Oh, not that," she said. "You don't know how to use it. You would hurt yourself."

I replied that I knew a great deal about guns from having read about them ever since the autumn. Besides, I said, I would accept nothing else from her, so at last she consented. The Karabena was mine.

It remained hidden for days among the barrels in our cellar, while I cleaned and polished it a little at a time, and collected powder and shot. Finally the gun was loaded and ready, and very proudly did I set out with it across my shoulder. From the stories of Grandmother Adamis, I understood that the fairies often appeared just at noon, but I started early since it was some distance to the top of the *Neraidorahe*, Fairy Hill, where the entrances to fairy palaces were said to be found. I was congratulating myself on getting away unseen, when my mother's voice called from the doorway.

"Theodorake[1], come back. Where did you get that gun?"

When I told her, she asked what I was about to do with it. My answer was sufficiently evasive.

“Well,” she said, “don’t try to shoot and whatever you do, don’t go up to the Neraidorahe! Evil will come to you!”

After waiting till she had returned to her work, I hurried through the village and started up the mountain.

“Ho, Theodorake!” rang out above me. The old shepherd known to everyone as Uncle Kostas was making his way down the slope toward me. Since I was in no mood for further interruption, I pressed on as if I had not heard.

“Ho there!” came the call again. “I know you, son of Perikles. Where are you going with that Karabena?”

“To the Neraidorahe to hunt fairies,” I replied casually.

“Stop!” He was directly above me now and he planted himself in my way. The picture of him, in his great, loose shepherd’s cloak, with its pointed hood thrown back, his short, full skirt and his brown shoes with a fluffy red ball on each pointed tip, is still vivid in my mind. “See those hills yonder,” he cried, his right hand extended in a dramatic gesture, his white hair blowing in the wind. “On one of those hills the fairies overpowered me. You do not know what they can do. Listen to me. I was older than you are and I had a better gun than your Karabena. A gun cannot save you. The fairies carried me away and kept me for a year and a day, and it was only by a miracle that I escaped from them. They can take you as they took me, but you may never get away. Listen to one who has lived in their palace and learned their ways and been their prisoner!”

Old Uncle Kostas with the help of his staff settled himself heavily on a stone in order to relate his adventure. This was my chance.

“The fairies will not scare me,” I told him. “I will fire at them and chase them back into their caves.”

I darted past him and went on up the mountain side. When I glanced back and saw him plodding slowly downward shaking his head, I laughed to myself. I would show them all.

In the steep, rocky slope above me were several great, black holes like yawning cavern mouths. Perhaps, I thought, these opened on moonlight-

flooded gardens and shining palaces and all the beautiful things Grandmother had described. If I could frighten the fairies, I could enter unharmed and see for myself. Carefully I approached the holes, lay down behind a pine tree and made my Karabena ready to shoot at the first fairy that should appear.

Soon I heard the whistle of the noon train and I watched it far below as it hurried along the southern shore of the Gulf. The time had come. For a moment everything was still. Then the gently stirring air brought me a soft, whirring sound that grew louder and louder. The air itself, moving faster and faster, became a wind from the north, and at the same time in front of one opening something white went whirling around and around just above the ground.

A wild fear rushed upon me. The unknown terrors that were whispered of in the garden and the weird power that had seized Uncle Kostas, seemed to grip my heart. Clutching my gun I turned and tore down the mountain side like one mad. I slipped and stumbled, struck my feet against stones and scratched my arms on tree trunks, but nothing stopped me until I reached home and fell into the kitchen in front of my mother. I accepted her scolding humbly and never again did I go fairy-hunting.

2. Fairy Gardens

UNCLE KOSTAS, as everyone called him, had once been a prisoner of the fairies. He would sit stiffly down upon a stone and lean upon the tall, shepherd's staff which he always carried, to recount his story.

"Look," he would begin. "Do you see those hills yonder? They are the Hills of the Dragons. Many, many years ago

Kostas was resting at noon beside a spring under the shadow of a pine in one of the Dragonorahes, Dragon Hills, after eating his bread and cheese. He closed his eyes for a little while and when he opened them, there were fairies dancing all around him in the air. He knew that he was handsome, handsome enough to tempt them to carry him away, but since he had his gun with him he thought himself safe.

Some of the fairies were singing, others were playing their flutes, and all would pause now and then to ask Kostas to play his flute and dance with them. Pointing to his gun, he shook his head and even though they were angry they dared not harm him. Suddenly the music and the dancing ceased. The fairies whispered together a moment and then disappeared like a cob web that is brushed away.

Kostas was about to go back to his sheep, grazing lower down on the hillside, but he was unable to move, even to stretch out his hand. Then the fairies were back again and this time their queen was with them, riding on a great white horse. Around her were a thousand fairies on white horses and others kept coming and coming until the Dragonorahe was covered with them.

Kostas tried to stand up, he tried to reach his gun, but he could do nothing except gaze at the beautiful queen, with her shining, silken hair and her shimmering white garments, as she sat upon her proud horse. There was a great murmuring around him. After a while he understood that all the fairies were talking about him.

"Does he please you?" one asked the queen.

"Will you have him?" asked another.

“He is powerless now,” said a third. “Shall we take him?”

The queen looked down at him thoughtfully for a long time. Then she smiled, lifted her wand and cried, “I shall have him! He is beautiful! Let us bring him with us!”

Servant fairies caught up Kostas and darted away with him as fast as an eagle flies. The queen with the thousand fairies on horseback followed and after them came the thousands and thousands of others, all in white, all dancing around and around as they swept forward. They took him up to the highest peak of the mountain Kyllene, where there is snow nearly all the year. A yawning, black opening admitted to a long dark passage, ending in a golden gate. Beyond lay the gardens of the fairies, where the sweet, warm air of summer always dwelt.

“Here you must stay
For a year and a day,
And never, oh never,
Will you wish to go away.”

sang the queen to her new prisoner and all the fairies echoed softly,

“And never, oh never,
Will you wish to go away.”

Looking about him, Kostas saw that he was in a paradise. There were gardens everywhere, each with flowers of a different color. One garden was white, one yellow, one purple, then green, rose and blue, with many shades of each, so that they all blended together like the bars of a magnificent rainbow. In the center was a lake, mirror-like, upon which an island appeared to float. So clear was the water that one could see to the bottom which was studded with emeralds. Upon the surface, like great bubbles, diamonds, rubies and sapphires moved with the slow current.

On the island many youths, stolen by the fairies, were playing with flower-wreaths, chains of precious stones, and fine gold and silver-like sand. Kostas was taken to the island, given fairy clothes such as the other youths wore, and shown trees from which he could gather as much fruit as he wished.

There were as many kinds of fruit trees on the island as there were flower gardens around the lake. Figs, pears and olives, peaches and plums, as well

as grapes heavy upon their vines, hung in tempting profusion. The fruit would fall to the ground when it was ripe and if no one ate it, it would harden into a jewel of the shape and color of the fruit.

Peacocks strutted about and birds of bright plumage flitted through the trees. In the lake one saw mermaids with fairy faces, graceful swans, and fish such as are not found in any other sea. All the time, for there never is any night there, fairies danced in the flower gardens, gazed at their reflections in the lake, sang or made music on their flutes, while youths played on their beautiful island, and the queen appeared happiest of all, watching the others being happy.

But Kostas, alone of all those thousands, was not happy. He enjoyed living in that paradise, but he could never forget his home and his sweetheart Christena, and he longed to go back. Then he would think of the queen. He thought she cared a great deal for him, more, perhaps, than for any of the other youths. He remembered her song:

“Here you must stay
For a year and a day,
And never, oh never,
Will you wish to go away.”

“I must wait,” he told himself again and again. “I must wait for a year and a day.”

Finally the time passed. Kostas went to the queen, bowed very humbly and said:

“Here did I stay
For a year and a day,
But always and always
I’ve wished to go away.”

Then he told her how, even though she was so beautiful and everything was so lovely, he desired above all to go home to his sweetheart Christena. The queen did not answer immediately, and he waited in anguish on his knees with his head bowed to the ground.

“Kostas,” she said at last, “will you do anything I ask you?”

“Anything!” he cried, starting up eagerly.

“Then listen. I have lost a gold vase set with turquoise and lined with golden hair. Find the vase for me by noon to-day. Be sure of the lining of golden hair, for that is important. Go!”

Hopefully Kostas began his search in the gardens, but though he looked carefully among all the vari-colored flower beds, he found nothing. Going to the island, he searched anxiously beneath all the fruit trees and even scanned their branches, but the vase was not there. It was now almost noon. He walked to the shore and stood looking hopelessly into the water, thinking how far he was from his desire. A strange fish, all gold and blue, appeared swimming toward him. But no, it was not a fish. It was a vase, gold set with turquoise!

Kostas seized it and held it up joyfully. The lining! He was almost afraid to look. There it was, the fine gold hair, and there was something else, more precious to him than hair or jewels or gold. It was the shepherd’s clothes that he had worn when the fairies carried him away. He knew then that the queen meant to let him go. Quickly exchanging the fairy garments for the old loose cloak and short, full skirt of the shepherd, he returned to the queen and laid the vase before her, just as the sun reached the meridian.

The queen smiled and touched Kostas with her wand.

“You may go back to your home and your sweetheart,” she said, “and you may take with you a strand of the hair lining the vase. It is my hair, and if you should ever wish to return to the fairy gardens, you have only to show it to the fairies and they will bring you back.”

Kostas thanked her many times and arose. There was a beautiful white horse with a golden tail and mane and a human face, to carry him, and three fairy princesses with red caps, to show him the way. Through the golden gate, through the long, dark passage, through the snow-fringed opening in the mountain and over the hills they flew until they reached the spring on the Dragonorahe. There the fairies left him, just where he had been a year and a day before.

But the strand of golden hair Kostas lost out of his selahe as they came swiftly over the hills. Afterward he searched for it tirelessly, climbing all of the Dragon Hills as high as he could go, but he never found it.

3. The Fairy Wife

DEMETROS, the goatherd, lived alone with his mother on the Keafa Hill. Near his hut and the *strounga*, a shed for the goats, was a spring named *Neraidovreshe*, Fairy Spring, for the fairies that had been seen there. Usually Demetros' mother went to this spring with her great earthen jar to get their water, but one day she fell ill and Demetros had to go for it at night after his goats were driven home.

