

EVRIDIKI AMANATIDOU

The Dragon and the Garlic Eater Knights



Illustrations by
Apollonia Paramythioti





Evridiki Amanatidou lives in Athens, even when she wanders off into her own world together with her alter ego, Eriia. Although she has studied Law, she prefers playing with words, paper and pencils. You can find her e books, “The Sun who lost his way”, “The Breeze and the Chimney”, and “The Volcano who got the sniffles” at <http://www.saitabooks.eu/>. A children’s theatrical play, “A hat for the professor”, which was awarded in 1991 by the Ministry of Culture, has been also published by Saita, available for the time being in Greek.

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Chapter 1 (in which we learn about the Kingdom of Pamfoukia and there is some discussion about social injustice)

Centuries ago, somewhere far from here, there was a small place, Pamfoukia. There, ruled King Apiganos who often wandered for long spells into the woods; and when he returned, he always suffered from headaches. Thus, Queen Aria dealt with all state matters that, truth to say, were too many, although the kingdom was so tiny that you could cross it in one day.

The king and the queen had a son, named Filandros. He was young, courteous, good looking, a well sought groom. According to her Majesty, his mother, Filandros had a flaw; he stated that he was an unrepentant bachelor, a thing that did not concern at all his Majesty, his father, who, as we already know, not only walked into the woods for hours but also suffered from headaches. Thus, her Majesty has taken over the task of matchmaking, in vain alas!



And her Majesty's worries were growing as she had the duty to govern her people, namely the guards, the royal gardener, Zinovia, the constantly angry royal cook, and their families. Someone thinking maliciously would say that it's not big business to rule a kingdom consisting only of the palace and the surrounding woods. The fools! They can't imagine how

laborious and full of responsibilities the task of governance is; especially at times when people perish during warfare; but, that concerns other kingdoms since Pamfoukia is not only peaceful but also lacks population willing to sacrifice themselves in noble fights.

The queen should consider herself lucky to have a most esteemed help in her service, Batireas, her Majesty's biggest secret advisor. Do not be fooled by his name (in Greek it means a man lacking money); a kingdom that respects itself must have a secret advisor, even if he is called by such a name. Nevertheless, her Majesty does not miss a chance to remind him that she and only she voices the public opinion; if she had been in need of a tiny bit of advice, then she would have sought it. And the secret advisor obeys the royal commands, because he believes wholeheartedly that if you want to flourish, you must not have too many objections.

Lastly, there is Marcos, a dragon who according to the queen is a shame for his generation, because he does not spread awe and terror in his path like all those decent dragons with which brave men seek to fight in order to become braver. Alas! Marcos does not breathe smoke and fire. It is truly unflattering for a dragon not to eject fiery rivers from his awesome mouth as a narrator of those times so masterfully would describe it.

When our story begins, King Apiganos lolls with half closed eyes under a tree and a peaceful smile lights his whole face. A little further away, the royal horse chews tender grass extremely pleased, because at least for the time being it escaped his master's burden; the king, bless him, lacks height, but not pounds.

As we already know, the king has no interest in state affairs; these issues are for the queen to be concerned with. The poor soul knows as much about diplomacy as his horse does. Thus, life seems to pass uneventfully and the sole black spot is Filandros, his only son.

"When someone takes a rest, he can think more clearly," confessed the king to his horse, Doris, but the horse paid him no attention. "And he can solve his problems. Look at Filandros, for example," the king went on. "He has to find a bride and settle himself in order to take up the Kingdom; then I could be carefree at last."

What the king meant was to be relieved of Her Majesty's constant nagging; otherwise the only thing that troubled his nirvana was an irritating whistling. He made no further inquiries because he thought it was a bird. But suddenly, a fruit from the plane tree above him popped on his cheek.

"Bless my soul!" the king moved uneasily.

A second fruit fell on his round belly and the king felt a tickling and giggled. But a third fruit hits him on the forehead. Ah! That made him really angry!

He straightens himself, looks to his left, looks to his right, looks up and screams in such a way that honours neither his status nor his ancestry. Who can blame him? I would also be frightened by the sight of some strange creature hanging upside down and spying on me through the foliage of the plane tree.

"Psst! I've been whistling for hours; are you completely deaf?" the creature complained and landed with a leap on His Majesty's feet.

"Is this the appropriate way for you to address my authority? I am King Apiganos and



you..., you are in my forest, so you are my subordinate,” the king said outright feeling quite confused.

“I am not what you called me. I am Spigos, the elf. I know many tricks; if you like, I’ll teach you some.”

“I don’t think so,” the king said in a hurry. “Besides, it’s time to get back. The sun goes to bed and I am going to be fed!” he concluded rubbing and caressing his tummy.

“Cool! We’ll grab a bite!” the elf bounced excitedly.

“I will eat and you shall stay here!”

“You mean, you won’t take me with you?”

“That’s right. If the queen saw you, she would lock us both out.”

“But I have nowhere else to go,” the elf whimpered.

“Don’t you have a family?” the king became interested.

“Sure. We are a big clan!” the elf confirmed excitedly.

“I don’t get it. How is it that you are all alone?”

“I am to reach elfhood. Humans say manhood, elves say elfhood. I must be on my own for three days and nights and complete three feats. Only then I’ll become a real elf and go back home.”

The king gave the elf an amused look. Although the creature had pointed ears and hairy body, you liked him on impulse.

“Have you made it yet?” the king inquired.

“No, but I hope so since I accompany you”.

“Don’t even think about it!” the king exclaimed startled.

“I’ll come with you, I will!” the elf spluttered stomping his small feet on the ground. “You can’t leave me here!”

As we already know, the king could not stand screams and shouts that undoubtedly would cause him a headache, so he relented.

“That’s enough! Ride on my horse!”

As dusk falls, the king and the elf, a strange riding pair indeed, make their way to the castle.

Meanwhile in another part of the forest that surrounds Pamfoukia, the prince and his friend, the dragon, have a serious talk.

“If I were in your position, I would travel around the world,” Filandros said.

“You are not in my position and that is good for you. Imagine being mocked by everyone!” the dragon complained.

“Pay no attention!”

“It’s easier said than done. It wasn’t at you the gardener’s son threw stones!”

“What a naughty kid! Luckily for him he is a minor, otherwise I’d show him what for!”

And the prince barely restrained his anger, because he could not bear injustice. Torturing his friend was the most cowardly thing anyone could do.

Marcos, the dragon, looked fondly at the prince. He would never forget that disastrous day years ago when Filandros found him floundering in the mud at a remote spot of the forest. How fearless was his friend! How a boy of seven would dare to reach the borders of the kingdom although so many risks lurked? How did he find the strength to pull him out of the muddy water where the horrible Garlic Eater Knights had thrown him? And after that, when both of them were safe under the ageless plane trees and fat salty tears flowed down the dragon’s cheeks, Filandros begged him to cry no more and promised that they would be friends forever.

Those were Marcos’ thoughts while he rubbed his sore forehead; the stones had hit him at the same spot where since childhood the dragon bore an odd dent. “You are ugly and scar faced!” Grambos, the gardener’s son kept calling him as he aimed at his forehead.

“Am I really that ugly?” the dragon wondered aloud.

“Of course not!” the prince assured him. It doesn’t matter the way some ill natured see us. It is with the soul that we perceive better.”

“You speak so nicely! Like you’ve been travelling a lot and gathered all the wisdom of the world,” the dragon sighed.

“Alas! The entire world I’ve known is our tiny kingdom. Only the wings of my imagination fly me further. Sometimes I wish I were a bird and could fly wherever I’d desire.”

“I’ve got wings but I dare not fly higher than Zinovia’s hens do,” Marcos snivelled.

“If you truly wish something, you can do it. And then the two of us are going to fly around the world.”

“I don’t want to leave. Besides, I could not breathe higher.”

“You need to strengthen yourself. It’s only for you to decide. If you try a little, day by day you’ll fly so well that you’ll never again think about walking on the ground.”

The dragon lowered his head lost in deep thoughts. He did not wish to break his friend’s heart. Maybe he should try a little harder.

Chapter 2 (in which Spigos is trying to make friends and an accident happens)

King Apiganos is undoubtedly the absolute ruler. He has a title, glamour! But then, why is he looking at the floor with his tail between his legs?

“If you look at my shoes, I have to inform you that they are old!” the queen snapped.

“I’d vow that they were brand new, my darling!” the king cajoled her.

“There is something you keep hiding from me and this is really bad. Come on, speak up!”

The king had his doubts, but as he knew that the queen would not otherwise calm down, he decided to finish this story for good.

“I brought a friend with me!” he said in a hurry.

“Huh! And who is this friend of yours?”

“He is called Spigos!”

“Spigos!” the queen repeated curling her lips.
“What a common name! I bet he is not a knight!”

“You’ll never guess! He is an elf!”

“I beg your pardon! Where did you find an elf?” the queen asked horrified.

