

# Novalis

There is an interesting allegorical tale with definite alchemical undertones in the German romantic author Novalis' novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* which has some parallels with Goethe's *Fairy tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*.

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The long night had just commenced.

The aged Hero struck his shield so that it sounded far and wide through the empty city streets. Three times he did the same, signalling: at which the lofty stained glass windows of the palace began to brighten from within, and the figures on them moved.

Their movements quickened as the fiery light grew in strength and spread onto the streets. The great pillars and walls were also illumined gradually, standing forth, at the last, in the purest milk-blue shimmer shot through with subtle colours.

The whole region was now visible, and the reflection of the figures... the melee of lances and swords, shields and helmets, bowing down on every side to the crowns which appeared here and there, and which in turn finally withdrew and retreated before a simple green wreath, to form a wide circle around it... all this was mirrored in the frozen sea encircling the mountain on which the city stood.

The distant chain of mountains that enclosed the sea was also bathed to its roots in the soft glow. Nothing could be discerned clearly, but a strange noise echoed through the peaks as if from a far off mighty forge.

The city, by contrast, appeared bright and clear. The gorgeous rays reflected from its smooth glass-like walls and discovered the laudable symmetry and noble design of all the buildings and their pleasant allocation. Set before each window stood a fine earthenware vase filled with blossoms of snow and ice which glittered enchantingly.

Prominent above all else in splendour was the garden in the great square before the palace; a garden wrought with metal trees and crystal plants, and scattered with flower and fruit of jewel. The diversity and elegance of these forms, and the richness of light and colour, created the most sumptuous spectacle; its magnificence crowned by a lofty fountain frozen to ice at the centre of the garden. Slowly, the aged Hero passed in front of the palace gate. A voice from within called his name. He pushed against the gate, which opened with a gentle ringing sound, and stepped into the hall, holding his shield before his eyes.

"Have you discovered nothing yet?" said the beautiful daughter of Arcturus in an anguished voice. She

lay against silken cushions, upon a throne fashioned skilfully from one huge sulphur crystal, while her delicate limbs, which seemed as if they blended together the whiteness of milk with the crimson of roses, were massaged thoroughly by several maids-in-waiting. A brilliance radiated from beneath their hands, and a sweet-smelling breeze wafted through the hall.

The Hero was silent.

"Let me touch your shield," she said, softly.

He moved towards the throne and stood upon the costly carpet. She took his hand, pressed it tenderly to her heavenly breast, and touched his shield. His armour rang, and a pervasive strength re-vitalised his body. His eyes flashed, and his heart could be heard as it beat against his breastplate. The beautiful Freya seemed happier, and the light streaming from her grew more intense.

"The King approaches!" cried a splendid bird, perched in a recess of the throne. The handmaidens drew a sky-blue coverlet around the princess, arranging it above her breast. The Hero lowered his shield and looked toward the dome, from which a broad staircase wound to each side of the hall. Soft music preceded the King, who appeared soon after in the dome and descended with a numerous retinue. The splendid bird spread its dazzling wings, stirred them gently, and sang to the King as if with a thousand voices:

Soon will the noble stranger come, and Time

His endless reign begin: The warmth return!

The Queen will waken from the sway of Dream

When Earth and Sea, enjoined by Love, are one.

Once Fable has her ancient right reclaimed

The cold of Night from all this realm will leave:

In Freya's womb, the World awake enflamed,

And every lover chance upon his love.

The King embraced his daughter tenderly. The spirits of the constellations grouped themselves around the throne, and the Hero took his place among them. An infinite multitude of stars filled the hall in decorative clusters. The maids-in-waiting carried in a table and a casket holding several cards which bore holy and profound symbols formed entirely from patterns of stars. The King kissed the cards with

reverence, shuffled them carefully, and handed a part of them to his daughter. The rest he withheld for himself. The princess drew them forth, one after another, and laid them on the table. Then the King studied his own, and made his selection with great care before adding one to those others. At times he seemed compelled to choose a certain card: but often his delight was quite apparent when, by virtue of some happy circumstance, he was able to arrange the signs and symbols in a beautiful harmony.

As play began the spectators showed signs of a deep involvement and, as if each one held some invisible instrument in his hand, wielding it excitedly, they made the strangest movements and gesticulations. At the same time, a soft but soul-stirring music carried on the air; the seeming product of the stars interweaving wondrously in the hall and the other strange activities. The stars flew by, now slowly, now swiftly, in ever-changing patterns and, in keeping with the rhythms of the music, they conformed to the figures on the cards in the most skilful fashion. The music, like the symbols on the table, was in continual flux; but, despite the frequently exotic and complex transitions, a simple theme lent it the effect of unity. With astonishing grace the stars flew, echoing the patterns: Now they were all together in a dense constellation: Now disposed in beautiful clusters: Now the long processional scattered, like a beam of light, into countless sparks: Now, as they formed into smaller groups and concentrations, a vast over-all design would suddenly emerge.

Throughout this time the figures in the stained-glass windows remained still. The bird displayed his coat of dazzling feathers with endless invention. Hitherto, the aged Hero had been busy with his own, unseen work, when suddenly the King cried out in joy:

‘All will be well! Iron, cast your sword into the world, that it may know where peace is to be found.’ The Hero freed the sword at his side, held it pointing toward the sky, then took and hurled it through the open window, beyond the city and beyond the sea of ice. It sped through the air like a comet, and seemed to shatter against the circle of mountains, for it rang distantly and fell in a glitter of sparks.

