

The Origin of the Fays

Whatever discoveries poets have made concerning the gods, they have not penetrated all their secrets; human intelligence is not sufficient to develop the profound mysteries of their pleasures.

Amour having made at all times the delights of Jupiter, and secrecy being an essential part of that passion, some of his mistresses have escaped the knowledge of mortals, and only revelation has been able to substitute for that default.

Some time ago, a woman who flatters herself with being one of the favorites of Apollo was meditating profoundly about the tales of the fays that pass for chimeras. Only able to think that there was no veritable foundation to traditions so ancient, however, she remained in vision and falsity so long as she only had her own intelligence for a guide, and her application guided her insensibly to slumber. Shortly thereafter, she thought she had been woken up by the harmonies of an instrument, the sounds of which caused her sweet and extraordinary transports.

She opened her eyes, or thought she opened them, and saw that she was in a pleasant woodland, through which a stream ran over brilliant diamonds. A blond young man clad in antique drapery was playing a lyre on the bank. He had graces so spiritual and so uncommon that she recognized him as the god of verses.

She tried to throw herself at his feet, prejudiced by her erroneous belief that she was his protégée.

“Stop!” he cried to her. “Stop! Do you believe that for a few rondeaux and petty songs you are worthy to approach me and penetrate into the secrets of the gods? That’s how mortals are; their self-esteem always renders them dupes; proud of a slight talent that I tolerate in them, they behave as if I had enabled them to savor the precious waters that I reserve for my favorites.”

Apollo’s discourse astonished the dreamer greatly; she reconsidered herself, and confessed with a profound humility that her ignorance had caused her temerity until now, but that in future she would not attempt anything that surpassed her range.

“That’s how I desire you to be,” the god said to her, smiling, “and to recompense such submissive dispositions, approach; I’ll grant you a favor with which I have rarely honored your sex.”

She went on her knees to the feet of the handsome Apollo. He put a drop of the mysterious water on her lips.

“Go,” he said. “Return to mortals, and since they are unjust enough to treat fays as imaginary, I give you the ability to disabuse them; you will no sooner take up the quill than the majestic origin of those admirable women will be revealed clearly to your eyes.”

She did, indeed, wake up, very surprised to find herself in her bed, but so filled with what had just happened that she immediately started to write, and did not hesitate for a moment to compose the following story.

A few centuries after Jupiter had organized chaos he acquired a passion for a nymph, the most beautiful that there has ever been. Nothing was lacking in the regularity of her features; her figure was divine, her manner gallant and majestic; her complexion surpassed the most beautiful flowers, her laughter was gracious and her intelligence had a sublimity and a charm that it was impossible to resist.

Doubtless Nature, in order to render thanks to Jupiter for the ornaments with which he had embellished her, had made her utmost efforts to accomplish a masterpiece in the person of Ogilire, in whom the god found the recompense for his labors. He had already had several mistresses; all had succumbed to his first attacks. The conquest of Ogilire was attempted in the same fashion, but the result was different.

She would not accept the rapidity with which Jupiter wanted to take the places to which he laid siege. Although sensible to the glory of submitting to such a great god, her heart rebelled against the means of which he made use, and, sure of not succumbing unless he made use of other ways, she did not do him the honor of avoiding him.

“Great god,” she said to him one day, “I can neither dread you nor love you so long as I only see you as overwhelming Jupiter. You believe that you have only to appear in order to be victorious; learn that a young person who has virtue and who only fears the weakness of her heart is always shielded from the enterprises of the power that you value so highly, and which, after all, is worth far less than a faithful amour.

Jupiter was not accustomed to find so much resistance; he tried to make use of his power to subjugate her, like the others, but, with the eloquence and the majestic mildness that was natural to her, she was so well able to suppress the audacity of the master of the gods that he had recourse a few days later to his ordinary disguises, under which he had stolen so many favors. The amiable Ogilire was never deceived, however; always attentive to her duty, she rendered his enterprises vain, but without deterring him.

“What!” he said, finally. “A girl, a simple girl will be more powerful than me? It will not be said that, master of everything, I can surrender to her will. Let us employ other weapons, since my ruses are as futile as my grandeur.”

At that moment, he perceived Amour hidden in the foliage of a large myrtle, laughing wholeheartedly at seeing the Thunderer beside himself.

“Cruel Amour,” he cried, “lend me your aid; you know the matter in hand better than I do.”

“You’ll know as much about it,” Cupid replied, “when your heart is veritably touched. Until now, you have only had desires; you have satisfied them without delicacy, and without the sensible pleasure that one savors in the pursuit of a heart. Go,” he added, unleashing an arrow at him; “learn what sentiments are, and treat a mortal woman as if you were mortal; that is the means of savoring delights that you have not yet experienced.”