“I met him in the woods.”

“And you brought him here? To besmear the floors of the castle although you know very well that we lack servants! And an extra mouth to be fed as well!”

“But he is so young and he has nowhere else to go, the poor one!” the king said tender heartedly.

“He will mess around! You know how elves are!”

“I am sure that you’ll really like him when you get to know him better.”

At that critical point, Spigos chose to make an appearance into the Grand Room. He entered in a hurry and as he tries to bow in front of the queen, like the king told him to do, he trips over Her Majesty’s feet.

“Step away from my dress, you horrid creature!” the queen hissed and looking at the sharp toothed elf smiling at her, she bristled.

The elf, scared of the shouts and cries, hid behind His Majesty’s back.

The queen regretted her behaviour. Moreover, she had to set an example, so she beckoned the little elf to step closer. Looking at him intently, he seemed less repellent to her. For an elf, he appeared to be even cute, although the queen had never seen any one akin to compare. Besides, she thought that the kingdom could



acquire a lot of fame owning such a creature. Who among their neighbourhoods had his own elf?

“You can stay!” the queen declared with solemnity.

Spigos started bouncing up and down contentedly.

“Enough!” the queen scolded. “Dinner is served at eight o’ clock. And wash your hands. You are muddy!”

At five minutes past eight, the queen looked solemnly at the king, then at the empty seat on her right side and then at Spigos on her left who dipped his long fingers into the soup bowl. She sighed and shook her head. She would not repeat for the umpteenth time that it was dinner time and the prince had not bothered to show up. Yes, it was the same thing every evening. She put the blame on his bad companion, that wretched dragon who was no good and had got to her son’s head!

Hurried steps were heard from the stairs and Filandros rushed into the dining room.

“Honoured Queen, Venerable King, I humbly apologize for being late. Hah! We’ve got a guest today!” the prince added jovially.

“Oh yes! Let me introduce you Spigos! Spigos is an elf!” the king declared.

“Nice to meet you, but what I mean is that I invited Marcos to dine with us.”

“What?” the queen exclaimed turning a thousand colours. “This is unbelievable! How dare you, young man!”

“Mother, Marcos won’t sit at the table but on the threshold, just out of the window. Besides he would not wish to create trouble,” the prince said, kissed his mother on the cheek, and leaned out of the window to call his friend.

Marcos, rasping for breath, flew to the threshold and rested heavily. His previous efforts to move his weak wings had overwhelmed him.

“Good evening!” he said, but suddenly he lost his balance and measured his length on the courtyard.

Everybody screamed in shock, and almost tumbling they reached the tiled yard.

Tough luck for the dragon; he was landed on the queen’s beloved daisies. Seeing the mishap, Her Majesty collapsed half-fainted on the tiles.

Meanwhile, Filandros, having knelt beside his friend, caressed him fondly on the forehead. “Silly me, I should not tire you so much,” the prince regretted.

Marcos blinked his eyes with some effort. His body was full of scars, he had sprained his hind foot, but even more he was scared stiff. Filandros was still caressing the dragon who sighed unhappily. The elf called on all his courage and stepped closer.

“Does he bite?” he asked hesitantly.

“Of course not!” the prince answered offended.

Meanwhile, King Apiganos felt dizzy with all the tumult. He had interrupted his meal and was looking forward to sipping his soup. But someone had to put things right, and by someone we mean the king, as the queen, fully recovered by now, was yelling about her trampled daisies.

“Spigos is too young, so he is not fully acquainted with our dragon’s practices. But he is trying hard to become a competent elf, so you must not snub him,” the king scolded his son.

Full of shame Filandros lowered his head and apologized. The elf approached courageously. He examined the dragon’s scars, touched his sprained foot, and finally looked him in the eyes.

“Don’t worry! I’ll take care of you. I have a lot of experience,” the elf assured the dragon.

The dragon whiffed with relief. He was feeling rather uncomfortable, he was hungry, and the smell of those daisies made his nostrils flare. Without a second thought, he swallowed a bunch of them.

“This isn’t happening!” the just-revived queen yelled hysterically. “He is munching my flowers!”

The gardener hastily removed her Majesty, filling her head with compliments of the kind that ring so sweetly in the ears of the rulers. As for the king, he took the opportunity to escape unnoticed.

The night had already fallen when Spigos, who spent some time thinking about how to help the dragon, flared his nostrils, huffed and pointed his nose to the north. Satisfied, he leaped and ran into the darkness. He may not have good eye sight, but his sense of smell was excellent.

While the prince and the dragon wondered about his strange behaviour, the elf had a lot of reasons to feel contented. In his hands he held two kinds of mushrooms that were renowned among his kin for their reviving results. Near the roots of an oak tree he found some bulbs. Grinding them with mint he would make a first class ointment for the dragon’s scars. Finally, a little further on, he found some bushes and gathered a few handfuls of their dark tiny fruits. With them he would make a salve ideal for sprains.

“Eat!” Spigos, having placed a steaming bowl under the dragon’s nose, prompted him.

“But, that stinks!” the poor dragon complained.

“Come on! Do not fuss! This soup will give you energy. Close your nostrils and swallow! And then I shall anoint your wounds and tomorrow you’ll be up and about,” the elf said cheerfully.

“How are you so sure about all these?” the prince asked suspiciously.

“My good Prince, you insult me! Am I an elf or am I not? I am not someone off the street. My kin neither use spells nor hurl curses at unsuspecting passers-by. We don’t bite their tongues neither drive people insane.”

“So, what kind of an elf are you?” the prince wondered as whatever knowledge he had of elves came from the fairy tales his mother had been telling him as a child.

“My kin are called the Healers,” Spigos said proudly and explained to the prince and the dragon all that which he had already told the king; meaning that in three days and nights he ought to complete three feats in order to become a grown up and worthy healer.

Marcos and Filandros had never heard about the Healers, but the world was so vast and they so small. Thus, they decided to show the elf some confidence.

So the dragon sipped obediently the soup which tasted better than its smell and then, obedient once more, he received the elf’s medications. He was already feeling better as happens when someone cares about you. The dragon wanted to tell all this to the little elf but a sweet fatigue enveloped him; so he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter 3 (in which a bright day dawns over Pamfoukia)

The sun brightens Pamfoukia while the birds start twittering, the peacocks stretch their feathers in the yard and the bugs seesaw undisturbed on the tree branches.

In this heaven, the dragon opens his eyes waking from his long sleep and feels brand new, as if all that happened to him was only a bad dream. He feels strengthened. He moves his wings, stretches his legs, gets up and huffs. His breast does not boil any more; he does not pant. A jolt runs through his body and at last he spreads his wings.



“I am flying, I am flying!” he shouts not even believing it himself.

His shouting awakens everyone in the castle. Here is King Apiganos wearing his nightdress and nightcap; he shows himself up, and leans on the threshold of the upper window. He stifles a yawn, presses his head, and looks with round eyes at Marcos who is flying a little further.

And here comes the queen and Batireas following her; and Zinovia is laughing down in the yard.

“Hurray! He made it!” Filandros hops merrily around the elf forgetting for a moment that such behaviour is inappropriate for a prince.

For Marcos, flying seems to be a newfound experience. Till that moment his life was so uneventful. But now..., now he spreads his wings proudly and goes higher and higher.

When the first excitement was over, the dragon remembered that the prince and the elf waited for him. He turned around and plunged downwards.

“I don’t know how to thank you,” he said again and again to the elf.

“I am indebted, because thanks to you I completed my first deed,” the elf bowed ceremoniously.

The three of them hugged one another and they would stay in this position if a cacophony of trumpeting did not make them jerk. Batireas wearing his official uniform followed the trumpeters.

“Glory and honour to the King, the Queen, and all their escorts!” he called out.

The trumpets were sounded once more, and then the king and the queen appeared. Zinovia followed them holding Her Majesty’s train, and after her came the gardener carrying the king’s crown on a pillow. I forgot to tell you that the king could not stand wearing his crown, not for grounds of consciousness, but for not bearing the least weight on his already full of troubles noble head.



Eying the royal entourage the prince burst into laughter. The queen frowned, the prince sobered up, the trumpets were trumpeted and Batireas unfolded a scroll and began reading with solemnity.

“On behalf of the King and the Queen, we are gathered here to honour our beloved dragon and to officially welcome the elf who answers to the name...”

Batireas lost track of what he was reading, he was myopic as well, and the queen stamped her foot impatiently on the cobblestones, and the king turned his gaze in despair to the skies.

“Who answers to the name of Spigos,” Batireas having found the text announced in triumph. “From now on, Pamfoukia takes pride in its two worthy sons who will bring glory to the historic kingdom and make it famous to the end of this world, which, as we are aware of, is not too far away,” he completed his sentence panting.

“Who wrote that crap?” the queen yelled. “The world is vast and full of prominent men and noble women one of whom is going to take my place soon,” she emphasized stepping knowingly on the king’s foot.

