

Vasilis Poulimenakos

The Fairy of Mani





Vasilis Poulimenakos comes from Gytheion, Mani, Greece. He lives in Chalkida, Evia, Greece and works as a civil engineer. His stories have been published on the Internet and his lyrics have been set to music by many composers. He has taken part in the digital musical book of poetry for children “For One of Your Smiles” (2009). His story “Passage to Nisyros” was awarded with distinction in the 1st story contest of the cultural magazine «Ως 3». He took part in the awarded collective e-book “Bite of writing: A dosen and three stories” with his story “Nocturnal”. He is married and has two children.

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THE FAIRY OF MANI

Short story

Translated from Greek by
Tanya Kritikou



Vasilis Poulimenakos, The Fairy of Mani

ISBN: 978-618-5040-87-1

August 2014

Original Title: Η Νεράϊδα της Μάνης

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Note: The font is offered by Aka-acid (www.aka-acid.com)



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Dedicated to my summers in Mani

She rolled to the seaside. Her body took the shape of a ball and grains of sand wrapped her and remained the indisputable witness of her presence by sticking, more and more, to her body.

Her hair was disheveled, entangled with sea scallops and embellished in a messy way with scarlet shells and black seaweeds. The waters of Porto Cayo are always hospitable and ready to welcome every dive of hers and be washed with her primitive beauty.

The Fairy of Mani lives in the caves of Inner Mani and Oitylo but her favourite beach is Porto Cayo, located in the southern neighbourhood of Cape Tainaron. For centuries in the summers you will find her hang about there.

Sometimes she stands nailed on the tall rocks, at others she basks in Armenopetra, scanning the ships which sail timidly around Cape Maleas, and sending fortunate words and smiles. Most of the times, though, she is lost into the blue waters, transforms into mermaid, finds home in the sea bottom and saunters on the earth at nights.

During the autumn, she comes back to her cave at Diros underneath Areopolis and dedicates herself to take care of her home. Her cave is full of stalactites and lakes with brackish waters. And she doesn't have only one cave but all the caves of the area have accepted and accommodated her.

If you find yourself there in September, get in, hold your breath, and listen. You will feel her warm breath like a sigh in the air and her heartbeat echoes on the walls. You will also hear drops and watery sounds piercing the silence which, truly, is her lonely swim in the cold waters.

She wasn't always alone. Her love drowned at the sea in one of his travels, and Fate endowed her with immortality and eternal beauty, by calling her "The Fairy of Mani" for consolation. So, the subterranean lake became the place where she spends her winters and Porto Cayo is her haunt during the summer.

She had thought of neither complaining nor escaping from her fate but fairies can not stand loneliness too. Besides, her beloved one got lost years ago by being a pirate, during a naval battle at Kythera, in the open sea of Mani while he was about to moor. His loss had caused her great pain.

Which mortal man would be interested in her by noticing that she remained young while he was getting old? She was ready to offer all her love and knowledge, to sacrifice her immortality only to feel the coupling and challenge of love.

All the males who come and go in her home – it's the 21st century now- are tourists that through the eyes of ignorant guides just take pictures of the beautiful nooks and clean waters of the cave, which the fairy has taken care of and polished.

Up to this time when someone left stealthily the boat, swam, and stood on a rock, at the edge of the grandiose room “The Pacific”, the fairy's living room. When the sounds of the paddles and whispers were lost, the fairy showed up from her nest and suddenly appeared in front of him. He was scared and startled.

- Who are you? he asked breathless.
- Someone who is lost or left stranded like you.
- Do you live here?
- Yes, for many years.

Then he remained speechless and astonished by her beauty and the shine stemming from her honey-coloured eyes. He couldn't say a word.

- Come, I'll show you my home.

She took him by the hand and he, being mesmerized, followed her. It was as if he was following her whole path throughout centuries. She told him her story; about her favourite places, her habits and her life. He was listening to her carefully, sucking every word like a sponge, like a

deck boy who was taught the basics. Her bed was in a nook full of corals, seaweeds and sponges.

She offered him sea-urchin salad and cockles. At first she hugged him with her hair and then with her hands. She brushed his hair like a doll. She loved him although she hadn't seen him before. She desired him like a mortal woman with the thought that love lasts for a moment. She tasted him like a sweet old wine that warms you, and then makes you drunk.

The man's family searched for him. Unfortunately for the Fairy of Mani, they found him. He never told them about her, but he kept her in his heart and since then, every summer he looks for her at the rocks and beaches of Mani, and the caves of Diros. But in vain...

Place Names

Areopolis: It is the historical capital of Mani where the Greek Revolution of 1821 started. It is very close to Diros.

Armenopetra: It is a reef at the southern end of Mani. Sailors always pay attention to the reef because it looks like a ship that sails.

Diros: Tower of Diros is a village of shady Mani, in the depths of which lies the famous “Diros Caves”. There is an underground river of 6,000 metres in total with many branches that end in the sea. The uniquely beautiful lake cave was discovered by a couple of speleologists, Ioannis and Anna Petrochilos, in 1949. People started visiting the terrestrial part in 1958. Stalactites and stalagmites in different shapes and sizes, which were created steadily but slowly throughout the centuries, embellish the caves. The room “Great Ocean”- it is mentioned as “The Pacific” in the story- is 160 metres in length and 30 metres in height with innumerable stalactites. It has the greatest depth of 15.5 metres.

Cape Maleas: It is the cape at the first peninsula of Laconia, in the area of Neapolis. It is considered to be the most dangerous passage for the ships due to its strong currents.

Kythera: It is a beautiful island underneath the area of Mani. In its sea many naval battles took place among pirate ships.

Inner Mani: Southern Mani

Oitylo: It is an important settlement. Its port is located on the route from Areopolis to Kalamata. During the Ottoman Empire it was a pirate retreat and called “The Great Algeri.”

Porto Cayo: The last port reaching the southern end of Mani. Its name “Porto Cayo” (Port aux Cailles, Porto=Port, Cayo= Quail, meaning the Port of Quails.) was a loan from the passage of many migratory birds, especially quails. The hunting of quails with a net was a tradition in the area. It was also a pirate retreat, a fishing village, an anchorage and a resort of sunny Mani.

Cape Tainaron: It is the tip of peninsula of Mani. In ancient times its inhabitants were called Tainarioi.



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