Since it was moonlight, he could see clearly, when he reached the Neraidovreshe, that three maidens in white were sitting on the stones at the edge. Supposing them to be shepherdesses who had come a long way for water and had stopped to rest, Demetros paid them no attention until he had filled his jar. At that moment a cock's crow sounded across the valley and, without a word, the maidens rose, joined hands and danced westward across the hills, singing and whirling around, faster and faster, until they disappeared like a wisp of white smoke.

Demetros watched them, wondering who they were, why they had come and where they had gone. He said nothing about these strange maidens, but he could think of nothing else all the next day. When night came he went again to the Neraidovreshe. It was about the same time, the moon was shining, the maidens were there; but now in addition to the first three there were three others. Just as the cock crowed the maidens rose, danced over the hills, singing, and vanished as before.

Demetros filled his water-jar and walked home with his head bent, thinking. He was so quiet that his mother asked if anything were wrong. He hesitated a little and then told her what he had seen on the two evenings.

"Beware, my son!" she cried. "The maidens may be fairies. Evil may come. Beware!"

The mother was still no better the next night and for the third time Demetros went to the Neraidovreshe. This time nine maidens in white were sitting on the stones. Once again the same things happened: a cock crowed, the maidens rose and danced away in the moonlight, singing.

“Is there any harm in watching them?” the goatherd asked himself. “They are so strange, so beautiful!” This time he forgot to fill the water-jar and he walked home still gazing westward at the far line of hills where the fairies had disappeared.

“You must have seen them again!” his mother cried. Demetros nodded. “Then go not again to the Neraidovreshe,” she warned. “It would be better to die of thirst. See! already you come back without water in the jar. To-morrow night is the night of the full moon when fairies’ power is greatest. To-morrow night you must not leave the strounga!”

Demetros intended to obey his mother. All day he sat on the hillside, watching his goats and thinking of the maidens.

“I will not go to-night,” he told himself. “I will never see them again. I do not want to see them. They might bring evil to my mother and me. I will not see them—how beautiful they were!”

That night he put his goats in the strounga as usual. Outside the door he looked up at the full moon and remembered the three other nights when he had gone to the spring. How lightly the maidens had danced! How brightly their golden hair had shown as it rippled over their shoulders!

It was now almost midnight and before Demetros knew what he was doing, he found himself hurrying toward the Neraidovreshe. He tried to stop, but he was powerless, as though he were being drawn on and on in spite of himself. He reached the spring and found ten maidens waiting for him. Nine he had seen the night before and he had thought them all lovely, but the one they had brought with them was many times fairer than they. She was more slender and graceful, with brighter, more abundant hair, and her face was more lovely than anything Demetros had ever imagined. Even the flowers she wore about her head were sweeter and the little handkerchief she carried was finer and more delicately embroidered than those of the nine others.

The ten maidens rose, joined hands in a circle about Demetros and danced around and around, never touching the ground. They sang in their silvery voices (hers the sweetest of all) and this time he could understand their song.

“Oh, to be light and oh, to be light
In the summer noonday sun;

Oh, to be light in the fairy night
When moon gossamers are spun;
On the sea sands bright and the hill snows white,
To run and to run and to run!

”Oh, to be gay and oh, to be gay
Where bright rivers glide and glance;
In gardens of May to skip and play
While fairy flutes entrance;
Oh, to be gay, and away and away
To dance and to dance and to dance!

”Oh, to be free and oh, to be free
As the north wind riding high;
Oh to be free with the lilting sea
When the wild waves wash the sky;
Oh, swift and free and a fairy to be,
To fly and to fly and to fly!”

Suddenly Demetros longed to be as light and gay and free as they.

“Come with us,” begged the ten maidens. “Come with us, Demetros.”

“Come and live in our palace with us,” said the tenth fairy with her loveliest smile. “We shall make you happy, Demetros.”

Unable to resist, he went with them a long way over the hills. He laughed and sang and forgot everything but the fairy maidens, their flowers, their smiles, their golden hair. Once he thought of his mother, ill and in need of him, and of his goats that would cry for him in the morning. He knew he should not go any farther with the fairies, but when he looked at the tenth, the most beautiful, he felt that he could not leave her as long as he lived.

Now the loveliest one was near him in the dance. Her long golden hair was sweeping past him. He breathed the fragrance of her flowers. He reached out to catch her, but only her handkerchief remained in his hand. The dance stopped. There was a scream from all the fairies. With a rush, like wind through a forest, they shot upward and disappeared—all but the tenth. She sank down upon the ground with a kind of moan and hid her face in her hands.

Demetros stood for a long while looking down at his beautiful prisoner. Then he fell to his knees beside her and tried to comfort her, but nothing that he did could stop her tears.

“Do not speak. Do not touch me,” she said. “You have taken from me my freedom, my happiness!”

Demetros did not know what to do. He stood up, tucked the handkerchief into his *selahe*, leather belt, and walked slowly a little way off, thinking. When he turned he saw that she had risen and was following him, weeping and reluctant. He walked on and she came after, stopping when he stopped, moving forward as he did, until they crossed the hills to the little hut that was his home.

His mother was startled when she saw this strange, golden-haired maiden with her son. She welcomed the stranger, however, and because she saw that Demetros loved her, she kept the wonderful handkerchief wrapped in silk and locked in a box in her own room where the fairy wife never entered.

Katena, so she was called, spent her time spinning, sewing and embroidering. She made beautiful clothes for Demetros’ mother, for herself and for the little child when it came. Everybody in Loutro knew that Katena was a fairy, because whatever she did was finer and lovelier than anyone else could do in all that part of the country. The child, too, was very beautiful, with fine, golden hair and soft, white skin. All the villagers and country people called her *Neraidokoretso*, which means fairy child.

But Katena was not happy. Demetros could do nothing to make her smile. She never danced or sang or laughed, but sat quietly at her work, scarcely glancing up or speaking a word to anyone. Demetros became very sad, and to see him so unhappy made his mother grieved and anxious. This went on for seven years.

One Saint Konstantinos day the mother went, as is the custom, to a neighboring village to visit a cousin named Konstantinos. She left, believing everything safe until her return.

Katena said to Demetros: “To-day is a holiday. I should like very much to go to Loutro to dance. I have not danced for a long time. Will you bring out one of my pretty dresses and my best handkerchief? We shall dance together as we danced on the night of the full moon seven years ago.”

Demetros could not speak for his delight. His beautiful wife would dance and be happy again. He fumbled with the keys which his mother had left in his care; he caught up the first dress his eyes fell upon; he took the beautiful handkerchief from his mother's box and put it into his selahe with trembling hands. As soon as Katena was ready, she and Demetros with Neraidokoretso hastened down the hill to Loutro.

The folk were already dancing on the grass plot in the center of the village, their bright costumes, joyous faces and graceful movements making an attractive picture. They formed a great circle, but instead of joining hands they held opposite corners of a handkerchief stretched between each two of them. Katena and Demetros stepped into the circle, holding between them the fairy handkerchief which his mother had guarded these seven years.

Katena's turn came to lead the dance. Demetros dropped his corner of the handkerchief. Katena sprang from him and went whirling madly about the circle. Demetros watched her amazed. Three times she circled before the astonished villagers, then rose as though on wings and floated like a cloud into the sky.

Demetros was heart-broken. When he realized that his fairy wife had left him forever, he wanted to die. His mother, returned from her cousin Konstantinos', tried to console him.

"My son," she said, "this is the evil which the fairy has brought upon us. Let us try to be content. Now nothing worse can come to us."

Demetros feared that Neraidokoretso would be unhappy without her mother, but every morning the child would hurry away to the fields and in the evening run home again, skipping and singing as she came. People said they often heard her talking or chanting to herself in words no one could understand.

Her grandmother was frightened at first because she could not induce the child to eat anything. One morning Demetros followed Neraidokoretso. She went straight to the Fairy Spring and, looking up, held her little arms toward the sky. Demetros heard her calling and he saw something white like a mist descending to her. A silvery voice came out of the mist and the child answered in words of strange sound.

"It is Katena," he told his mother. "She must come every day to talk to Neraidokoretso and to feed her fairy food. That is why she is in the fields all

day and will eat nothing here. Katena is caring for her child."

As the years went by Neraidokoretso grew more lovely, always more like her mother, with long, shining hair and the same beautiful smile. When she went to the fields now she took her sewing or embroidery and worked while she talked with the spirit that no one else could see. Often Demetros followed her and watched her wonderingly. She was his daughter, but she never seemed to belong to him. She did not need him and was happy without him or anything he could do for her. She was so much more a fairy than a human child that it made him afraid. He once said to his mother: "I believe something worse can happen to us than the trouble we have already suffered."

"How can that be, my son?" she asked.

"I am afraid that Neraidokoretso will not always be with us."

Demetros and his mother looked at each other without speaking. They both loved Neraidokoretso very much.

On the girl's fifteenth birthday her father followed her to the Neraidovreshe, as he had done every day for a long time. He saw again the white mist come to her out of the clouds and heard the sweet, silvery voice. She held up her arms and the mist, enfolding her, lifted her up and carried her away. After it had vanished, Demetros caught the echo of two fairy voices. He listened motionless as long as he could distinguish the sound. Then he knew that Katena and Neraidokoretso had gone from him forever. Demetros did not keep his goats any more. He wandered day after day through the fields and woods and over the hills, looking hopelessly for his wife and child. Sometimes a shepherd or goatherd, meeting him, would hear him chanting to himself:

"Come back, come back, my fairy wife.
Come back, my fairy child.
Seeking and searching I spend my life;
I wander lone and wild.
Come back!"

4. Fairies Of The Waterfall

IT WAS not yet dawn when Màro was awakened by voices calling her. She thought it was her three friends who always went with her early every Wednesday morning to the waterfall in the Peneus stream. Hastily she dressed, gathered up her washing, as usual, and hurried in the faint moonlight down the path to the oak forest.

Màro was surprised not to find her friends waiting for her along the way.

“Perhaps it is late,” she thought, “and they are already at the waterfall.”