Jupiter did, in fact, feel a pleasant languor; the desire to be loved made itself sensed sharply at that fatal moment. He asked Amour to give him dispositions favorable to the beautiful Ogilire.

“I’ll take care of that,” replied Amour, “but it’s up to you now to make your destiny.”

The god thought then that he had changed his nature, that he was no longer the reckless Jupiter who only wanted possession, that he was a tender lover who wanted to please.

He went into a meadow where Ogilire was taking the air as the daylight declined. She was lying on the green grass bordering a spring. Jupiter was very handsome when he was disarmed of his thunderbolts and his eyes only wanted to emit the flashes that cause tender passion. That evening he had all the grandeur of divinity, all the charms of an amiable mortal, and all the youth that solicits amour. His costume was elegant; it is necessary to neglect nothing when one wants to succeed. He threw himself at Ogilire’s feet; he said things to her capable of surprising a heart, things of which one only thinks when one is in love, and that have their effect sooner or later when one is not dealing with a prejudiced soul.

The nymph got up when he arrived, and then sat down next to him; she listened without difficulty; for the first time, it was not without emotion. She feared the surprise of the senses, but, mistress of herself, she only allowed to escape precisely what was necessary to nourish a little hope. The god was charmed by the slight progress he had made, content with so little because he hoped for more and because he was very much in love. He returned to the heavens enchanted with his lot. Juno found him so mild toward her that she did not suspect anything, being an ignorant goddess who did not know that passions mollify the mind.

The master of the gods left the universe in repose during that amorous pursuit; he was only capable of tender cares, mild ideas and cheerful designs. At Ogilire’s feet every day, he assured her of an eternal fidelity; she had often had recourse to flight in order not to abandon herself to the penchant that was already so strong within her.

Let us hide, she said to herself, sometimes. Jupiter is amiable; he treats me with all the application of a passionate lover, but I know him only too well, and the charms of his person and those of his amour; I would no sooner be favorable to him than his delicacy would diminish; perhaps he would give me a rival, and what would my consolation be then?

Her reflections bore her footsteps to remote places, but nothing was hidden from Jupiter. “You are fleeing, cruel nymph,” he said to her one day in the depths of a wood. “You are fleeing me; do you hate me?”

At those words she turned her gaze in his direction, and he saw a delightful mixture of amour and modesty there. “Cease making vain efforts to avoid my research,” he added. “I would find you everywhere, even if I were not a god. The little blind person who is guiding me would not leave me ignorant of your whereabouts for long, and you will never have anything to combat but my amour.”

That discourse reassured the nymph; she abandoned herself to the limitless pleasure of seeing the person one loves, and her lover’s respect gradually disarmed her virtue.

At that time Briareus and his monstrous brethren made their escalade, as well as all the nations.¹ The desire to please by means of evidence of valor extracted Jupiter from the agreeable languor in which he had been living for a long time. He crushed those audacious individuals with an intrepidity worthy of his power; as for his flight into Egypt, that is a horrible slander, the authors of which have been punished with the utmost severity, although that has not been able to interrupt the course of the tradition.

Meanwhile, Ogilire sensed movements in her heart augmenting, which sometimes rendered her the happiest person in the world, and sometimes the most unfortunate. The absences that Jupiter was obliged to make in the interests of mortals caused her the most piquant woe, but his return soon calmed such cherished alarms.

For six months, already, he had been the perfect lover without having been able to obtain the slightest favor; he complained of that tenderly, but with a submission that, in leaving the power to be rigorous, gradually took away the desire.

During that time, Ogilire exercised mastery over the master of Olympus. Comus took care of her table, Momus of her amusements, Plutus of her wealth, and the Graces of her attire, but the nymph only found pleasure in the cares of her lover; because they assured her of his amour, all the rest was indifferent to her.

One day when she was with him and they were talking to one another with the confidence that creates the most touching pleasures of the union of hearts, while her lover was making her party to all the secrets of nature and pouring his heart out confidently with such a lovable mistress, they suddenly found themselves in a kind of cavern of clouds that exhaled the most delectable odors; they saw little streaks of fire that traced, in clearly legible characters: *Profit from the moment, great god; it is the time that Amour ordains.*

Jupiter and Ogilire read that precise order at the same time.

“You see,” said the god; “my submission is finally too great.”

The nymph lowered her eyes, and pretended not to have read anything; an instant later, the words disappeared and others took their place.

Recompense your divine lover, nymph; when it is time, modesty pardons you.