The poor king shrieked like someone having his tooth extracted. Unfortunately he had a bunion on his toes, even if his shoes were made of soft leather. Never mind that! He caught the meaning because he knew that the queen leaped at the opportunity to refer to her son’s imminent marriage.

“Of course!” the king inhaled deeply and began his famous monologue. “Which is a man’s destiny? To get married and have a family in order to help increasing the population of the planet in general and of Pamfoukia specifically, so that the world grows vast,” he hesitated, stopped bubbling and wiped his sweat, because his bunion prickled and his son goggled at him.

“As so wisely my dear husband prefaced,” the queen took a glance at her son and went on having the last say, “this is the destiny of men in general and of princes in specific. So, I decided to organize a ball where the best and noblest of this vast world shall appear. Then, the prince will have no excuse. Like it or not, he will find his soul mate.”

“All right, mother. Let it be as you wish!” the prince consented.

The queen stared puzzled at her son. While she expected him to get angry with her, he appeared calm and positive. Strange! He must have a plan in his mind. The noble woman turned to Batireas and ordered him to summon the town criers to spread the news in the neighbouring kingdoms.

“But we have no town criers, your Majesty!” he said.

“What?” the queen was taken aback. “Then, summon the trumpeters!”

“We do not have anyone of these!”

“In that case, who were those whose drum rolls assaulted our ears?”

“Those were the guards!”

“Then, send the guards who became trumpeters to be town criers!” the queen declared satisfied with herself.

The secret advisor scratched his head uneasily.

“But who is going to guard you?” he dared to ask.

“You will, my dear! I assign my protection to you!”

“I am honoured, but would we rather assign the royal gardener to be the town crier?”

Hearing this, the royal gardener bounced terrified and nearly dropped the crown he was carrying on the pillow.

“You are a fool! I’d rather be alone and unprotected than deprive my beloved flowers of his care! Besides, who is going to carry the pillow with the King’s crown?”

The king consented with a smile thinking how clever his queen was while Batireas fled in order to prepare the new scroll.

“You drove him mad, the poor soul!” the prince said.

“Mind your own business, young man! When your time comes to govern the kingdom, you may apply your democratic beliefs!” the queen screeched.

“Please, my dear! Shove your anger aside! Spare me, I have a headache!” the king complained touching his head.

“I do not wish to stand here and listen to him anymore! The ceremony is over! Disperse!” the queen commanded and holding her gown she moved on hastily towards the castle.

“Wait for me!” said the king.

The queen stared at Spigos as if seeing him for the first time.

“You!” she shouted.

Spigos hid terrified behind the king's cloak.

"Follow me!" the queen ordered.

"I do follow you, my dear!" the king consented.

"Not you! You!" she said pointing at Spigos.

The elf gulped and followed the queen.

Spigos felt rather uncomfortable sitting on a high stool in the Grand Room of the castle.

"Look how she stares at me!" he said to himself, intimidated by the queen.

"Listen to me, my boy!" the queen said in a high pitched voice. "I can easily single out the capable ones and by looking at your face, I see..."

The elf groped his face in terror thinking that something was wrong.

"I see greatness, honour, privileges that you can enjoy from right now!" the queen paused waiting for Spigos to react, but the elf was staring with bulging eyes. The queen thought that he was far too ugly when he goggled; nevertheless she went on.

"What would you say if I made you a secret advisor greater than the Secret Advisor himself?"

"I'd better eat as many bowls of cream I fancy!" the elf replied having taken just a slight interest in the queen's offer.

"You shall have the cream, and chocolate, pastry, cakes, and everything your greedy mind wishes, as long as you do whatever I want."

"Which is?" the elf asked suspicious.

"I am well aware that Filandros, my son, has no intention to get married. Until this moment, he had objections. Suddenly, he agrees to everything. He has something on his mind. To prevent whatever he plans, I want you to spy on him and then report to me everything that he says, thinks or dreams. It's the only way I should accomplish my goals unhindered. What do you think? Am I asking too much?"

The elf had no mood to spy on anyone. On the other hand, he could have all the cream he wished. His conscience did not bother him as his mouth watered by thinking of the thick cream.

"I'll do it! Can I eat the cream now?" the elf looked expectantly at the queen.

"I shall order Zinovia to prepare you thick cream! Right now!" the queen smiled contentedly.

Chapter 4 (in which in a place far away the green haired girl seeks the silent water and finds friends and troubles)

Far away from Pamfoukia, a solitary house stands on the foot of a mountain. There in the wilderness, lives a woman with her three daughters. Literally speaking, only the two of them are her real daughters, the third one, the green haired girl, was found abandoned under a tree when she was still a baby. As it happens in every fairy tale, Green's fate was to stay in that cabin on the foot of the mountain and serve Megaira and her two daughters, Bilio and Morfo.

Green was never able to sit back and relax, because by finishing a chore, another one was assigned to her. From dawn till dusk her feet felt sore and were full of blisters, due to constantly walking and carrying heavy things. As if that was not enough, Green was being mocked for her ugliness, a girl so young with an old lady's face, and those hairs that seemed like a living bush on her head. She could not help but accept the situation, and feel gratitude for the stale bread they fed her, and the concrete floor on which she slept.

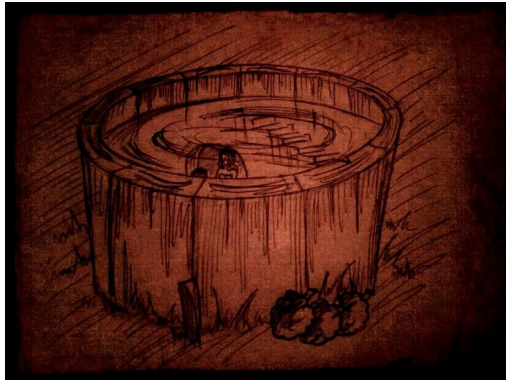


“Wake up!” Megaira ordered her. “Hurry and fetch the silent water for my daughters to wash themselves and drink so that they’ll find out whom they’ll marry.”

At the entrance of the forest there was a well from which on a specific night of the year the unmarried girls could pull the silent water. According to legend, she who reached home carrying the silent water without talking to anyone as well as she who drank the water would learn about her fate. Megaira, just to be sure, would give the water to her daughters not only to drink but also to wash themselves.

Green, still sleepy, took the clay jug with her and marched through the darkness towards the entrance of the forest. As soon as she reached the well, she bent down to grab the bucket but it was missing. What was to be done? How to pull the water? She only had the clay jug with her and if she threw it into the well, it would break. She could not return home empty handed.

So, she sat sighing in the dark and at every turn she jolted frightened by the caws and the howls, until she decided there was only one thing to do, namely to go down the well, fill the jug and go up again. Whatever should happen to her was better than facing the dreadful Megaira.



She climbed the mouth of the well and then began going down carefully. Luckily for her, there were stone steps and fumbling she managed to find where to step. The strange thing was that, as long as she climbed down, the darkness cleared instead of thickening. A creeper with bunches of yellow berries and pale flowers covered the slippery stone surface. The inside of the well could be made out clearly; the stairs were getting broader till on her right hand Green saw a small waterfall gurgling to an alcove.

She was about to dip her jug into the water when she noticed a nearby bush loaded with cherries. She was starving, so she plucked a handful and ate them greedily. And then she ate some more.

“You’ll be sick if you go on like this!” a voice said.

“Who is this?” Green asked really frightened, but got no answer. “Why nobody speaks? I am scared!” the girl whimpered.

The water started to stir and light up until it calmed resembling a pure crystal. Green kept climbing down to the bottom of the well. There, a woman waited and beckoned her to enter the water. Green did not hesitate and swimming cautiously she passed corridors of violet and purple colours until she reached a garden.

“Do you know where you are?” the strange woman’s voice resounded.

“I reached the bottom of the well”.

“Indeed you did. And I am the fairy who dominates the silent water which denotes the girls’ fate.”

“Megaira wants the water; I must get back!” Green said aghast.

“You need not worry. I know why you came here. I admire your courage, because no one else has ever climbed down the well.”

“I’d rather encounter every calamity in the world than face Megaira’s anger,” Green shook her head.

“Thus I must reward you; I’ll give you the silent water and something else,” the fairy said and pointed out a tree loaded with berries. “These are the water berries which are irrigated by the silent water. You can pluck three of them. You must store them until they run dry. If you make a wish before eating each one of them, it will come true. Remember to wait for the berries to dry out!” she repeated.

Green could not believe her good fortune. In a hurry she plucked three berries and hid them in the pocket of her apron while the fairy filled her clay jug.

“Take the jug and give it to those impatient to know their fate; although I am not sure they will be delighted,” the fairy said and led Green to a door small enough for just one man to pass through it.

“This leads to the forest. The way is longer but there is nothing else. You climbed down the well but you cannot climb it up again. Beware! It’s up to you to change your fate. Remember your three wishes!” the fairy said while opening the door with a key made of crystal.