But when she reached the familiar stones beside the pool at the foot of the fall where they always did their washing together, she was still all alone and daylight had not yet appeared in the eastern sky. Màro did not understand. She stood hesitating on the stones, not knowing whether to begin her work or to return home.

As she glanced toward the waterfall she thought she saw the forms of three maidens, combing out their long hair. She looked again, but she could see only the oak leaves shivering in the breeze. She dipped her hands in the water and began her washing.

“Will you not let us help you?” came a soft voice unknown to Màro. Three forms appeared to move among the trees near the water. She was frightened, but the strange shapes disappeared again among the thick shadows. She went on with her work.

“We shall help you. Let us help you,” spoke the voice quite close to Màro. She started up trembling, to see three maidens standing at the edge of the pool. Their bright hair had a glint of green like the green of the oak leaves; the blue of water shimmered in their eyes, and their clinging garments were caught with pink blossoms like the wild *neroloulouda* water flowers, that grew beside the waterfall. They were mirrored in the pool as they combed their long hair with golden combs.

“Do not be frightened,” said one of them. “We wish to help you.”

The other two came forward silently. They took the clothes from Màro’s hands; they whitened her dresses snow-white, and the work was done

before dawn. Màro thanked them. As she started away, the maiden who had spoken and who had looked on while the others worked, approached for the first time and said:

“We shall help you again, but do not tell anyone about us. Do you understand? You must not speak of us to anyone.”

Màro promised. On the way home she met old Kyroula, the sorceress of Plaka, wandering over the hillsides in search of medicinal herbs. She was the doctor for Plaka and many neighboring villages. She made her own preparations and she alone knew the secret of their application. From beneath her bag of magics which always weighted down her shoulders, the old woman looked curiously at Màro.

“You have been out alone in the woods very early,” she remarked.

“I have been washing,” answered Màro without stopping.

“And you have finished it already by yourself?” persisted Kyroula. Màro, remembering her promise, walked on without a reply.

A few days later when Màro was gathering wood in the oak grove, she came upon the three strange maidens, washing and combing their greenish golden hair with their golden combs. When they saw Màro they approached. Swiftly and silently the two began to pick up wood and give it to her, until in a few moments she had all that she could carry. The maidens walked with her to the waterfall, where they paused and the one who had spoken before held out to her a small, beautifully carved box of polished wood.

“We wish to give you a gift,” she said with a smile like a ripple upon placid water. “It is candy such as you have never tasted.”

Màro was perplexed. She remembered hearing of *magemena koufetta*, the candy of forgetfulness, which makes the one who eats of it forget all his earthly life and become a fairy. Although these lovely creatures had been helpful to her and she wished not to offend them, nevertheless she refused the gift. Without another word the maidens vanished.

Màro was afraid she had made them angry. But they came again and many times after that, when she was washing or gathering wood or watching her cattle. The two would help her, while the third sat a little way off, combing out her long hair. Sometimes as Màro sat in the fields, they would

embroider or knit beautiful lace for her. They would walk back with her as far as the waterfall in the oak wood, where they disappeared. Even when she was with her friends from the village, the maidens would often join her. Then they would not speak to her and, to her amazement, her, friends were never aware of their presence.

One summer evening as Màro was driving her cattle home, she passed near the waterfall in the stream Peneus. The three maidens were washing and combing their hair at the edge of the pool. When they saw Màro they began talking earnestly together. An anxious look came into their faces. The fading light shimmered green on their hair as they shook their heads at one another. Suddenly they grew silent and advanced to her smiling.

“We have some gifts for you, Màro,” said the one who always spoke. “We think they will be useful to you and if you accept them, you will make us very happy.” She held out a three-circled bracelet of gold.

“Take it,” she urged as Màro hesitated; “it is for you.”

The second maiden offered ear rings, each with three jewelled pendants, and the third presented an apron of silk with three scallops embroidered in wild flowers. Màro did not understand the strange manners of the maidens, but seeing no harm in the gifts, she accepted them.

“Will you let us see you again in three days?” asked the first maiden. “We should like to see you wearing our gifts, but be careful. Let no mortal’s eye behold them and no ear hear of them until we have seen you.”

When they had her promise, the maidens vanished and Màro went home thinking how beautiful she would look in her new things.

“No girl in Thessaly ever had a treasure like mine,” she thought as she hid them where no one might see them.

It was not until some days later that she remembered her gifts. Then she realized that the appointed time had passed when she was to let the maidens see her. It was too late. She looked regretfully at the apron, the ear rings and the bracelet and, wrapping them carefully, she laid them away once more.

Màro forgot the treasures for almost three years. One summer day she happened upon them while her three girl friends were calling upon her and she was showing them some of her needlework. She let them see the gifts also.

“Oh, how wonderful!” they exclaimed. “Why don’t you wear them, Màro? You’d look lovely in them.”

Màro followed the suggestion of her friends. She had not seen the strange maidens after she had failed to meet them and she supposed that they, angered by her forgetfulness, would never visit her again.

The next day when she set forth toward the waterfall, she was wearing the bracelet, the ear rings and the apron. It was at the edge of the oak wood that she met the old sorceress with her magic bag on her back. Every one knew that in it were moon herbs, night flowers, a bat’s tooth, a turtle’s bone, a dragon’s claw, a snake’s wing and hemlock. Only once had Kyroula used the hemlock. That was for an old man, at his death hour, whose soul did not wish to leave his body. The villagers stood a little in awe of Kyroula, with her mysterious bag and her lore of fairies and the spirit world.

As Kyroula moved slowly by, her keen eyes took in all the details of Màro’s dress. Màro felt uncomfortable.

“The gifts of fairies bring evil,” muttered Kyroula.

“What are you saying?” asked Màro, pausing in the path. Kyroula shook her head as she looked at the lovely ornaments.

“Fairy gifts,” she said. “You are in the fairies’ power. Take them off, Màro, take them off. Burn them at midnight. They are bewitched. Evil! Evil!” The old woman moved on beneath her burden, leaving Màro to wonder what she had meant.

“These are such beautiful things,” she thought. “How could they do harm?” and she went her way into the forest.

The day was very hot. Not a leaf moved. The people of Plaka were harvesting in the barley fields. The monotonous song of the harvest fly was the only sound. Suddenly a great wind circled over the village three times and, passing to the oak woods, died away. A single, sharp cry was heard from the woods and then silence.

The people dropped their work and ran to the forest. They could see a girl darting among the trees pursued by three swift, furious creatures. They raised a shout. The girl fell to the ground and the three forms vanished. When the villagers came near, they recognized Màro lying beside the waterfall, speechless, her hair disheveled, her shoulders bare where her

garments had been torn from her and showing the marks of a lash. Kyroula now arrived. She had heard the wind circling over the village and she knew it to be an omen of evil.

“Do not touch her,” she commanded the people. “Turn your faces to the sun and kneel.” All obeyed for they knew the wisdom of Kyroula. Swiftly she took the bag from her back. She drew out her magic glass and, muttering mystic words, applied the contents of the bag to Màro.

“Now you may go,” she said to the villagers. They dispersed. Kyroula remained with the girl three days and three nights. On the third night she burned the fairy gifts at midnight near the waterfall. All the while she continued her incantations and magic applications. Her power did not fail. Màro regained her voice and her strength returned.

The people of Plaka never forgot that incident. Ever after they called Màro the *Neraidomagemene*, fairy-bewitched.

5. The Fairy Comb

GALANIS, the curly-haired fisherman, found himself at the entrance of a strange, rocky cavern. He was leaning against one side of the opening, staring dazedly out at the pale sea and sky of dawn. There was upon him weariness like the reaction to a great exhilaration. How had he come there? What had been happening to him?

As Galanis stood motionless, dumbfounded, daylight came slowly upon the island of Ithaca. He heard the voices of fishermen on the shore below and the barking of dogs upon the hills, and he realized that he must go back to his fishing boat, moored to the rocky banks. He started forward uncertainly. The flash of a jewel caught his eye and he saw a bright, jewel-studded comb lying at his feet.

He began to remember. As he picked up the comb and turned it over in his hands, he recalled the maiden who had worn it in her shining golden hair. She was not a mortal maiden; he was sure of it. Yet he, Galanis the fisherman, had danced with her, had held her for a moment on his lap, had touched her bright hair and brushed her white fingers with his lips—Oh, what a night it had been!

It all came back to him now. In the calm of the early evening he had lain half asleep in his little fishing boat, watching the full moon rise. Faint voices and the music of plashing water floated to him from the open sea and seemed part of his half-waking dream. After a little time the sounds came again, startling him from the light sleep into which he had fallen. He thought he saw vague, foam-like forms moving upon the water. He could not sleep again. Something strange was stirring beneath the calm moon and the white stars.

He lit a cigarette to keep him company and at the flare of the match, twelve forms darted toward him. He could not see them clearly. They were like maidens, graceful, glimmering with jewels, yet pale, shadow-like. They danced in the air around and around as they approached him, to the rhythm of their own singing. Nearer and nearer they came; they brushed him as they whirled by and he could distinguish their words.

”To Odysseus’ Cave we go,
To the Marmarospelo.

“Come with us where joy is free
And endless as the careless sea.
Come with us while the sky is bright,
Dance, with heart and footstep light.

”To Odysseus’ Cave we go,
To the Marmarospelo.

“The stars will watch while we play,
The sea will wait till another day.
Hark, hark to our music sweet,
Dance, dance to its lilting beat.

”To Odysseus’ Cave we go,
To the Marmarospelo.

Galanis was breathless. All power left him. Unresisting he followed the maidens along a rocky path, overgrown with thyme, to the Marmarospelo, Marble Cave, where Odysseus is said to have taken refuge. The scraggy opening yawned black, and for a moment they were swallowed up within it. Then a weird blue light shone through all the marble passages of the cavern. Music as of another world drifted around them. The dance was on, fantastic, care-free, mad. Galanis remembered lily-pale faces, shimmering garments, jewelled combs in shining hair, movement to a wild, pulsating rhythm. His head whirled; his eyes were dazzled. The fairest of the maidens was upon his lap, gazing at him with her soft, inscrutable smile. He longed to speak to her, to caress her rippling hair, to touch her white hands.