“Will you resist such a sacred edict?” cried the amorous Jupiter. “Is there a means to defy it?”

Immediately, the new cavern, which had previously had an opening guarded by two Amours, closed, and, its luminous obscurity—if one can speak thus—giving a little boldness to Ogilire, she extended her hand to Jupiter and allowed him to kiss it, with the transport that a first favor causes. She withdrew it afterwards, ashamed of having done so much, and called Jupiter temeritous when he complained of her rigor.

¹ In Homer and Hesiod the giant with fifty heads and a hundred hands named Briareus aided Zeus against the Titans, but in Callimachus and Virgil (the latter being the author’s likely source) he became an enemy of Zeus and one of the rebels who tried to storm Olympus. The allegation that the gods of Olympus took refuge in Egypt during the war with the Titans, where Jupiter became a ram, is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a favorite text of the first wave writers of *contes de fées*; it is most aptly construed as an allegory, and is devoid of previous mythological foundation.

That lover, confused by such a reproach, begged her pardon, and ceased his insistence. Then they heard one of the Amours burst out laughing. "Behold the god become a shepherd," he said to his comrade. "That's how he'll be used one day."

Ogilire called the Amour a libertine and a corrupter of morals, and begged Jupiter to put another in his place.

"I consent to that," replied the little mischief-maker, "but you won't be any better guarded for it."

In fact, it is known that the nymph surrendered shortly thereafter, not without being able to increase the purchase price of the most precious gifts of all.

The delight of Jupiter was such that it was sensed throughout the heavens, without any inhabitant of the celestial vault being able to penetrate the mysterious case, except for Phoebus and his sister, Diana, from whom it is impossible to conceal amorous larcenies. As for the Amours and the gods employed in Ogilire's service, they had sworn by the Styx never to reveal what they knew.

The perfect happiness of Jupiter made him more eager; his mistress had forbidden herself for so long, ambition had had no part in her defeat; amour alone, the amour that nothing can resist, had gradually engaged her in its web, and his passion was so long, so happy and so faithful that it could hardly be criticized.

"No," Jupiter said to her one day, "until now I have only had a false idea of perfect pleasure; my unregulated desires were veritably satisfied with famous beauties, but, contented as soon as amorous, I only encountered a vulgar resistance soon vanquished by an equally vulgar ruse or an insipid abandonment to my divinity, with no regard to my person. They were not felicities worthy of me, but you have guided me to the supreme felicity, charming Ogilire. What can I do to recompense you for such a great benefit?"

"Love me forever," said Ogilire. "That alone can render me more fortunate than you are; loved by a simple mortal, you cannot savor what I feel in the greater amour of the gods."

It was thus that the lovers spent their days, in hiding, or in the obscurity of a forest, or in valleys irrigated by streams; amour has always sought solitude.

Eventually, the nymph became pregnant. She had difficulty declaring it to Jupiter; her modesty was alarmed by having such a speech to make; the tears that it caused her to shed, paralyzed her with dread.

"You're weeping," he said to her, "although I love you and I swear that I love no one but you."

"Alas," she replied, "I cannot doubt that, but if you knew that fatal condition that I am in, you would understand that it is that very love which is causing my tears."

He took some time to divine the reason for such a touching affliction, but by virtue of interrogation, she revealed the important secret to him.

"You can see the state I'm in," she said to him. "If you don't take care to hide me and console me, I'll become the most unfortunate person in the world."

"As for hiding you," said the god, "you can trust me, but as for your consolation, either my power will fail or I'll do things in your favor that will render your fate very different from other mortals."

"You will have a daughter by me whose destiny will be beautiful and brilliant, and her knowledge so extensive, that she will be called a fay, a name that will be honored for centuries, and which will only fall into a kind of debasement because everything has a period, after which decadence comes; the most powerful empires experience the same fate. But a day will come when illustrious women will celebrate the fays and renew their deeds with a great deal of intelligence and art. At first those works will be regarded as the effects of a vivid and fecund imagination; then a simple mortal will learn from the god of Parnassus the veritable origin of what people would like to pass off as fables."

"I cannot hide from you that among your descendants, some will have supreme virtues and other great vices, but all of them will have a redoubtable or marvelous power. As for you, charming Ogilire, you will be the first of the sibyls, known throughout the vast universe by that famous name, and you will participate in immortality."

Thus spoke Jupiter; his mistress rendered him thanks for a prediction that flattered the nobility of her heart and was appropriate to her virtue.

