



FAIRY TALES OF MODERN GREECE

**THEODORE P. GIANAKOULIS
AND GEORGIA H. MACPHERSON**

Global Grey ebooks

**FAIRY TALES OF MODERN
GREECE**

**BY
THEODORE P. GIANAKOULIS
AND
GEORGIA H. MACPHERSON**

1930

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

This edition was created and published by Global Grey

©GlobalGrey 2019



globalgreyebooks.com

CONTENTS

Foreword

1. The Fairy-Hunter

2. Fairy Gardens

3. The Fairy Wife

4. Fairies Of The Waterfall

5. The Fairy Comb

6. A Fairy Wedding

7. The Fairy Ring

8. The Fairies' Theft

9. The Haunted Ship

10. The Wonder Of Skoupa

11. The First Of May

12. The Fairy Mother

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!

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.

"Theodorake¹, 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!"

¹ Little Theodore.

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!"