Suddenly dawn. The music stopped, the blue light paled. The maidens, one by one, vanished silently, mysteriously. The one Galanis held lingered till the last. She arose to go, but he caught her back by her long hair. She reached out her hand to free herself and he touched his lips to her lily fingers.

She shrieked and fled like a wild dart of light out of the cave, leaving him alone with the hollow echoes of her cry.

But now he had found her comb. She would return for it and he would see her again. He would speak to her this time, he would take her in his arms

and never let her go from him. He hid the comb in his clothing and went back to his fishing boat and his work. But all that day he was impatient, filled with memories of the night and longings to see the maiden again.

When darkness came, he hastened to the Marmarospelo. Within a niche at the opening, he waited. Nothing stirred upon the water or among the rocks. The moon showed a deserted world and the still hours went by. Galanis slept. In the pale dawn he awoke and heard the voices of fishermen on the shore below and the barking of dogs upon the hills. The maiden had not come back. Sadly he looked at the comb. That day he did not return to his boat. He sat among the rocks on the shore, thinking he would never see her again.

On the third night Galanis went early to the Marble Cave. There was new hope in his heart. He waited again in his niche, but this time he did not sleep. After a long while he heard steps of sandalled feet in the darkness. Then a dim, fluttering brightness drew near him. He arose. It was she, the maiden whose hand he had brushed with his lips, the one he loved. He stretched his arms toward her with glad eagerness.

“Why did you stay away so long?” he asked.

She did not speak and he saw there was grief in her eyes. He took her hands and tried to comfort her. Slowly, coldly, she drew her hands away, saying:

“My comb—where is my comb?”

“Won’t you dance to-night?” Galanis asked.

“Give me my comb,” she answered.

“What makes you sad? Won’t you tell me?” he pleaded.

The maiden on her knees before him begged him for her comb. Swiftly he bent down, his arms were about her, he kissed her three times.

“Oh, pity me, pity me!” she moaned. “Give me my comb.” No other word would she speak.

Galanis drew forth the comb and reluctantly held it out to her.

“I want you to be happy,” he said.

As the maiden touched it, she uttered a shriek and fled like a dart of light beyond the vision of Galanis. He dashed down the rocky path to the sea, calling after her. He was still standing there at dawn, when he heard the

voices of fishermen near him on the shore and the barking of dogs upon the hills.

Galanis did not return to his fishing boat that day, nor ever again. He forgot his work, he forgot his home, he did not recognize his friends when he came upon them. For many days he wandered, pale and haggard, along the shore and about the Marmarospelo, sometimes muttering to himself, sometimes calling, calling. Then he disappeared and was not seen again.

Every full moon night, it is said, one can see at the entrance of the cave a weeping maiden with a jewelled comb in her golden hair. It is the mortal-kissed fairy, whom Galanis loved, but whom he condemned by his kiss to exile. Never again may she return to the fairy palace and her companions. She hides in the cave and for her sin she weeps eternally.

6. A Fairy Wedding

IT IS said that one May day long ago, the hills of Eurostena smiled with rare and remarkable beauty. The pines of Maze and the fir trees of Trikkala bloomed, the wild thistles grew soft and lovely, ferns wore a yellow crown, the perfumes of wild flowers were heavy on the air, and all the land was filled with joy.

Although many years have passed, the day is not forgotten, and from generation to generation the story of this day, as first related by Vassos of Trikkala, is throughout the countryside remembered and told again and again. It was the wedding day of Neraidos, a fairy youth, and Neraida, a fairy maid.

Vassos of Trikkala, after searching for thirty-three years, had at last found the *Neraidovotano*, a fairy plant by which he was able to communicate with the fairy world. He knew all fairy secrets; he had helped or cured many mortal youths who had hopelessly loved fairy maidens. On this day, the third of May, just at noon, Vassos was seen on that hill of Trikkala called the Pine Hill, running or rather gliding above the earth with the swiftness of a bird. Those who saw him had time only to be amazed, when he was lost to sight.

On the third day following, when he appeared in the village of Trikkala, the villagers thronged about him to hear what had happened.

“It was a fairy wedding,” he said. “All the fairy world knew it. The hills of Trikkala and the mountains of Eurostena knew it. I was invited; fairies came for me while I was drinking at the Fairy Spring. I heard, as though far off, their drums and violins and the music of strange instruments. Then the clouds became like chariots, sinking lower and lower to come near me, while the music swelled and echoed around me and seemed to draw me on and up, until the clouds were all about me. They were filled with beautiful maidens, who took me away and away, across the Corinthian Gulf and other seas, across green fields and blue waters.”

Vassos did not know the spot where the cloud-chariots descended to earth, though he thought it might be Mount Pendos in Thessaly. On the top of the

mountain, where no human foot had ever stepped, arose the fairy palace, gleaming gold in the sunshine, with silver towers and spires fading into the clouds.

Within, the rooms of varied colors and the long, flower-festooned halls were crowded with innumerable guests. Vassos was unable to describe the beauty of these fairy people, for their faces, though like those of human beings, could not be clearly distinguished, and their clothes like milky foam transcended all description.

Colored lights played through the palace, at one moment tingeing all things with gold, the next with rose, then violet, crimson, green and lavender. The music of harps and violins and the steps of the dance changed with the shifting colors, but laughter and joy went on ceaselessly. In each room a thousand candles burned in candlesticks of crystal and burnished gold, while the bright silver walls like mirrors reflected their brilliance. The smoke of incense rose on all sides and the air was laden with its piquant odor.

In one of the great halls a table of crystal set in silver held fairy food heaped on chased silver platters. It was impossible to tell of what the food was made. Vassos knew only that it was white and soft and so light that it seemed to melt away as soon as he tasted it, leaving the memory of a rich, yet delicate flavor that he could never forget.

For three days the wedding continued and all the while there was music, feasting and dancing. Neraida and also Neraidos, whose face was like a girl’s, had a beauty surpassing all mortal beauty. On their heads were crowns of gold; their clothes were distinguished from those of the other fairies by the silver lace and jewels of all kinds that sparkled whenever they moved. The bride and groom were always on horseback; food was handed up to them on golden trays; fairies sang continually, dancing, scattering blossoms and twining ribbons around them.

Ceaselessly one heard, rising and falling with wave-like rhythm, the gentle tinkling of glasses as they were clinked together. The guests drank cherry-red nectar from crystal glasses etched with flowers and fairy faces. On the third day, after all had drunk for the last time to the health of the bride and groom, the glasses were broken and with a crash of crystal the festivities came to an end.

“I do not remember how it happened,” finished Vassos, “but at noon I found myself back on the Pine Hill of Trikkala, proud to have been the only mortal guest at the fairy wedding.”

7. The Fairy Ring

PETROS GOURAS! The name rang through all the Peloponnesus, and every tongue that spoke it spoke in praise and every ear that heard it listened in admiration. Petros came of a noble family of warriors, rich and powerful, with lands, herds, gold, and rare beauty of form and feature, as his heritage.

Three days after the birth of Petros, his fairy grandmother, Selena, came to offer blessings and gifts. She brought her grandson a bag of incense and hung it about his neck to protect him from evil. Three kisses she gave him for the Holy Trinity and then from her leather bag she drew a ring. It was a ring such as no one in all that country had ever seen. The gold band was delicately fashioned and engraved with strange figures, and the jewel caught the light in its crimson heart and flashed it out again with dazzling radiance.

“This is my gift to my grandson,” said Selena as she kissed the ring three times. “He shall not put it on his finger until the day he is twenty-one years old, for only then will he be strong enough and wise enough to wear it.” She made the sign of the cross upon the head of the child, upon the head of the mother and upon the ring, and touching the heart of mother and child, she went away, murmuring words that no one could understand.

The ring was a magic ring which the queen of the fairies had bestowed upon Selena when she was a fairy maiden. It would have made her queen, and it was her most beloved treasure until one day on the Eagle’s Hill she saw Panàgos Gouras. Then Selena remembered that fairy queens never marry. Mortal youths are only their slaves. Suddenly the idea of being a queen lost its fascination.

Selena kept the image of Panàgos ever before her. Sometimes she would go to the spot on the Eagle’s Hill where she had seen him, and weep, wishing she need never go back to the fairy palace. One day, after three years, Panàgos Gouras came upon her thus as he was on his way to the Laconian Gulf to meet a ship from the Aegean. At his first glimpse of Selena he vowed never to part from her. He did not meet his ship; he did not reach the Laconian Gulf; he took the beautiful fairy maiden back with him to his

home among the hills. Selena thus renounced the right to queenship for the love of a mortal, and became the grandmother of the far-famed Petros Gouras.

The fairy grandmother was as beautiful as the moon, the loveliest woman in the land. Panàgos, her husband, was no less beautiful, and he was one among the many warriors in his family who defended the hills of Taegetos against the Turks and allowed no Turkish foot to step thereon. Because of Selena the family was called *Neraidogenemanoi*, and its descendants ever after were the fairest, richest and most noble in that part of Lacedemonia.

When Petros grew to the stature of a man and could fight the Turks side by side with his father, he was given the fairy ring and told by his mother all that she knew of it. Petros kept it in his selahe, and often while alone on the hills he would look at it, wonder where it had come from, and dream of fairies, their flower gardens and their palaces, as though he saw them in the strange figures on the ring.

Petros reached his twentieth year. He was alone one day upon the *Aetorahe*, Eagle's Hill, from where he could gaze far away to the east where the Eurotas River rolls. It was springtime; the hills of Taegetos were abloom; cedars, firs and pines gave to the breeze their rich odors; birds sang; and shepherdesses danced on the hills to the music of flutes which their sweethearts played. Petros' heart was filled with vague longings. He took out the ring and gazed into the bright depths of the jewel.

"I am nearly twenty-one," he thought. "I am old enough to fight the Turks. Surely I am strong enough and wise enough to wear the ring. What harm could there be in it? Besides, who would know?"

He looked about. His dogs were sleeping near him. Quiet filled the land, for it was mid-day and the field workers were at rest in the shadows of trees. Swiftly, as though not to be seen, he slipped the ring on his finger.