Green stooped and got out. Looking back she could detect neither a door nor anything else. There was only a giant tree whose trunk was so thick that five men would be needed to enfold it. Green fingered the old tree bark but she felt no cavity or gap anywhere.

All that had little significance. She had her jug and the three berries. If she did not encounter anyone, she would arrive home in about half an hour. But as she walked on the soft grass, she felt so tired! Its smell filled the air and Green felt her eyelids heavy due to the lack of sleep.

“I’ll close my eyes for a little while, just to have a rest, and then I’ll go straight home,” she said to herself.

But little becomes much. Green fell asleep and when she woke up, the new day had already dawned. She got up and searched for her jug, but it was gone. What a disaster! What could she do? Not only was she missing for hours but she would arrive home empty handed. There was no excuse for Megaira. Thinking about her situation, Green began to cry.

“Please! Do not cry!” a small voice was heard.

Green searched startled, but she saw no one.

“Over here, among the lilies!” she heard the voice once more.

In a cluster of lilies a little further, Green detected with surprise two wings moving till they were spread and revealed a girl not bigger than the palm of a hand.



“Who are you?” Green asked enchanted.

“I am Spithami, the elf of flowers!”

“My name is Green,” she introduced herself, but suddenly she remembered what the fairy told her and put her hands over her mouth.

Anyway, it didn’t matter. Was there anything more serious than loosing her jug? So she told Spithami about her misfortunes.

“Don’t fret! I think I can help you. Come with me,” the elf said flapping her wings.

Green followed her till they reached in front of a big mushroom. Below its cap that looked like a huge umbrella, an elderly owl was sitting. The bird wrinkled the

eye brows and stared at the girl with bulging eyes. Green stood motionless; meanwhile Spithami was buzzing into the owl's ear who listened wrinkling further her eye brows.

"So, did you loose your jug?" the owl asked sullenly.

Green consented.

"You lost your time," the elderly bird reprimanded her.

Green had nothing to say.

"You lost your voice as well!"

"Godmother, I brought Green here thinking you might help her," Spithami reminded her courteously.

"Indeed! Well my child, when I said that you lost your time, I meant it. I do not wish to frighten you, but I know who stole your jug."

Green cried her heart out. So many misfortunes! The road took her further and further from home. The furthest she went, the more she hesitated to return to Megaira's house. As a result, the more she hesitated, the more she cried.

"I do not think that crying will help you in the least; unless you mean to collect your sobs in a jug instead of the silent water," the owl reprimanded Green and then, turned her gaze to the sky. "I smell and I see and I hear!" she paused abruptly.

"Come on Godmother, tell us more!" Spithami urged her.

"I see blaze, I hear mayhem and I smell..."she paused once more, and then all of a sudden she screeched.

Green jolted with panic. Even Spithami who was accustomed to the owl's strange behaviour, flapped her wings restlessly.

"I smell garlic! It is Akar! Yes, he is the thief! Ouuuu!" the owl let out a prolonged screech.

"Who is Akar?" Green asked really scared by this time.

But the owl had shut her eyes stubbornly emitting sounds like a frightened whimpering.

"He is the master of the Scary Swamp, and he sent the hawk that belongs to the Garlic Eater Knights to seek the silent water. You know about them, don't you?" Spithami asked Green.

"I've never heard of them before. Yet since I was a little one, the smell of garlic filled my head with darkness" Green shivered by just thinking of it.

The owl opened her eyes wide without looking at anything specifically.

"I only see misery ahead. Woe to us should he seize the water; only trouble and sorrow is what I see after that," she predicted and fell silent again.

"Go on, Godmother! What else can you tell us?" Spithami asked, but the owl did not utter a word as if she were petrified.

"Who is going to help us now?" Green wondered in despair.

“Wait here,” Spithami said and flapping her wings she disappeared into the foliage of a big tree.

Frightened, Green stayed as far away as possible from the owl; but she was feeling so sleepy, her eyes were shutting; she must have fallen asleep for a while since she had dreamt a little of a boy and a girl with golden hair and, as from far away, she was also hearing a familiar lullaby. Abruptly she opened her eyes and touched her hair; disappointed she realized that it was still green and rough. She was on the verge of bursting into tears again, yet just in time Spithami arrived out of breath.

The little elf recounted to Green how she flew high over the trees to the direction the owl had pointed out; how she searched thoroughly for traces of the horrible Knights, but her nose could not detect the smell of garlic anywhere. Therefore, the two girls were safe to take the road that would lead them to a tiny and peaceful kingdom called Pamfoukia.

They walked till darkness fell. Then Green burrowed into the cavity of a tree to get some sleep while Spithami would keep guard resting on an upper branch of the same tree. But soon the elf's eyes felt heavy with fatigue.

“Who would dare to pass through this dense forest at night?” Spithami thought and folding her precious wings she slept exhausted.

But a few meters higher, the hawk made his appearance once more to carry out the latest command of his masters. The Garlic Eater Knights may have obtained the silent water, but it was not enough. When they had heard the hawk's descriptions, they became furious and ordered him to capture the girl and bring her to them. All these years they thought they had got rid of her, but there she was, alive and dangerous.

The hawk sniffed and plunged downwards. He landed noiselessly near Green, grabbed her by the hair, lifted her and before she realized what was happening, they were flying high into the darkness.

Chapter 5 (in which Filandros and his companions seek the adventure)

Back in Pamfoukia, Marcos kept on munching the queen's beloved daisies, Spigos gulping the rich cream and the prince thinking about how to avoid the royal ball.

"It's time to get to know the world. What do you think, Marcos?" the prince asked his friend.

"I think we're fine here. I feel rather weak," the dragon whimpered as he was in no mood for adventures.

"You don't know how to lie. You were never before in such a good condition. Don't you wish to do heroic deeds?"

"I think I've caught a nasty cold! There, look at me, I can't even blow fire from my throat," Marcos said and for argument's sake he took a deep breath and the prince just in case sought shelter behind the bush but he felt only a chilly wave of air.

"You are right. Let's summon the elf; he is the one who knows what to do so that you shall be out and about," the prince said and hurried towards the palace.

"The prince got me where he wanted," the poor dragon told himself huffing as he saw the prince dragging the elf behind him.

"Here is the deserter! I found him in the cauldron eating cream greedily!" the prince declared with anger.

"It's not my fault, it's not my fault..." the elf protested but stopped abruptly because it was wiser to find out about the prince's plans first.

"Enough!" Filandros cut him off. "I won't tell anyone as long as you take care of Marcos and make him a decent dragon."

"But I made him brand new!"

"With a minor detail; he cannot breathe fire."

"Ah! I am not a Healer yet, that I might do magic whenever you wish! I have to complete three feats, but one a day for three days; so far I've got ..." the elf looked at the sun that was still high in the sky, "almost a whole day!"

"In that case you shall accompany us!"

"And my cream?" the elf protested not wanting to reveal that the queen had assigned him as a royal spy.



“When we come back, I’ll give you so much cream that will last you for a lifetime.”

Spigos considered the offer, made a brief calculation and felt pleased. Should he accompany the prince, the elf not only would do him a favour but he would also keep his promise to the queen and in the end he would eat the cream!

So the bizarre company went off to seek adventures with Spigos going ahead, fumbling into the thick bushes, smelling their foliage, and digging with his nails the earth around them. From time to time he would cut a flower or a fruit, inspect them closely, smile contentedly, and stuff them in the bag he carried with him. If some fruit or flower was of no need, Marcos was keen to munch it with great pleasure. Sometimes they would argue for fun’s sake, and Filandros would remind them that the adventure was waiting eagerly.

“Nothing will happen if it waits a little longer,” said Marcos feeling his eyes heavy with sleep. He’d like very much to lie on his back, and take a nap there in the shady wood.

Filandros looked at him sternly and the dragon simply shrugged, and devoted his attention to a most beautiful flower. He had never in his life seen anything similar and even he, the greedy one, regretted to gobble it up. As he lifted his huge paw, the flower spoke and...

“Sir, spare my life! Please, do not eat me!” said Spithami who after flying for hours in search of Green’s and the hawk’s traces she sought shelter amid the undergrowth, and now stared at the dragon in terror.



“I am vegetarian,” he reassured her lifting her with care.

“How should I know...,” began to mumble the girl-butterfly but stopped as she realized who was standing beside the dragon. “Your Highness,” she addressed Filandros performing a very satisfactory curtsy despite her bewilderment.

Filandros was more bewildered than the little girl as he was not used to being addressed in such a way.

Basically he had no wish to be reminded of his grand position in

Pamfoukia; however he had no chance to say the least, as Spithami took a deep breath, and blurted out about Green, the hawk, the silent water and the Garlic Eater Knights.

When she finished her story, Filandros was very angry; Marcos too desperate and Spigos much disappeared.

