



# *The Fairy Hunter*

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Greek

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*Intermediate*  
*8 min read*

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

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

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

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

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

In wonder and a breathless, ecstatic fear, I strained my ears to catch what snatches I could. As the strange stories followed one another, forms, *pentamorphes*, five times beautiful, seemed to glide before me: maidens in

white with flowing, golden hair, handsome youths on horseback, chariots of cloud, seas shimmering with jewels, palaces light as foam and lovely as dew in sunshine. Oh, if I could see these things which Grandmother Adamis described! If I could hear the flute-like voices and silvery music which she said rang through the Fairy Hills!

But the fairies, it seemed, had some terrible, mysterious power. One must beware. One must not venture alone too high among the mountain tops. The fairies might—Grandmother's voice would sink to a whisper and the circle of heads draw closer about her. I could learn only that all places are safe for him who carries a loaded gun, the highest hills and even the palaces of the fairies. With this thought, as the moon paled and the dawn came and the group in the garden dispersed, I slept.

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

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

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

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

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

It remained hidden for days among the barrels in our cellar, while I cleaned and polished it a little at a time, and collected powder and shot. Finally the gun was loaded and ready, and very proudly did I set out with it across my shoulder. From the stories of Grandmother Adamis, I understood that the fairies often appeared just at noon, but I started early since it was some distance to the top of the *Nerai-dorahe*, Fairy Hill, where the

entrances to fairy palaces were said to be found. I was congratulating myself on getting away unseen, when my mother's voice called from the doorway.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"To the Neraidorahe to hunt fairies," I replied casually.

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

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

This was my chance.

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

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

In the steep, rocky slope above me were several great, black holes like yawning cavern mouths. Perhaps, I

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

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

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

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