All was as it had been for a moment. Then far away on the Laconian Gulf three cloud-like chariots with leaping white horses, and an army of strange, fairy forms appeared, moving toward him. With incredible speed they came on and in an instant the Aetorahe was enveloped in them, while music and voices and the beating of drums echoed through all the hills. Petros was lifted onto a white horse. The earth seemed to slip away from him and drop

down, down. There was no sensation of motion, only a great wind in his face, and hills, trees and streams whirling beneath him.

Then he could not distinguish any objects below. All about him was cloud. The sunlight was dim and even the faces of the fairy host were blurred and indistinct. At last after what seemed days and days of riding without motion on the horse's back, Petros saw ahead a mysterious shore. A city of mist rested upon it and was faintly reflected in the cloudy sea on which they floated. A palace of pearl could be seen from afar, like a pile of foam glimmering in the faded light. The great silver gate of the city at the very edge of the sea, admitted them through the banked cloud walls to the pearl-studded path to the palace.

Petros was assisted to the ground. Throngs of fairy maidens in white, with chains of pearls entwined with flowers, greeted him in song and led him to the palace. The path lay between gardens of white roses, roses of thirty petals, of a hundred petals, of a thousand petals, whose perfume hung heavy above them. The maidens parted, bowing on either hand while Petros passed up the sixty-six silver steps that led into the hall.

Fairies in blue, in white and in gray, colors of the sky, surrounded him. Strange notes, sweet as the murmur of the Eurotas, fell upon his ears. The inner walls of the palace were festooned with cloud-like draperies caught with pearls. In the center of the main hall was a crystal fountain and beyond it, as behind a shimmering veil, the fairy queen sat upon her throne.

Petros was dazzled, but the queen smiled reassuringly and spoke in the gentlest of voices.

"Petros Gouras, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Oh queen," murmured the young man, almost overwhelmed by her beauty and by the strangeness of all that was happening, "oh queen, ask anything you wish of me."

"My dearest desire in the world," she explained, "is to possess the ring that you wear on your finger. This jewel may mean only a little to you, but to me it is more precious than all things else."

Instinctively Petros held out his hand and looked at the ring. He had not thought of it since the appearance of the fairy hosts. He would have given much to please the queen, but the ring was the gift of his fairy grandmother.

“Ask anything but this, oh queen, I beg of you, for this only I cannot give.”

The queen’s frown seemed to darken the room. She arose and with an imperious gesture summoned fifty of her servants.

“Take the ring from him,” she ordered, “and bring it to me.”

In spite of Petros’ resistance, she was instantly obeyed. Joyfully she seized the ring, but in a flash her expression changed to angry disappointment, almost fear.

“Oh!” she cried. “A cross upon it! A mortal’s work! Give it back to him. Give it back. Evil upon my palace. Take him away! Take him away!”

Again the queen’s command was immediately carried out. The ring was placed on his finger and Petros was rushed down the steps, along the path, through the gate and on horseback across the mysterious sea of foam to the top of the Aetorahe. When he had time to catch his breath and look about, the fairies had disappeared and he was sitting in the same spot as before with his dogs asleep near by.

Petros wished then that he had obeyed his grandmother’s warning and waited until he was twenty-one. Still, he had escaped. The cross Selena had made upon the ring saved it for him. Probably now, he reasoned, the fairies would never try again to take it. He might just as well go on wearing it.

Months passed. The father and mother of Petros were both dead. A strange disease fell upon his herds and their vast numbers were reduced by more than half. Thieves one night broke into Petros’ house, murdered the old servant who had guarded it for years, and escaped with all the gold and jewels they could carry. Crops failed. Part of the land had to be sold. Petros, who had not known illness, moved about thin and wan. His pride, that had been fed by envy and adulation, had to endure pity from all who saw him. He neglected the supervision of his fields and flocks, to wander over the hills in search of wild plants for potions. Every remedy suggested by wise old women, eager with advice, he tried. He made offerings, and of the riches that remained gave lavishly to the poor. But evil was upon his house and nothing availed against it.

Ten months before he would reach the age of twenty-one, Petros heard of a sorceress, Nessena, who in passing through the country, had taken up a temporary abode among the highest rocks of the Taegetos. When he learned

that even the *Archontes*, chiefs, of Lacedemonia went to consult her on mystical matters, he decided to ask her help in his trouble. Through a friend he was given an audience and was told to meet Nessena at the top of the Eagle's Hill at twelve o'clock on the night of the next full moon.

Painfully Petros climbed the Aetorahe and waited. At the appointed hour, old Nessena, wrinkled and bent, hobbled out from among her rocks. The instant she saw Petros, she drew herself up, raised her stick above her head and cried out:

"A curse! A curse is upon you!" Her flashing eyes were fixed upon him while she told him all his history, as though she were reading it in his face. "You have about you," she continued, "yes, I see you are wearing it upon your left hand, a fairy ring. You were not to put on that ring until you should be twenty-one years of age, and I see that ten months must yet roll by before that time arrives. Imprudent young man!"

"Imprudent and wretched," Petros accused himself.

"Do not speak, do not stop me!" cried the sorceress. "The ring has magical power, giving the wearer control over fairies, if he knows how to use it. You do not know, my boy, and you have exposed yourself to all manner of danger. Until you are twenty-one, the fairies can and will continue to persecute you through yourself and all that is dear to you."

"But, oh wise one, is there no remedy, no cure?"

"Do you not wish to wait the ten months for knowledge of the ring's power to be given you?"

"I would not wait one single hour, if there is any means to be cured immediately!"

"I see that you are in earnest," said Nessena. "Listen then. I shall tell you what to do:

"If forever you would be free,
Kiss the ring thrice. Away, away,
Cast it into Eurotas' sea,
Go, go, obey, obey!

"Three nights from now in the night's noon
(The cross cannot save you. Away, away.)

Let no one see you beneath the moon.
Go, go, obey, obey!”

On the third night at the time set, Petros stood on the banks of the Eurotas. The night was beautiful with its bright moon and countless stars. The waters were calm, softly murmuring secrets to the sky. The land was deserted; not a soul was awake; not a breath stirred. Mounting to the peak of a high, lone rock, Petros kissed the ring three times and cast it far out into the water. Instantly three fairies with angel faces and garments of gleaming white floated down and danced on the water about the spot where the ring fell. Joy was in their faces and joy in the swift movements of their dance. They watched the ripples spread wider and wider until the outer circle touched the shore, when like a bubble they separated and vanished into space.

Peace came to the house of Gouras. Petros regained his health; his flocks prospered and increased; the earth sent forth an abundance; the old property boundaries were restored and gold again filled the bags of the treasure room. To the end of his days Petros enjoyed nothing more than to recount the story of his fairy grandmother’s gift.

8. The Fairies' Theft

THE people of Petsà were threshing their wheat on the hard, dry, sun-baked threshing floors. Suddenly out of the stillness came a strange cry. They saw, coming down one of the foothills of Mount Kellene, three shepherds carrying a limp burden. Behind them came shepherdesses wringing their hands, while dogs leaped and barked around them.

"The priest, the priest! Go for the priest!" shouted one of the shepherds. It could then be seen that they were carrying a young girl.

"Tasoula!" someone cried. "It is Tasoula, daughter of Petros!"

A boy darted away to find the priest. The shepherds moved slowly on to Petros' house, while the villagers followed, talking and asking questions excitedly. Tasoula was very white and she lay very still with her eyes closed —her eyes that were always bright and laughing—and there was a strange look about her, as though she would never move again. Around her bed, the crowd became silent and one of the shepherds spoke.

"I was watching the sheep on Saint Elias Hill," he said, "when I looked across to the Sotera Hill and saw something white under the tallest pine tree. 'Fairies,' I said to myself, but I wasn't sure. I called Yannis and Stephanos," indicating the other shepherds, "and they said, 'Yes, it is fairies! It's a fairy ring around that pine tree!'"

"I saw Tasoula first," broke in the one called Stephanos. "I saw her in the center of the ring, trying to get away from the fairies."

"We ran toward her," went on the first shepherd, "but the fairies at the same moment started the other way, dancing round and round without touching the ground, and dragging Tasoula with them. Faster and faster they went till they looked like white birds skimming along the ground. Above a spring they stopped a moment and we saw them no more. When we reached the spot, Tasoula was lying there on the ground as if she were asleep."

"We tried to wake her." Yannis took up the story. "But she didn't speak or move or even open her eyes. We are afraid," lowering his voice and speaking very slowly, "we are afraid the fairies have taken her soul with them and left her body because it isn't beautiful enough!"

There were murmurs from the crowd, some of surprise, some of agreement, but before any word could be spoken, the priest arrived, and the people fell back to let him enter.

“Evil, evil!” he cried in a kind of chant as he moved solemnly to Tasoula’s bed and held his cross above her. “Evil, evil, depart from this house!”

After he had prayed, the priest burned incense and went all through the house, swinging his censor and chanting, “Evil, depart. Evil, depart.” Tasoula remained white and motionless. The priest left, shaking his head.

A hush had fallen over the whole village, as though everyone were waiting, waiting. Few of the people returned to their work. They sat on the ground near the house of Petros and talked in low tones about fairies. When Grandmother Adamis joined them, they begged her to speak because they knew she had seen fairies.

Grandmother told of her experience which Tasoula’s accident recalled. When she was about sixteen years old, she was considered one of the prettiest girls in the village of Petsà. It was one lovely May day when she, a shepherdess, was watching her sheep high on the hills of Sotera. At noon she climbed to the pine-crowned peak of the mountain to drink at the spring called Kreovreshe and to rest under the shadow of a pine.

The sheep had gathered in the deep shade, the goat bells were hushed, the dogs lay still, and only the wind stirred, bearing the perfume of wild roses and of pines. The girl was lulled to sleep, but in a few moments she was awakened by hundreds of beautiful beings, airy and shadow-like, approaching from all sides. She heard the clear notes of their flutes and the gentle beating of their drums drawing nearer and nearer. She seemed to be in a very wave of sound and of light, dancing forms. She was caught up on the wave and lifted high, high above spring and fields and sheep. With the fairy maidens circling about her, playing and singing as they rose and descended and rose again in slow rhythm, the shepherdess was borne onward into the west.