“When I hear about these awful Knights, nothing good is about to come!” whimpered the dragon. “What do they contrive now? No, I have no wish to know. I feel sorry for the girl, but the last time I came up against them was almost the last day of my life!”

“Stop it, Marcos! You forget that they owe you something,” Filandros snubbed him.

“Would punishment make them better? I don’t think I can fight them. I have got neither the guts nor the fire”.

“Along with the fire and steam, you shall also obtain the stimulus you need. Someone has to relieve the world of their threat. Something weird is happening. What do they want to gain by possessing the silent water? Why did they abduct the girl with that bizarre name?”

“If we found my godmother, we would learn more; but who knows where she hid herself! She can become really irritating when you need her for anything important. You see, she doesn’t go around in daylight. She always says that the rabbit’s eye differs from that of the owl,” Spithami filled them in.

“Is she a rabbit?” inquired Spigos having just turned up with his bag full of the goodies he had collected for his remedies.

“She is an owl; the wisest of all,” Spithami answered.

In the meantime the prince had unfolded a scroll and was scrutinizing it. It was a map that showed the position of every kingdom, a map being given to him by King Apiganos since the latest avoided consulting it. King Apiganos said that the map reminded him of how small was his own kingdom in comparison with the vast and unexplored world.

“We have only to follow the shortest path, and reach the borders of Garlic Eaters’ land,” Filandros concluded.

“No! I do not have bright memories of marshes and swamps. I nearly drowned there!” the dragon squealed terrified.

“But you can fly now. We’ll make haste. Something nasty is going on and we must hurry,” the prince said briskly.

Nobody had any other objections, so they kept on going through the dense forest. They walked and walked till it started to grow dark, so they stopped for a bite and a rest.

And then, just as the senses get benumbed, and the weary travellers surrender exhausted to a welcomed sleep that comes to shut their eyes, as a poet might describe this scene, an eerie shriek was heard, and Filandros drew his sword armed and ready to protect his friends. Spigos hopped and took shelter under the dragon’s

wings just to be on the safe side. Only Spithami pricked up her ears, listened closely, and smiled.

“Godmother, it isn’t fair to startle us!”

The owl landed with a thud beside the fire, fidgeted for a little while, and then remained still and silent. Spithami, already acquainted with her godmother’s habits, understood that the owl was to communicate either something really unpleasant or really important or both of these. She did not miscalculate.

“The moon is waxing!” the nocturnal bird shrieked. “But soon it shall be full and Garlic Eaters are aware of this!”

“Everybody knows that; it’s no big deal,” Spigos mumbled looking forward to falling asleep again and dreaming of cauldrons full of cream.

“Fool!” said the owl looking sternly at the elf. “Tomorrow night is full moon. When the moon is perfectly round, the awful Knights will carry out their plans. And their plans, their plans...,” the owl stopped abruptly and covered her eyes with her wings.

Even the patient Filandros would rather clutch the owl’s throat, and force her to finish the grim forecast.

“When the moon is full, the Knights...,” the owl stared at Filandros as if reading his thoughts, “the Knights shall change the world. Ouuuuu!” she shrieked once more.

“In which way, Godmother?” Spithami inquired. “At this rate we are wasting time!”

“Young people do not have patience. They think that time is running exclusively for them. Time can be either very hasty or incredibly lazy. All in good time!” the owl philosophized.

“You mean that what will be, will be?” asked with sudden interest Filandros who had just understood the way the wise bird was thinking.

“As soon as the moon is full, the awful Knights will empty the jug with the silent water into the Scary Swamp. Then, vapors will rise high into the sky till they cover the moon. The sky will be red and when the rain comes, it’ll be far too late for everybody,” the owl said all at once.

And if any other words reached the ears of the company, nobody was aware of them as the nocturnal bird flew and disappeared above the tall trees.

Marcos huffed upset. Into his dragonish brain he created disastrous images; besides he was familiar with the Knights’ malice.

“Why did they capture Green?” he wondered aloud.

“If the hawk snatched the jug, why not carry off Green at the same time?” Filandros wondered in turn.

“What if Green has something else that the Knights want to get their hands on?” the elf intervened.

“Like what? Green has no place in the sun; she is so poor and so plagued by her horrible family!” Spithami disagreed.

“But you were the one who told us they’re not her real family. Green did not fall from the sky. She must have parents, maybe brothers and sisters somewhere,” Filandros said in turn.

For a while nobody talked, yet the uneasiness was growing.

“There is no time to lose. We must start at once; we have had enough rest,” Filandros decided and got up right away.

“But, where are we heading? How can we confront them?” whimpered the dragon who still considered himself as no real dragon at all.

Like guessing his thoughts, Spigos searched his bag till he emptied it on the ground, and started picking things mumbling and munching his words. Till...

“Yet we have a weapon!” the elf said with enormous excitement.

“I do not see anything else other than Filandros’s sword,” Marcos commented.

“You seem to me a poor fish, not a poor dragon. You are the weapon!” the elf said back.

“If you mean that because of my bulk you’ll throw me on someone’s head to break it, then maybe!” Marcos laughed uneasily.

“You ninny; I mean that your flame is our mighty weapon!”

“You already know that I cannot spew out flames.”

“You didn’t till now; but we are going to change it.”

Marcos was ready to protest but the elf got really busy mixing ingredients into a bowl, and mumbling at the same time.

Some time passed away, and the only sound someone could hear was the monotonous thud of chopping, crushing, grinding, stirring, and so on, till the elf sniffed satisfied with the mixture.

“It’s ready. Now you can drink it,” the elf told the dragon with a smile.

“Yeah, sure; and how am I to know what it contains? Let alone it stinks!” the dragon answered and curled his lips in disgust.

“It contains sulfur, pepper, and the root of the spiciest herbs that grow in the forest. There are some other ingredients also, but you don’t need to know everything; just to be on the safe side in case you start making your own remedies,” he joked. “Go on; gulp it at once, because this will be my second feat!”

Marcos was rather convinced since the elf had already cured his wings and his sprains. So he pinched his nose, shut his eyes, and gulped the disgusting remedy. At once a nasty cough started to shake his body while smoke was getting out of his nostrils.

“My; the remedy works! I can’t believe it! I’ve just completed my second feat. One more and I’ll reach elfhood!” the elf jiggled and did some somersaults in the air.

“I was feeling a lot better before,” Marcos complained, but a persistent coughing cut him off.

“What an ungrateful being! You’ll get used to it,” the elf confirmed.

Spithami stepped back in terror. She had no wish to destroy her glorious wings should the dragon have some strange idea.

“My friend; now is the time for us to test your endurance,” Filandros said patting Marcos on the back. “If we start immediately and head eastwards, we’ll reach the land of Chthonius in about an hour. There we’ll put you to the test.”

He gave no other explanation, and Marcos, who did not know a thing about Chthonius, asked nothing, because he was trying hard to get used to the fire that boiled inside his chest.

Chapter 6 (in which Marcos becomes a real dragon and the company finds a bizarre stone)

The map was quite enlightening, and Filandros sent his friends off with ease to the land of Chthonius. It was nearly dawn as they emerged from the dense forest. Used to trees and greenery, suddenly they found themselves in front of an endless yellow, walking on a parched flowerless land. As they went on, they saw a wagon loaded with sheaves of grain. The driver was dark-coloured and rough-skinned, and he was wearing a wide-brimmed hat. He had long hair that reached down to his waist. The wagon stopped, and the man stared at them with suspicion; actually he stared at the dragon with a lot of suspicion.

Filandros moved away from his companions, and approached the man. The others had no idea what the two of them talked about. They just followed the motions of heads and hands, and relaxed only when the prince took out the map, and showed it to the man; then he pointed at the dragon, and the man consented, took out his conch and blew hard. After a while wagons similar to his appeared; men resembling him were driving them.

“Everything is arranged,” Filandros announced to his friends, and explained that the whole land of Chthonius was an endless grain field. Harvest was just over, and now they had to burn the dry stubbles. Marcos could try his newly acquired power without risk since Chthonius wanted fire; so fire they would have.

The dragon huffed and puffed; all of a sudden he had stress; he did not know if he could succeed, let alone he might put himself at risk by using this brand new power. So he was sitting aside scratching awkwardly his ear with his paw until Filandros called him to get ready. What could Marcos do? Of course he could spread his wings and fly away, but that wasn't a nice thing to do even for a dragon or better, specifically for a dragon since it is supposed that dragons are fearless. So he stepped back a few paces, inhaled deeply, and blew.

Bah; nothing happened. A thin line of smoke came out of his nostrils, and disappeared into thin air. His second effort was even worse.

“Come on, Marcos! You can do it,” Filandros urged him; Marcos braced himself, blew once more, and a little flame came out of his mouth.

But it wasn't enough! What should he do?