She did, in fact, give birth to a divine daughter endowed with all graces and all enlightenments; she had an amiable husband, and several daughters as beautiful and enlightened as her. Everyone felt their benefits and for several centuries their posterity only applied themselves to rendering mortals happy, but, something audacious perhaps having interrupted the course of their ancestors, some were accused of crimes, others of moral libertinism. Often, their absolute power gave them the desire to use it badly. Several impulses motivated them; avarice, ambition, amour and vengeance bore them to cruel extremities.

There were a few, however, who conserved the purity of their ancestors, and in those virtue seemed to be hereditary; not only did the women of their posterity not belie it for a long time, but even the men of that lineage were favored by those precious heavenly gifts; several of them had the art of faerie, and thus were as many sage enchanters and protectors of oppressed merit. From them the eleven sibyls were born, who, with Ogilire, made up the number twelve, which has never been surpassed.

What glory to have ornamented the earth with those marvelous women, whose penetration discovered the most hidden recesses of the somber future! The purity of their life, their independence, their authority, and, above all, the precious chastity praised by all peoples, all conserved their stainless reputation until our own day. It is true that Ogilire had placed a serious crack in that last virtue, but what cannot be pardoned in a violent amour caused by the master of the gods? She soon repaired that fault by means of her harshness of her mortifications, and that famous sibyl has always been known until today as the divine Ogilire.

That digression was unavoidable, in order to accord to the reputation of those extraordinary women what is legitimately owed to them; their relatives, the good fays, did not all exercise such austere virtues, but they shone for a long time amid the darkness of the most uncouth centuries; knowledge resided in them alone, while the rest of the world languished in profound ignorance. Several of those worthy daughters of Jupiter only wanted the power to do good, and refused the gift of doing harm.

Meanwhile, they lived together in a sufficiently perfect union, the most malevolent hiding themselves from the others in order to exercise their cruelties, and as they often had great secrets to communicate to one another, they resolved to construct a superb edifice in order to be able to hold their council there on certain appointed days, to which they rendered from the four continents of the world, permitting those who were judged worthy of it to reside there. That place, so beautiful and so singular, merits description.

The Council of Fays was a fortress built in the middle of a vast plain; a large river that ran over mother-of-pearl served its moats; the surrounding area was shaded by fruit trees of every species, always laden with exquisite fruits, which travelers could pick in complete assurance because they were always replaced more abundantly as soon as they were detached.

The river could be crossed by four different bridges, which led to the gates by which the fortress was entered; those bridges were constructed of incorruptible wood, and had a delectable odor that could be sensed ten leagues around; appropriate golden figures ornamented the arches and the parapets; countless little vessels, painted and gilded, were ever-ready to set sail whenever it pleased the fays to make an excursion on the water.

The gates were emerald and their hinges gold; each of them was guarded by four animals, which allowed mortals to pass whose intentions had nothing criminal, but if any reckless individuals appeared whose desires might harm the fays, the four elephants that stood guard at one of the gates would lift them with their trunks above the edifice and hurl them on to the horn of one of the unicorns at another gate; with an inconceivable skill, she would throw them with a similar dexterity in order to deliver them to the wild boars guarding the third gate, who would plunge their tusks into their hands in such a way as to mark them for life; then the excessive pain would force them to flee such a dangerous place, but, wanting to avoid the road they had initially taken, they would go to the end of the bridge, which four lions would immediately traverse with impetuosity, in order to imprint their formidable claws on the foreheads of the unfortunate criminals; thus, without making those audacious individuals die, they were put in a state to remember their misfortunate enterprise eternally.

That vengeance was so terrible that few people risked becoming an example of it. As for honest people, we have already said that they were permitted entry, and the furious animals did not make mistakes.

When one had entered the fortress, the eye, already surprised by so much beauty, could scarcely sustain the splendor and majesty of the incomparable place. Each of its facades was composed of a hundred pavilions made of gold and enlivened in green; the casements, open all the way to the floor, were crystal, more transparent than glass, which never broke; their secret has been absolutely lost since a cruel emperor put to death the excellent artisan who had renewed it under his reign.

The balusters of those windows were alternately made of turquoise, ruby, emerald, amethyst, topaz and sapphire, cut with the greatest artistry. The pavilions were covered with burnished gold and crowned with figures of white cornelian, which represented the most beautiful fays of antiquity. As for the arcades, in which it was possible to walk under cover, they were sustained by wide gold columns enriched with brilliant diamonds. In the bas-reliefs above the arches one saw the most memorable actions of heroes, until the present century. The terrain on which one walked was of similar workmanship, which only represented flowers; the eyes were often deceived thereby, and one bent down to pick them, as if from a flower-bed.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE BOOK