Music and motion stopped. She found herself on the side of the Neraidorahe, Fairy Hill, before the great, black openings like monster’s jaws. Through one of these she was led to a garden, within the mountain, where flowers and sunshine and the plashing of fountains made the heart glad. There was music in bird songs, chanting voices and the buzzing of

bees, while streams of silver, crystal cataracts, and youths and maidens in graceful dance, were a delight to the eyes. Fairies with white veils who were subjects, and fairies with red caps, who were princesses, grouped themselves about a throne of brilliant jewels. The fairies who had escorted the shepherdess led her by flower-strewn paths to the throne, where she saw the queen of the fairies.

The queen was dressed in pure white robes, her long, golden hair falling about her, and on her head she wore a circlet of gold entwined with flowers that never fade.

“Would you not like to be a fairy?” asked the queen, “and live with me in this garden where the sun never ceases to shine and where it is summer all the year?”

“My gracious queen,” said the shepherdess trembling, “do not be angry because I refuse. I have a lover who will be waiting for me at the foot of the Sotera. I beg you to let me go back to him.”

The queen paid no heed to these words. “Take her,” she ordered the servants. “Take from her the clothes of mortals and dress her in fairy garments!”

The girl, weeping, was whirled away from the queen’s presence. The servant fairies were about to remove her dress when they discovered the bag of incense which she always wore in a ribbon around her neck. This little bag, *felahtare*, contained incense from Mount Levanos, a bit of candle that had burned on Easter before the portrait of the Virgin, a leaf from a wild fairy plant, a petal from a hundred-petaled rose and an amethyst stone. The bag had been hung about her neck by her godfather on the day of her baptism, to protect her from all evil.

The fairies released their prisoner suddenly with cries of alarm. “We dare not touch it! We dare not touch it! A curse would fall upon us!”

Instead of fairy robes, the shepherdess was given cream and the finest honey from Crete. When she had eaten, the fairies carried her back over hills and fields and streams, and set her down beside the Kreovreshe near where her sheep were feeding. The watch dog that had guarded them in her absence came to her, barking, and the fairies disappeared.

Twilight began to fall as Grandmother Adamis ended her story. The priest returned for his third visit to the house of Petros. Tasoula's mother still knelt at the bedside, moaning, while the women who stood about wailed in despair. Tasoula was lying just as she had been since she was carried in, when all at once she gave a little sigh and opened her eyes.

She seemed startled as she looked about. Then she realized where she was and after she had been given a little food and wine, she was able to tell what had happened.

Six beautiful fairy maidens had appeared before her while she was drinking from the spring at the foot of the tallest pine. It was the very Kreovreshe where the fairies had appeared to Grandmother Adamis. The maidens begged Tasoula to dance with them and when she refused, they grew very angry and by joining hands they formed a ring around her so that she could not escape. They took her up, up, dancing all the time and never touching the ground, until they reached the highest peak of all the mountains. There was snow, deep snow, everywhere, and it was bitterly cold, but they danced in the snow and made Tasoula dance with them.

Then their anger seemed to have left them. They whispered together a little while, looking at her. Then the tallest, the most beautiful, waved her handkerchief above the ground. The snow melted and a great, black hole opened beneath their feet. They dropped into the mountain and went whirling down, down, down. It was dark and terrible. Tasoula could not see, but she felt the fairies holding to her and their voices echoing through the passage rang in her ears. All at once they were out again in the hot sunshine on the side of the Sotera.

"The fairies laughed and flew away," Tasoula said, "and then I don't know how it was, but when I started to the

spring to drink again, I was here!"

"She doesn't know it was only her soul they took with

them," whispered a neighbor.

"No," agreed another. "They would have stolen her body, too, if she had been more beautiful. We would never have seen her again."

9. The Haunted Ship

NASSOS had never been happy, except for one moment. He was captain and owner of the many-sailed *karave*, but water and ships, buying and selling, had no appeal for him. The great hulking islanders from Psarà, who made up his crew, filled him with terror. But he was the eldest son of a noble family and he must stand on the bridge in his dead father's place.

The karave was slowly moving westward in the open sea, bound for a Sicilian port to sell the cargo which she had taken on at Vostetsa. Nassos, alone on the deck, played his violin to the beauty of the still, sweet evening. He could catch gruff sounds from his men below, but he played on, trying to forget them and his unhappy life.

As he looked up at the full moon, he noticed a thin mist floating across it. Or was it mist? Nassos looked again. It seemed to be the translucent form of a strange and beautiful creature, half woman, half fish. His violin bow slowed, almost stopped, but he forced himself to play on as though he saw nothing.

Silently the creature passed before him, moving with a rhythmic grace and apparently without effort. Golden hair rippled across her shoulders; her airy garments shone in the moonlight; she cast no shadow. Again she moved before him and a third time. At a silent gesture, another creature very like her, though not so beautiful, appeared beside her, then another, then more and more until they thronged the deck and the water about the ship.

Nassos' music had lured them and, he thought, perhaps it would also win her, the most beautiful, the princess of them all, for himself. Breaking off the slow, plaintive melody he had been playing, he made his violin throb to the rhythm of a weird, wild dance. The fairies caught hands, whirled round and round, tossing their bright hair and laughing soundlessly. Faster and faster beat the music; wildly and more wildly danced the fairies, forgetting the presence of the mortal. While Nassos played furiously, he was watching for the great moment. Suddenly when the princess was near him, her back toward him, he dropped his bow, sprang forward and caught her hair.

In an instant the maidens had leaped into the sea and disappeared. The karave was rocked by the waves that rose to receive them and a breeze sprang suddenly out of the east. A scream of terror came from the lips of the princess. At the touch of a mortal hand, her glistening scales had dropped from her. Her shadow fell upon Nassos as she knelt at his feet, imploring him with outstretched hands to let her go.

Twisting her hair about his hand to hold it more securely, he gazed down at her and thought her more lovely than before. A great exaltation filled his soul. But only for a moment. Behind him a hoarse cry rang across the deck. The sailors had felt the rocking of the ship and the sudden breeze, and had heard the scream of the woman. When Nassos turned to them, he saw amazement, delight and anger struggling on their faces. How had the maiden come there, why had he been hiding her from them, who was to have her, and a hundred other questions, leaped out at him.

The maiden screamed again and hid her face. Nassos ordered the men below, but he was answered by a confused muttering as they moved nearer to gaze with fascinated eyes on the beautiful creature.

“Let us draw lots for her,” one suggested. The rest approved. Nassos was angry. He spoke to them as he had never dared to speak before, denouncing them as insubordinates and cowards, and demanding their obedience. His words had no effect. He shouted orders that were not heard, while the maiden implored him to let her go and the sailors argued loudly with one another. Then four husky fellows broke away from the rest and advanced toward Nassos.

“Give us the maiden,” they commanded. “We will decide.”

“She is mine,” replied the young man calmly, “and I am your captain.”

“Let us have her or we’ll make you prisoner!”

Nassos drew himself up and defied by a look of contempt the four huge men. Their faces grew dark with anger and a cry like a roar came from them as they rushed upon him.

“Save me! Let me go!” cried the maiden, but one man seized her and tore her from Nassos, leaving only a strand of her hair in his hand. The other three caught their captain and in the space of a moment his hands were tied and he was cast overboard.

When he rose to the surface, the sounds that came from the ship told of a fierce struggle. With a mighty effort he released his hands, but as he did so the strand of golden hair escaped him and floated free on the water. Though he snatched at it desperately, the rising waves carried it away, and the maiden, again in the transparent and shadowless form of a sea fairy, dropped silently into the water and disappeared. With a cry of despair, Nassos swam to the spot and called her again and again to return, though he knew with the certainty of sad premonition that he would not see her any more.

Yells and groans drew his thoughts back to the karave. The sailors, ignorant of the fairy's escape, and believing that one of their own had hidden her, fell in jealous fury upon each other. They were desperate, drunken men. It was a struggle to the death. Nassos made his way back to the ship and by means of the anchor chain finally climbed aboard. By that time the clamor had subsided and when he reached the deck, a horrible, silent scene met his eyes.

Two men alone of his crew of thirty were left alive. It was difficult for him to convince them that he was not the ghost of their captain, that he had not hidden the maiden away and that she, being a fairy, had gone back to her home in the sea.

"Woe, woe upon us!" they groaned. "Evil has fallen upon us. We are in the power of fairies. If you had told us, we would never have touched her. Their revenge and the blood of our comrades be upon your head!"

A trembling terror gripped them. Even after Nassos had bound up their wounds and they had helped him clear the deck and remove all traces of the combat, they started and shuddered at the least sound. Nassos determined to head for Sicily, but even when he promised the sailors an equal share of the profits with him, they were little encouraged. Sullenly they obeyed his directions and the karave moved slowly forward.

"Woe, woe!" they would chant again and again. "Evil is upon us!"

Once Nassos started from sleep, terrified to see the two men standing over him, one with his knife raised ready to strike.

"You are the cause of all our misery," said the seaman in his own defense. "Perhaps your death would appease the fairies and our comrades' souls could rest. Perhaps then they would not torment us night and day!"

The karave sailed on, but the spirits of the three on board sank lower and lower. They could not sleep; they ate little, because they had no desire for food and because they dreaded to go down into the deserted hull to get it. Nassos tried once to play his violin, but it moaned beneath his touch and the sailors stared with wild eyes into space as though listening to sounds not of the earth.

Petros and Mertikos, as they were named, would have been willing to let the ship founder, but in peril of his life Nassos ordered, begged, coaxed and bribed them into holding the course for Sicily. When they were within a few hours of their destination, Nassos found Petros at the tiller, praying for a storm to destroy them all. Nassos rebuked him.

“The ship is haunted,” said Petros, his hair tossed and his eyes glazed. “The evil power of the fairies has possession of it. Nothing but misfortune can follow it. Misfortune, misfortune must take all of us. Six days have I been waiting for my share. Six days—a long time, a long time!”

Nassos turned away, as though paying no heed to the prophecy. The next moment he heard a plunge and saw Petros sink without resistance beneath the surface of the water.

The two who remained managed to make a successful landing, but before the cargo could be unloaded, Mertikos fled from the haunted ship and Nassos saw him no more. The captain sold his karave and all she contained, and sent the receipts to his mother on the island of Psarà, keeping out only a few drachmas. With these he bought a little fishing boat and returned to fish for a living along the Corinthian Gulf.