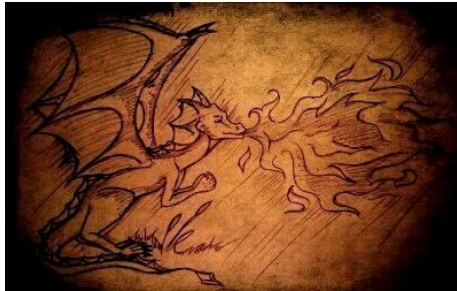
The crowd, as many more Chthonius had already arrived at the spot, started to applaud, and to encourage the dragon.

“I fear that whatever comes out of my guts will cause disaster,” Marcos mumbled disappointed.

“No! You need not fear when you do something for a good reason.”

“Is that so?” Marcos asked.

“Of course it is!” Filandros assured him. “Come on! Show them what a dragon is worth!”



Marcos looked incredulously at him but Filandros nodded, and Chthonius with their wide-brimmed hats nodded too.

Since he had to do this, and those strange people seemed to hold no grudge against him, Marcos spread his dragonish wings, and flew high and further away and then lower shedding fire everywhere till he came back exhausted, and covered with soot.

“It is said that dragons are of no use in this world; that’s totally inaccurate. Well done! This is the most trying part of our work; you see, it doesn’t quite suit us to set fire on our own land; but this has to be done in order to get the fields ready for sowing. It seems to me that from now on we’ll summon you every year at the same time to get over with it the fastest way,” the leader of Chthonius declared, congratulated him, and gave him a very weird-looking object as a gift.

“What is this?” Marcos inquired as they left behind the land of Chthonius and its inhabitants, who by using rakes and shovels were delving into the remains of the fire.

“It looks like an accordion,” said Spigos who, landing on the dragon’s back, was fiddling with the weird gift using his claws.

Nevertheless the object neither produced a sound nor folded or unfolded; generally speaking, it seemed to be of no use.

“Strange men, strange gifts!” mumbled Spigos who would prefer a bowl of full-fat cream.

“And yet, everything can prove useful. This is a bellows, and we’ll have the opportunity to make use of it in the near future.” Filandros smiled knowingly but nobody understood what the meaning of his words was.

So they walked and walked moving westwards. It’s more accurate to say that they flew, since it was a long way until they could reach the land of Garlic Eaters and the Scary Swamp.

The house inhabited by Megaira and her daughters was to be the intermediate stop for the company. Marcos landed a little further, and Spithami entered it through an open window, and burrowed by the fireplace.

“Hurry up, you lazy ones!” Spithami heard Megaira yelling at her daughters.

“What was the reason to send her for the silent water?” Morfo talked back to her mother. “Now who is supposed to help us become the most beautiful of the kingdoms?”

“As much as we need her! The marriage to the Prince is more than certain; of course he will choose me!” Bilio declared.

“No! It’s me he’ll choose; I am the oldest and the more beautiful!”

“Stop cackling, and get ready at last! We must hurry and reach Pamfoukia in time!” their mother said sternly.



And Spithami just watched them as they crammed clothes and more clothes into bags and suitcases along with pans and kettles and similar stuff like they were moving out; so much convinced they were of the imminent wedding. When at last they got ready, and loaded all their stuff, Spithami made sure that they would not come back and then fled in a hurry to inform the rest of the company.

Shortly all of them were searching Megaira’s house lest they found a clue that could cast light upon Green’s mystery. They left no stone unturned; in the end they gave up since they discovered nothing but dirt and untidiness.

That was until Spigos, who had smuggled in the cellar seeking anything edible to put a decent meal under his belt, found a bag. After emptying its contents on the floor, he realized that those were Green’s sole belongings; two or three mended clothes, and a charm that nobody would look at a second time.

When he opened it, the only thing he found inside was a stone inscribed with the names Leopold and Mirela.

Only Marcos took an extra look at the weird stone bemused, and then he shook his head full of sorrow.

“What a strange charm! Why would the girl keep it? It’s like carrying sadness, and breaking your heart,” he said, and gave it back to Spigos who stored it in his bag.

“We don’t have enough time! We must reach the land of Garlic Eaters without making another stop; which means that we have to fly above the High Waterfalls on the other side of the mountain, and then head eastwards once more to reach the Scary Swamp,” Filandros said looking at the sun.

After some time, as they flew over the magnificent High Waterfalls, Spigos lent perilously, and barely grasped Marcos’s neck so he could take a good look at the flowers and fruits which were in abundance in that part of the earth. His thoughts were concentrated on what kind of remedy he could prepare with all those, since his third feat was due to take place in a few hours time on full moon; so he took no notice of how disturbing his shouting and hopping was.

Marcos folded his wings, then shook, and unfolded them but his movements distracted the rest of the party. Filandros grabbed in haste the elf by his leg.

“Hold on tightly!” Marcos warned them, and abruptly he dived towards the water that steamed and foamed below.

Spithami lost her balance, made a reverse turn on air, and everybody watched horrified as the little flower-elf approached perilously the water that seethed with fury. Fortunately the dragon made it in time, and grabbed her using his mouth, and then Filandros hugged her protectively. Alas! What a disaster! By then Spithami’s glorious wings looked like creased paper, and their vivid colours like irregular smudges.

Spithami started bawling so everybody thought that she was seriously injured. Some time passed before Marcos could land on a safe spot; only then the company realized that nothing more than the girl’s pride was hurt. Valuable time was already wasted, and besides the lost prestige, they had to make haste so that peace and tranquility on earth should not be wasted too.

As Filandros unfolded the map in order to study the distances, he felt for the first time in his life that the words were stuck in his throat. He remembered the owl’s quote about time. It seemed that Garlic Eaters wasted their time while the prince pressed for time wishing the dragon’s wings would bring them the sooner to the Scary Swamp. He must keep calm as they were that close to the kingdom of the horrible Knights. If they started right away, they would arrive there while the moon completed his waxing.

Chapter 7 (in which we learn about the kingdom of Garlic Eaters and Green's fears)

On a land where even the sun keeps hiding embarrassed, and hardly touches its surface, the Garlic Eater Knights sharpen their swords ready to conquer the world. As time goes by, their faces appear to become fiercer and uglier. Out of their ears, nostrils and mouths come fumes that make the site smellier and the scarce plants crawling on earth.

Because of the continuous stench the only thing that thrived in that land was garlic; its plants were overgrown into the swamps, and had become so enduring that they multiplied instantly as long as the water was stagnant.

Stagnant was even the memory in the kingdom of Garlic Eaters. Its subjects' recollections got stuck in a single moment, and that was when the Knights' shiny armours filled the place, and hundreds of swords were raised over the Scary Swamp to honour Akar, its master. And since the memory got enslaved, nothing was left to remind the former state of the people. If you asked them, some with fear, others acting mechanically, would describe Akar, that horrifying creature, as the land's saviour, a magnificent figure, and a lot of other word-painting, even if nobody had ever set eyes on him.

The subjects of that land worked all day long at the garlic fields, and the only thing they remembered were the tears in their eyes. They saw, inhaled, and tasted garlic doing the same mechanical movements. They spent every living day under the Knights' threat and control because they had to work harder and harder. Most of the production was to be thrown into the swamp for the master to be fed; that same master about whom we already know although neither we have seen him.

Now you'll ask me how we know that he really exists. But what is false and what is true? The answer is where a fairytale is due. So, the Knights maintained a lie in order to control their subjects or maybe all this was a reality that in a few hours time would simply be a fact?

For the time being the only truth is that the Knights ordered their subjects or slaves -name them as it suits you- to get assembled by the banks of the swamp as soon as darkness started to fall. The ill-starred people had no choice but to obey them.

Only for Green's guards the orders differed. Because -excuse me for leaving it out but I shall fill you straight in -as soon as the hawk laid the green haired girl at the feet of the leader of the Knights, he looked thoroughly at her and then ordered that she was to be imprisoned into the dark dungeon of Garlic Eaters' castle. And some said that fear made his lips look tighter and his eyes more bulging. And then

the leader of the Knights ran hastily to the Scary Swamp to meet his master, but nobody saw or heard anything else.

All this occurred two days ago, and today Green is still incarcerated in the depths of the castle without a clue about what is to happen to her. And let's not speak about the meals; just a bite of stale bread, of the sort every subject of the land is being fed; the one made of garlic, the only thriving plant on that site.

Even though she was hungry, Green did not touch the bread. She was scared of everything in that strange land as much as she was scared of the Castle that looked like a dark ant-nest full of stairs and arches that connected one side with the other or led nowhere. Despite her ill fate a little hope flickered into Green because she still kept the water berries into the pocket of her apron. Every so often she took them out, and groped them only to find out that they were not dried yet as the fairy of the well had told her. So every time the girl got disappointed because she could not make a wish.

As if all this wasn't enough, every time she heard the knights going back and forth in the castle, her fear grew more and more. If only she knew why they had incarcerated her or why she was doomed to live so miserably with Megaira and her daughters! She wondered whether she was always so ugly and so poor. And this green hair! If she had possessed a pair of scissors she would have cropped it to stop feeling it on her head. She could bear no longer how everybody kept staring at her, as if she had done them a great wrong.