The memory of that voyage never left him. His only consolation was the thought that for one exalted moment he had held a fairy in his power.

10. The Wonder Of Skoupa

CHRISTMAS is lonely on the snow-covered peaks of the Mauroros that rise bank upon bank, like great white drifts piled one upon another. Saint Nikolaos Day, as it is to the Greeks, finds these hills almost deserted, and yet strange things can happen there.

The clouds that at times hang about them at this season are like misty fairy veils, and when the sun lies upon them, they are as resplendent as the fairy palaces of dreams. The shepherds and goatherds with their flocks have been driven down to shelter in the valleys. Most of the watchmen of fields and vineyards descend to the villages to celebrate the festival of Saint Nikolaos with friends and kinsfolk, in wine and steaming food around a glowing hearth. Only here and there on the white hills a lonely watchman remains.

One cold, stormy Saint Nikolaos Day, Vasilis was keeping guard over stretches of silent fields. Just at noon, as he lifted his eyes to the top of the mountain, he saw what appeared at first to be snow caught up in the wind where two mountain paths crossed at the foot of a pine tree. Yet faint, silvery voices, like bells in the distance, seemed to come from the same spot.

Surely no human being would be so high up there on such a day. The sweet voices, the whirling white something and the fact that it was just noon, made Vasilis sure that he was watching fairies dancing in a ring about the pine tree. He started forward eagerly, wishing to see them nearer, but at that instant they vanished and their voices died away.

Perhaps, thought Vasilis, they had left some trace of their presence, so he pressed on through the unbroken snow as rapidly as he could. No footprints were to be seen at the Stavrodromos, cross-road, nothing to mark their visit. Maybe it was not fairies after all, only snow scattered in the wind. Then he discovered a white bundle, beneath the pine indistinguishable from the snow except that it stirred feebly.

Within the bundle Vasilis found a tiny baby, more beautiful then anything he had ever seen, with fine hair golden as sunshine, and skin soft and white like the snow. Its clothing was of the finest, downiest cloth, daintily

embroidered. Vasilis knew that this was a fairy child and he marveled to think that he had actually beheld the fairies who had left it.

The watchman hurried down the hill to the village of Skoupa, where he stopped at each house to show the beautiful child and tell his story. The villagers were amazed and at first did not know what to do. They decided after conferring together that they would all help, giving each year what they could of food and clothing, and taking the child into their own homes turn and turn about.

This idea was put into effect. The child was called Nikolas because he was found on Saint Nikolaos Day. He was loved by all the village folk and belonged in a way to everyone. He was given the same care as the village children, was nourished with the same food and dressed in similar clothing. Yet from the beginning there was a difference. Not only was Nikolas handsomer than the rest and taller than any of his age, but he was different also in all his ways.

He was very quiet. He did not play with the children, but he would talk to them for hours, telling them wonderful stories that had never been told him, that had never been heard in Skoupa. Often he would wander away and some shepherd or watchman would come upon him sitting alone in the fields gazing at the sky. Sometimes when he was addressed he did not even hear. Because of his mysterious origin and his strangeness he was known through all that country as the Wonder of Skoupa.

Nikolas became a shepherd at the age of fifteen and no longer needed the help of the villagers. He came down from the hills sometimes to spend a holiday in Skoupa, but even then he did not join in the games or dances, merely watched from a little distance with sad eyes. The people wondered if he were thinking of his fairy mother and the palace he had left; they wondered if he were lonely and longed to go back. But he was a fairy child and they dared not ask him.

It was again Saint Nikolaos Day on the Mauroros. Seventeen years had passed since the day Vasilis found the white bundle in the snow. The old watchman was still guarding the silent hills. Never had a Saint Nikolaos Day gone by without the memory of that strange experience. Vasilis had lived it over each year.

Now again at noon he raised his eyes to the pine tree at the cross-road. There, instead of the fairy ring of swirling white, he saw a man standing in the snow reaching his arms toward the sky. His head was bare and the sun fell upon his golden hair, bright as the sunlight. Could it be anyone but Nikolas? Yet was he not spending the day in Skoupa? Vasilis shaded his eyes against the sun's glare on the snow and gazed at the strange sight.

The man stood still, like an image. The wind blew wisps of snow about him. Thicker and whiter rose the snow till it seemed to meet and melt into the white sky above the mountain peak. Then Vasilis saw fairies, myriads of fairies in white, dancing in the sky and in the swirl of snow about the motionless form. Faster and faster danced the fairies until the cloud of them obscured the figure of the man. Silvery voices like distant bells floated down to Vasilis. Suddenly a fierce blast wrapped the whole mountain top in a mist of flying snow. When it had passed, the fairies and the man were gone and there was no motion and no sound upon the mountain.

Vasilis climbed again to the spot. This time the fairies had left no trace. Trackless snow and the lonely pine. Vasilis made his plodding way down to Skoupa to look for Nikolas, hoping it was not he who had vanished from the Stavrodromos. All the villagers joined in the search. None of them had seen Nikolas on that day and no one ever saw him again.

11. The First Of May

ANASTO was the unhappiest of all the maidens in the village of Pyrgos, because she was the most beautiful. The other maidens were jealous of her. They would not talk to her or associate with her. They spoke evil of her. She lived in a little house apart from the rest, with her uncle who was too old to work. They were very poor.

Anasto was loved by Tassos, a shepherd on the hill slopes of Helmos. Tassos loved her with all his innocent heart. Anasto knew it and the people of Pyrgos knew it; even the hills and the wild birds of the hills knew it, because Tassos had whispered it to them. Tassos was handsome and the finest singer in all the village. When his voice rang out, rich and beautiful, from the hills, any of the maidens would have given all that she possessed if his song had been for her. But it was always to Anasto that he sang as he sat on the hillside a little way above her home.

The love of Tassos and her love for him were the only joys Anasto had, and even those were blighted by evil tongues in the village who said that Tassos kissed Anasto. They called her "phelemene," kissed. Malamo, the sorceress, alone was kind to Anasto. She would say to the villagers:

"Well you know that Anasto is beautiful and on that account you are jealous of her. Naught but evil can come to a cruel people that accuses and makes miserable an innocent child like Anasto!" Many times Malamo said it, but the villagers would tell her to go back to her magic and her communion with fairies and leave mortals to their own ways.

One first of May, as is the custom, the maidens of Pyrgos went early in the twilight before dawn, singing and swinging empty flower baskets through the village. They met beside the stream *Mauropotamo*, Dark River, at the foot of the mountain Helmos. They did not notice that Anasto was not with them. They were in haste to perform the rites belonging to the first of May and be upon the hills before sunrise.

Each maiden held a silver coin in her right hand. Silver coins are rare in the villages and they are saved and laid away for this occasion—silver in harmony with the bright sky and the gleam upon the water. The maidens,

standing on the bank, threw their coins into the stream. Only then might they dip their hands into the water. When they had washed their hands, so that they could touch fairy flowers without harm from the fairies, they chanted in unison:

“O kindly stream, may I partake
Of all your cool delights,
And may I be forever free
From the power of your sprites.”

The maidens joined hands and danced among the rocks along the shore of the Mauropotamo. As they saw the light in the east grow brighter, they broke away from each other and took the winding paths to the hills in search of flowers for their hair and for their baskets.

Last of all, Anasto came to the river alone. She stood looking into the bright water of the stream, but she had no coin to give. In a sad voice she began the familiar chant:

“O kindly stream, may I partake—”

But she broke off, sobbing. Her empty flower basket fell to the ground as she sank down at the river’s edge. Without the coin, the hymn was of no avail. She could not touch the water; she could not gather fairy flowers for a garland. She did not see the sun rise upon Helmos. She wept bitterly and her tears fell into the stream. The waters became dark and the waves moaned and cried:

“Anasto, your tears have embittered us!”

The wild flowers cried: “Anasto, your tears have poisoned the water that we drink and our petals are fading!”

And the wild birds cried: “Anasto, your tears have embittered the seeds that we eat and the fruits of the trees, and our hearts are embittered!”

But Anasto could not listen. She was weeping and her tears mingled with the waters of Mauropotamo. The sun climbed high and stood above the stream. It was mid-day, the hour of fairies. Anasto’s eyes were dim with tears and her senses dulled by weeping. She was not aware of the fairy hosts that suddenly appeared about her, nor did she hear the sound of strange music and fairy voices.

“How beautiful she is!” exclaimed one of the fairies. “She has cast no silver coin into the water,” said the fairy queen in anger.

“She is dropping her silver tears,” said another fairy tenderly.

“Her tears have darkened our stream and the waters are saddened!” cried the queen. “Seize her. She is in our power. Away with her to the *Neraidospelo* on the peak of Helmos!”

Anasto always wore for protection against evil a rare old amethyst which had come down to her from a remote ancestor. It hung, beneath her clothing, on a silken thread around her neck.

“A magic stone,” said the fairies when they discovered it.

“Touch it not,” commanded the queen. “We dare not touch it. We must leave this beautiful maiden. Come!”

The fairies abandoned Anasto in a high, rocky cave, where no mortal had ventured to set foot.

At sunset the maidens of Pyrgos came singing and dancing down from Helmos, crowned with wreaths and carrying green branches and baskets of flowers. As each one reached her own house she hung flower garlands on the door and fastened the branches above it, so that the whole village looked like a garden bower.

From the hill slopes Tassos watched for Anasto to return with the maidens. Not seeing her among them, he went to the village. He saw all the doors hung with garlands, but upon Anasto’s door no May flowers nor fairy flowers. He questioned some of the maidens, but they could tell him nothing. Through all the village Tassos found no trace of her, except her little empty flower basket at the edge of the river.

Holding it high and looking about in all directions, he called her name. Only the echo of his voice rang back to him from the rocks. He ran to the hills, crying, “Anasto, Anasto!” It grew dark, but he did not stop. All night he searched for her among the pines and firs and rocks, and did not find her. At dawn he came again to the Mauropotamo, calling, “Anasto, Anasto!” Looking into the stream, he groaned, “O cruel stream, where is my Anasto?” His tears, as they fell into the silvery waters, turned them dark and they moaned. Then Tassos looked toward Pyrgos and cried out curses upon the village that had made Anasto unhappy.

Even as he spoke, dark clouds were massing above it. In a moment the heavens were covered with them, so that the brightness of dawn was blotted out. Lightning and thunder followed and hail fell upon the land.

“Let Pyrgos be destroyed!” cried Tassos, leaping up in a fury of grief and anger. “Let it be wiped out! It has persecuted my Anasto!”

Then the old sorceress, Malamo, saw the doom of the village in the dark sky. Running out, she called to the villagers:

“The punishment for your cruelty is at hand. Your homes and all of you will be destroyed. Come, follow me, if you would save your village! Follow me to the stream, if you would not die! Bring a stone; we’ll stone the stream, we’ll stone the stream!”

Terror fell upon every heart. All the people of Pyrgos followed Malamo to the river banks. She cast her stone into the stream, the others did likewise. They pressed about her. “What shall we do?” they begged. “Tell us what to do.”

“The fairies of the stream have taken away your Anasto,” explained the sorceress, “and you have avenged yourselves upon them. The stream is stoned. Now let all the maidens search in the caves of Helmos, for in one of them Anasto is hidden. Let them not return without her, for if they do, great will be the evil upon this village!”

Tassos, who had watched this scene, led the maidens, lighting their way by torches, up to the caves of Helmos. The dark clouds hovered ominously over Pyrgos. Frantically the maidens searched for the lost Anasto.

All day the search lasted. Finally on the peak of the mountain where none had dared to venture, they found Anasto in the Neraidospelo, fairy cave, alone. She could not move or speak. She made no sign that she saw them. At this the maidens wept and were in despair, but Tassos took Anasto in his arms and brought her out upon the mountainside. Suddenly the sky cleared. It was sunset and the last rays of the sun fell upon them. Anasto was aroused. She looked about, she smiled, she called them all by name.

Great was the rejoicing in the village of Pyrgos when the procession bringing the lost maiden came down from the hills. A wreath was upon Anasto’s head; her basket was full of flowers; other maidens were talking

with her, holding her hands. For three days the village held festival with music, flowers and dancing to celebrate her return.

12. The Fairy Mother

AT THE foot of the Pseloretes on the island of Crete, there once grew up a youth called Kapetanakis, because his father, whose death made him an orphan, had been a *kapetan* or leader. Kapetanakis was a beautiful boy and he could bring forth such sweet sounds from his lyre that the flowers on the hillside smiled and danced.

From the time that Kapetanakis was quite young, he would climb to the highest hill of the Pseloretes, named *Thanatorahe* or Death's Hill, where he would sit for hours playing his lyre under the deep-blue Cretan sky and gazing down at the gray-blue sea that gives to Crete its name of the Blue Island. Sometimes the maidens of the village would leave their work to listen to his music which filled all the lands of Crete. The villagers might have supposed him an eagle, so high would he sit on the Thanatorahe, but they all knew him and gave him not a moment's thought.

Kapetanakis was always lonely. He felt that there was no one and nothing to love him except the hills of the Pseloretes. Often he would gaze far out to the Mediterranean as though he heard, above the sound of his playing, something calling him from the silent waters.

One noon in autumn while he was lying half asleep in the dark shadows of the fir trees near the *Onerovreshe*, Spring of Dreams, he heard singing, the music of flutes and the throbbing of a drum from somewhere among the hills. He sat up. "Perhaps," he thought, "someone is coming to me at last and I shall not be lonely any more." The sounds drew nearer and he saw to his amazement three strange maidens, with long veils that sparkled with gems. Their dresses were of some silvery, silken fabric and their golden sandals were adorned with jewels whose gleam seemed to flash to the opposite shore.

The maidens approached, two playing flutes and the third singing and gently beating a drum. They danced around the Onerovreshe without appearing to see him, passed on from hill to hill, from spring to spring, circling like flower petals eddied by a light wind, flitted over Mount Ida, and skimmed across the Mediterranean to vanish on the horizon.

As a breeze, sighing among the mountains, leaves only a murmur behind it, so they passed, leaving in his soul only the echo of their music and the memory of their bright, shimmering garments.

The next day at the same hour, Kapetanakis took his place again at the Onerovreshe and played on his three-stringed lyre, trying to catch the silver, bell-like beauty of those melodies. Sounds of unearthly sweetness floated up to him and he saw again the three strange maidens dancing over the *Aerorahe*, Hill of the Winds, and coming toward him. He held his breath; the lyre fell from his hands. Nearer and nearer danced the maidens till he breathed the perfume of their garments and felt the air stirred by their swift movements. Wild with joy he leaped up to dance with them, only to see them flit lightly away, circle about the Thanatorahe, and pass far beyond, growing smaller and smaller, till they disappeared where sky and Mediterranean meet.

"What are they?" he asked of the spring. "Why do they come?" he asked of the fir trees. "They do not even see me! Oh, if they would stay, if they would speak to me!" He looked about at the rocks and hills and sky, but silence was everywhere.

On the third day at noon Kapetanakis waited again at the spring with anxious eyes and pounding heart. Faint on the softly stirring air came the elfin music of the flutes. Kapetanakis scarcely breathed. Then he saw the glint of gems and the swirl of airy garments. The music swelled to a wave of sound that seemed to engulf the whole mountain. Now the three veiled maidens were on the Hill of the Winds, now on the Hill of Death. Kapetanakis stood up as they drew near and held out his hands to them. He cried out to them to stop, but they did not notice him and his voice was drowned in the harmony of sweet sound. Once more they circled about him, scattering their perfume on the air and their mysterious radiance on his soul, and once more they started away.

He could not let them go. Madly he plunged after them and seized the veil of the one nearest. There was a shriek. The two others darted with the speed of a kite straight to the sea and vanished, while the third swayed, her face unveiled, gazing after them in terror and dismay.

Kapetanakis stood amazed. He saw before him a maiden whose beauty rivaled that of Aphrodite. What was she? What were the two who had fled?

He wanted to ask, but he feared his voice would make her fly away after the others. At the end of a long moment she turned slowly toward him and the look in her eyes was of such hopeless sadness that he instinctively dropped to his knees.

“Oh, do not be sad,” he begged. “Only stay with me and I shall make you happy!”

The maiden was silent.

“Speak!” he pleaded. “Speak to me and tell me that you will stay and be happy!”

Still the maiden did not answer. For three days it continued, his pleading and her silence. Finally she looked at him, her eyes full of grief and reproach, and said, “Why did you do this?”

Kapetanakis had never heard a voice so angelic. The love that had been stirred by her beauty at the first moment he saw it was now awakened into life.

“Speak again!” he cried. “I am happy only when I hear your voice. I love you, Agnoste. I want you for my wife.”

She whom he called Agnoste, Unknown One, was thoughtfully silent for a time. Then she said, “I shall marry you on one condition.”

“Only one!” he exclaimed joyously. “What is it?”

“I am a fairy. You have me in your power. The condition is that I shall never speak again.”

Kapetanakis tried to hide his disappointment. “I would accept any condition,” he answered solemnly.

They were married. Three years passed. They built a little home at the foot of a hill and an elf-like child was born to them. Kapetanakis had hoped from the beginning that his love would melt the seal on that heavenly voice and that he would hear it in song and laughter and words of love. But all these three years Agnoste’s silence had hung like a shadow upon his soul. She only followed him about, gazing at him with a fixed expression.

Even to the child, Agnoste never spoke. But this fairy child, with her great far-seeing eyes and her strangely quiet, graceful ways, seemed not wounded by her mother’s cold silence, as was Kapetanakis.

“It cannot last,” he said to himself as he looked back over the three long years. He must find some way to make Agnoste forget the condition she had imposed upon him. Perhaps if she once broke her silence—

He had heard that in great crises or stress of great emotion one did unexpected, almost unbelievable, things. He reasoned that what rouses a mother most is danger to her child and that, of all elements, fire is the most terrible. Then his idea came. It was desperate, but another day of this silence, he thought, would madden him. Still he would try pleading once more.

That evening he sat at Agnoste’s feet as she worked in the candle light, and with all the fervor of his soul he sang his song of entreaty.

“Oh, speak to me, dear one;
Lonely has been my life.
I long for the music of words,
For the voice of my wife.

“Long years for love I waited,
Lonely my life and sad.
Long years for gladness I waited:
You spoke and I was glad.

“My joy lived only a moment.
For my joy, long gone, I cry.
Let me hear your voice, beloved;
Speak to me or I die.”

Agnoste, smiling faintly, shook her head in silence. His plea had been useless.

It was autumn again. The next morning was fine and clear. Kapetanakis left the house early, taking a rocky path up the Thanatorahe.

There was suppressed excitement in every movement, though he said no word. When he looked back he saw, as he expected, Agnoste following with the child in her arms.

They reached the top of the hill. It was partly wooded and on the north side among some fallen trees were dry, dead leaves leaped by the wind. He set to work furiously, gathering branches and leaves to make a pile on the rocky, wind-swept south side. Not knowing his intention, Agnoste laid the child

down and helped him. Kapetanakis set fire to the heap and together they watched the flames leap half way to the sky.

Then Kapetanakis went to the spot where his child lay sleeping and took it in his arms.

“Surely, surely,” he thought, “she must speak when she thinks I am about to cast our child into the flames!” He approached the pile, lifted the child high, gave a swinging movement with his body and arms, as though he were ready to hurl it into the fire.

Like an angel with wings invisible, Agnoste leaped into the air, caught the child from him, darted straight through the flames and without a sound flew over the hills and was lost on the gray-blue horizon of the Mediterranean. Weird sounds of tumult came from the fire which, like a snuffed candle, the instant Kapetanakis turned to it, died out. For hours he stood motionless before its ashes. Then with a violent waking of all his forces, he set out on a wild search for his wife and child.

Kapetanakis was not seen sitting eagle-like on the Thanatorahe, nor his lyre heard among the hills. He climbed mountain peaks; he wandered through woods and fields; he followed the sunset, seeking the palace of the fairies in the sea.

One noon after many years the people of the island saw once again Kapetanakis high on the Hill of Death. The notes of his lyre were sweet as in the old days, but sad, with despairing, heart-breaking sadness. When the villagers reached the rock on which he had been sitting, he was gone. They did not see him again.

THE END

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Notes

[←1]
Little Theodore.