Time went by, and the cold grew bitter in the dark dungeon. Every time she heard a noise Green jolted, but the clatter of feet went back and forth without stopping by her prison door. The more she wondered the more her fears grew. And when creeping and whispering came along, Green started to weep.

Once more she got the berries out of her pocket and fingered them. It was so dark around her that she could scarcely define them. She felt them wrinkled on her palm, but were they indeed dried? If she had no light in order to examine them, how was she to eat even one, and consequently lose a whole wish? How long did she have to wait? "You have to make your fortune on your own," the fairy had told her and had reminded her to be careful about what to wish.

Green wondered what that meant. Thinking twice about it, it was a great responsibility to take charge of one's life and fortune by mouthing some words. She had to be really careful about what to ask for. What was that she wished? Her freedom actually; and stop being so ugly; but also she wished the world were full of kindness, and merriness, and joy, and laughing, and a lot more. Besides, what sort of life was it to live in a miserable world where creatures like Garlic Eaters, Megaira and her daughters lived and thrived?

And then she remembered Spithami. There was a nice wish; was she to live in a world full of creatures like Spithami! But when she thought again about it, it did not sound a good idea any more, because becoming like Spithami she would be neither a whole girl nor a whole butterfly. No, she didn't like it. She bit her lips and tried to think clearly.

Ah! She contrived something! She could ask for an answer to a question. That would be her wish; not to obtain the least but just have an answer.

Closing her eyes she put into her mouth the water berry that seemed the most wrinkled, and made her wish in the form of a question.

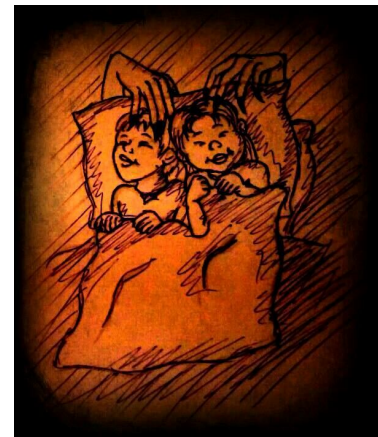
“Who actually am I?”

It was something she was always concerned about; she knew of course that neither Megaira was her real mother nor Bilio and Morfo her real sisters. Although Green had asked the three of them countless times, the only answer she got was that she had been found under a tree, a small and starved child whom the great hearted Megaira had saved.

Green did not dare to think further about her past. She chewed thoroughly the water berry, and swallowed it with her eyes shut. A little dizzy, she waited patiently for something to happen.

And when time goes by, it can be a single or many more moments; but even Green could not tell how much later, behind her closed eyelids, a pale pink light appeared into the darkness; a light like a cotton cloud that invisible hands put slowly aside till a vivid picture came into sight.

Two children, a boy and a girl, were sleeping side by side, so close that their blond hair was mingled, and their soft pink cheeks seemed to be puffed in and out at the rhythm of one breath. Above their bed was standing a woman identical with the well fairy who said reclining her head: “Be lucky; both of you!” But promptly the image was altered and Green saw in her dream or imagination a long hand with claw nails and skin the colour of mould touching first the boy, then the girl, and reciting: “This is my gift for Leopold, and this for Mirela!”



And then a malicious laugh blacked out the beautiful image, and the same laugh was Green's only company as she opened her eyes. For a while she had no idea of where exactly she was, but then she remembered that strange stone she had found accidentally in the forest years ago. It was so common that someone else might kick it aside, but Green, who possessed nothing, saw the stone as a valuable present; so

she picked it up and treasured it away from Megaira's reach. Those same names, Leopold and Mirela, were written on it. She wondered about the meaning of all this.

Heavy footsteps were heard outside the door, then the wood creaked making a horrible sound, and two ironclad Knights grabbed her, and got her out.

"Where do you take me?" Green yelled in terror.

"Somewhere really nice!" one of them answered laughing maliciously.

Chapter 8 (in which the hour of the dire encounter is getting closer)

Somewhere close to the land of Garlic Eaters, Marcos started to sneeze.

“We almost arrived,” Filandros announced.

“That’s for sure!” the elf covered his mouth and nose with disgust.

“It’s an unmistakable way to orientate ourselves,” Filandros agreed looking downwards.

Needless to say that their visibility was too limited as heavy clouds closed in on them, clouds that would pour enough rain to flood the land. The sun had set long ago so nobody could detect their nasty green color which was weird, and as a matter of fact, no good omen.

Marcos was flying slowly looking for a place to land, a spot that would keep them hidden from the eyes of every well wisher until they could get a clear idea about what was happening in the vicinity of the Scary Swamp.

“Down there!” the elf’s long fingers pointed at a spot where high and thick reeds formed a protective shield that would cover even the dragon’s bulk.

Shortly everyone was sheltered behind the reed bed, and positioned in such a way that it was easy to spy on everything without being spotted.

“What exactly are we waiting for?” the elf asked.

Filandros put a finger on his lips to show him that they must only whisper, and talk as little as possible. His stare surrounded the area. It was really weird that no living creatures were to be seen. Yet this confirmed all the stories they had already heard about the Scary Swamp and Akar, his lord.

The prince wondered whether Akar were a product of the Knights’ imagination in order to serve their sick purpose. What had the owl said? As soon as the moon was full, the Knights would drop the silent water into the Swamp, and the world would be altered. But how could anyone believe such a thing when everything was so still and quiet?

Yet the calmness and placidness seemed unrealistic, therefore someone or something was lurking around them. Maybe Akar existed for real a little further, in his kingdom at the dark bottom of the swamp waiting to show them his powers?

And what did they have to counter attack? Their own weapon was Marcos; a real dragon for sure. Marcos would sow terror if he really wanted, if it was necessary to confront evil. Moreover he had suffered the worst because of the Knights. Revenge was not the best solution in any case, but in that case it was the only one.

“What are you thinking?” Marcos inquired worriedly.

Filandros had no time to answer as a hollow sound started to spread around. The company squeezed themselves into their hideout, and everybody pricked up their ears.

Full armoured knights in an array of five made their appearance while the moon came into sight just above the repulsive Swamp. The murky water was getting agitated by the bubbles until the swamp looked like a seething gruel.

The leader of the Knights clad in steel and girded with three swords moved forward.

“Our Lord, I pay you my respects!” he said with a hoarse voice, and straight away his steel body made a bow towards the Swamp. A sound that seemed both as a laugh and a roar came out of the murky water.

The Knights stepped aside, and Green appeared; the latter had ceased to resist some time ago looking like she were waiting fearless a dire destiny.

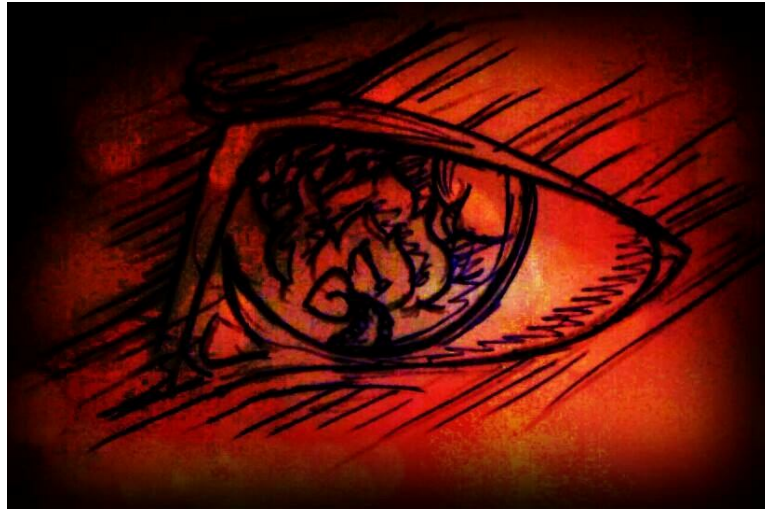
“And when the silent water is dropped for you to drink, our beloved Master, and we, your faithful ones, shall praise you, all kindness shall be lost from this world. Shortly not even Green shall exist, so let’s do her a favour. Bring her closer!” the awful Knight ordered fiercely.

Nobody could distinguish neither Green’s expression nor the Knights’ faces or what was going on under their helmets as well. The poor girl was veiled by a mist which tried either to protect her or to swallow her.

“Dear girl, you are so ugly that by no means, you could be our eternal companion. Yet, our Master goes before anybody and anything else. He shall take you with him and decide!” the leader of Garlic Eaters laughed with malice. “And then you’ll cease being good, because you’ll never become the princess Mirela. Where is now your Leopold to save you?” his laugh was raucous and creepy at the same time.

Filandros was stunned by what was happening. He remembered the stone Spigos had found, and whispering asked for it. He fingered it mechanically, and turned towards Marcos eyeing him with suspicion. What he saw made him jolt in awe.

Marcos’s eyes had acquired the colour of fire while dense smoke came out of his nostrils. Anger was what the dragon felt, an anger that he neither would nor could control. A hot wave was spreading all over his body demanding to be released. A memory burst upon Marcos’s eyes; the image of two blond children laughing, and playing together. His heart beat loudly, and a light emerged from his body; a ray aiming at the pebble that Filandros held in his hands.



The peculiar stone became overheated, and started to emit smoke. Filandros understood that the stone sought its owner, and without further thought handed it to the dragon. As soon as he held it in his hands, a mist enshrouded the stone but when it cleared, it had been transformed into a pendant with a golden heart at his end. The heart was of the sort that was used for hiding secrets inside. As soon as Marcos pressed the heart, it opened revealing the painted faces of two identical children. Their names were Leopold and Mirela, and it was obvious that they were brother and sister.

He had no time to feel anything else as the Knights cried with one voice:

“The moon is full. It’s time!”

A piercing screech was heard, and the surface of the murky water churned. Some saw a huge tail sticking up, others a neck, and others a snout or maybe nothing at all.

The leader of Garlic Eaters emptied the jug containing the silent water into the swamp, and at once a purple colour tinted its surface. All over the place hovered smoke, and a strong smell of garlic. And then, those who did not believe in Akar’s existence heard the beast.

Only the dragon seemed unaffected by the horrible cries as his own anger grew stronger. Dense smoke erupted from his ears and nostrils, and it seemed as if all his repressed memories were surfacing; a blissful kingdom, a beloved family, Leopold and Mirela whom the monstrous Akar had transformed, and thrown out of their land like they had been some kind of trash.

Marcos looked sad-eyed at Green. A single tear-drop trickled down as his stare encircled his chained sister. His voice echoed altered, hoarse and throaty; a voice that should make proud every decent dragon.

“It’s time to drown the one who is responsible for all the misfortunes of mine and others into this swamp once for all,” he cried aloud, and with two long strides came out of his hiding place.

“Marcos, what are you doing? Not on your own, wait for me!” Filandros cried taking his sword out of its sheath.

“Stay here, all of you! I am well aware of what must be done.”
Nobody moved as the spreading roar seemed to make time stop.

Chapter 9 (in which there is more than meets the eye)

Nobody had ever seen such an awesome creature! And we talk about Marcos, not Akar. The only memory the Knights had of him was that of a fragile boy whom their master had condemned. As for Akar himself, absolutely in trust of his powers, he emerged, his long neck three meters above the Swamp, and looked at the dragon with hatred and contempt; like he wanted to communicate that the dragon would be a fool if he dared to mess with him.

“You do not frighten me, Akar! It’s time for you to pay!” Marcos yelled in anger.

Akar raised his huge bulk above the water nearing the dragon menacingly. Everybody watched breathless. The dragon drew back a little, and Akar laughed loudly like he wanted to show how powerless his opponent was, and how certain his perishing would be.

The Knights started laughing too but their laugh was cut off abruptly, and they backed off scared as the dragon spread his long wings, and rose into the air.

The knights who held Green between them weren’t aware of Marcos’s plans, so they moved a few steps forward estimating the right spot to throw the girl into the swamp where Akar was expecting her.

Green’s unexpected screech made the knights jolt. In the little time remaining Green stooped her head, and reached her apron, caught the water berry with her mouth, and making the only wish that could save her, she swallowed it outright.

At once, lightning and thunder started to shake the universe. The dragon who stared at them from above rushed downwards, and opening his mouth sent a fierce wave of fire into the swamp. Akar’s shrieks merged with the sound of thunder and the clank of metal, as, out of the blue, hundreds of humans appeared emerging from the garlic fields; armed with shovels, rakes and pickaxes they rushed upon the Knights who drew back in disorder.

In the Swamp, the battle went on. The waves of fire covered the surface of the murky water, and Akar’s movements resembled those of a drunk. The hissing of flames was louder than the sound of the battle into which dashed Filandros and the elf; the later had already completed his third feat by preparing an ointment that hardened the skin so nothing could penetrate it. That ointment was protecting the brave prince.



Spigos shouted elated as he finally found a way to make Chthonius' present useful. With the bellows under his armpit he directed the fire where Garlic Eaters were gathered.

And time -as we often say- is long for some, and short for others. Yet, whichever of the above is the truth, suddenly all went quiet. It was the moment when the sky started to clear, and dawn came bright and pink after so many years. And time stood still to make its decision.

As the first sun rays caressed the world, men and elves stared open mouthed. Because everything was altering around them and they watched in awe. The Swamp became a serene lake; Akar was nowhere to be seen and the iron clad Knights vanished into thin air.

And all those slaves of the earth were no longer ragamuffins with wrinkled faces but happy well-dressed people who laughed and chatted like they were part of a big celebration.

Filandros wandered through the crowd looking for Marcos but the dragon was nowhere to be seen. The prince had no clue about what happened to him. He remembered clearly Marcos's ultimate attempt when he exhaled his most fierce fire that crushed Akar totally. He also remembered that straight after, he saw him landing on earth, and folding his wings with care. Where could he find him?

"Are you looking for your friend?" a melodious voice made him turn his head, and face the most beautiful girl in the world.

He could not give her an answer but dumbfounded he was admiring her long blond hair and her eyes that sparkled like precious gems.

He just managed to nod his head, and she smiled, and asked him to follow her.

They moved through a bustling crowd that bowed, and stood aside until they reached the front of a huge castle. The gates opened as of their own. Filandros and the girl climbed the stairs, and entered a grand room that hosted a big celebration. And there, at the top of the table Filandros saw a young man, the spitting image of the boy who was painted on the pendant.

"Let me introduce you to Leopold, my brother! You, of course, can call him Marcos if that suits you better!" the girl told him.

Leopold stood up, approached Filandros, embraced him, and told him laughing:

"But my friend, it's not to slip out that you call me Dragon! Who knows what may have remained of my old self!"



Chapter 10 (in which truth and lies make a fairy tale thrice)

Are fairy tales lies or half truths? Who knows! Yet they are nice stories that leave us with good memories, and turn time back. Our story might take place nowadays or in the future.

Surely you are to ask me: “What happened next?”

You probably understood that Leopold and Mirela would have reigned nice and peacefully if the wicked Akar had not conquered their land. To be rid of them he transformed the boy into a dragon who was far from decent, and the girl into an ugly creature just to prolong their torture. Filandros was a saviour and friend for the dragon. The wise owl was the one who brought Green to Megaira’s threshold, since it was the only way for the girl to escape her pursuers. Nobody would look for her in that awful place.

You’ll answer back that I left the story without a proper end. Yet there is no end to anything. Everyone is free to make his own fairy tale, to end it at that point or continue. I’ll answer only to what I know will be your next question.

What did Green wish just before she swallowed the second water berry?

“I wish that my friends would come near me!”

That was her wish, and she did not have to think twice about making it.

And then all those slaves who worked at the garlic fields regained their memory, broke the spell, and hurried to help.

As for the third water berry all I have to say is that it remains sealed in a vase in Pamfoukia. How did it get there? Mirela decided that she did not need it any more since she had anything she could ask for. She had found her brother, herself, her kingdom; the world became serene and peaceful once more.

“As long as there is love and friendship everywhere, what more could I ask for?” she asked Filandros as they said farewell to Leopold, Spigos and Spithami, and they took the road to Pamfoukia.

“You are right!” Filandros answered clasping her hand. “Maybe we should keep the last water berry for our children; it may come in useful!”

Mirela, once called Green, laughed, and moved her hand coquettishly over her blond hair. The truth was that she had been tempted to taste the third water berry, and wish to live happily ever after with Filandros who had won her heart; yet in a strange and inexplicable way she understood that she did not need to. The prince had already made his move. Once more I am not fair; that there are still unanswered questions, like what happened to Megaira and her daughters or whether Spigos became a worthy Healer or -for the ones all eyes and ears- what are Batireas and Zinovia doing?

As I mentioned before, you can find the answers by yourselves or in case you do not wish to make your own fairy tale, maybe we'll meet again, and share more stories!

And they all lived as they should live...

Erihia



THE END



The idea of **Saita publications** emerged in July 2012, having as a primary goal to create a web space where new authors can interact with the readers directly and free.

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IN A FEW WORDS

Marcos is a dragon who can neither fly nor blow fire out of his mouth. He lives peacefully in Pamfoukia until the moment when the distant memory of the Garlic Eater Knights will lead him to the Scary Swamp. Along with Filandros, Spigos and Spithami, they have a long journey ahead of them, and many riddles to solve; who is Green and where to find her? Who grabbed the silent water, and for which reason? Why the odour of garlic is too suffocating for some people?

Will they make it in time to fight against the evil that the Scary Swamp emits?

The conflict between two extremely different worlds, the fight, the result; an allegory about the battle of good and evil, love, friendship, and compassion.

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