At this same time, the handsome boy Eros slept peacefully in his cradle while Ginnistan, his nurse, rocked him and gave the breast to his foster-sister Fable. So that the glare of the brightly burning lamp which the Scribe had set before himself might not disturb the baby boy, she had spread her gaily coloured shawl over the cradle. The Scribe wrote tirelessly, glancing sourly at the children once in a while, and scowling darkly at the nurse. She smiled back pleasantly and kept silent.

The Father of the children came in and out continually, looking over to the babes each time, and nodding amiably to Ginnistan. He always had something to tell the Scribe who, listening with a keen attention, would note it down and then hand the pages to a noble, almost divine, woman who reclined against an altar. A dark bowl of water stood there into which she dipped the pages every time, glancing down with a contented smile. If, upon drawing them out, she perceived that certain passages held fast and shone brightly, she would give the page back to the Scribe to be fastened in a large book. Often, should his labours prove fruitless and all be washed away, he would seem disgruntled.

At times, the woman would turn to Ginnistan and the children, dip her finger in the bowl, and sprinkle

several droplets over them. As soon as they touched the nurse, the baby, or the cradle, they dispelled in a blue mist which contained a thousand intriguing visions, always changing and hovering at hand. If a droplet chanced to hit the Scribe a cascade of numbers and geometrical figures poured to the ground. Laboriously, he strung them on a thread and hung them round his neck by way of adornment.

The boy's Mother, the very incarnation of grace and charm, came in frequently. She was invariably busy and always left with some article of the household furnishings. If the suspicious Scribe, who perused her with prying glances, should chance to remark this, he started on a lengthy harangue, to which no-one paid the slightest attention. They were all, it appeared, quite accustomed to his pointless objections.

Once in a while the Mother took little Fable to her breast, but soon she would be called away once again and Ginnistan take back the child, who seemed to prefer to suck at the nurse's breast. Suddenly, the Father brought in a slender rod of iron which he had found in the courtyard. The Scribe examined it, turning it over in his hands with great excitement, and soon discovered that if suspended by a thread at its point of balance, it pointed North of its own accord. Ginnistan also took it in her hand, bent it, shaped it, breathed on it and, in a short while, fashioned it like a snake surprised in the act of biting its own tail. The Scribe soon wearied of his investigation, but recorded the facts precisely and proposed in great detail the uses this discovery might yield. How mortified he was when his entire script failed to stand the test and the page emerged blank from the bowl.

The nurse went on playing, sometimes touching the cradle with the snake. The boy would waken then, throwing back his covers, and reach with one hand for the light and with the other for the serpent. Once able to grasp it, he leapt vigorously from the cradle so that Ginnistan was startled and the Scribe almost slipped from his stool in terror. Covered only by long golden hair he stood there in the room and, delighted beyond words, gazed on the prize as it strained to the North in his hands and shook him, so it seemed, to the core of his being.

He grew visibly.

"Sophia," he said to the woman in a touching voice, "Let me drink from the bowl."

She handed it to him on the instant and he drank without halt while the bowl seemed to keep itself replenished. Finally he returned it and embraced the noble woman fervently. Hugging Ginnistan, he begged of her the brightly coloured shawl and tied it modestly around his hips. He took up little Fable in his arms. She appeared to take a great delight in his company and began to prattle. Ginnistan fussed about him. She looked exceedingly charming and alluring, and drew him to her with the eagerness of a bride. With a whispered word she led him to the chamber door, but Sophia motioned urgently and pointed to the snake. And then his Mother entered and he ran to her at once with scalding tears of welcome. The Scribe had left in a fury.

The Father came in, and when he saw mother and son in their silent embrace he passed behind them toward the seductive Ginnistan and caressed her. Sophia climbed the stair. Little Fable took up the

Scribe's pen and began to write. Mother and son were deep in whispered conversation, and the Father stole away to a chamber with Ginnistan, to restore himself in her arms after the day's labour. At length Sophia returned, and the Scribe entered. The Father left the chamber and went back to his work. Ginnistan came in with flushed cheeks. In a torrent of abuse the Scribe drove little Fable from the stool, and found that it took some time to put his effects in order. He handed the leaves that Fable had written to Sophia, thinking to get them back quite clean, but flared at once into high dudgeon when Sophia retrieved the pages from the bowl and laid them before him shining and unscathed. Fable held close to her Mother, who comforted her and then swept out the room, opened the windows, let in fresh air and began to prepare an appetising meal.

Through the windows one could contemplate the finest of views, and a clear sky stretching over the earth. In the courtyard the Father worked busily. Whenever he tired he looked up to the casement where Ginnistan stood throwing all manner of sweetmeats down to him. The Mother and son assisted everywhere, making their preparations for the plan they had conceived. The Scribe scratched away with his pen, grimacing sourly if ever he needed recourse to Ginnistan, whose memory was exceptional and retained all that had happened.

Presently Eros arrived, clad in superb armour, with the gaily coloured shawl tied round it like a sash, and asked for Sophia's advice concerning how and when he should embark upon his journey. The Scribe interposed at once and hurriedly offered a detailed itinerary, but his proposals were ignored.

"You may start your journey immediately, with Ginnistan for a companion," said Sophia. "She is acquainted with the road and well-known everywhere. She will assume the semblance of your Mother, in order to keep you from temptation. If you find the King, think of me and I will come to help you."

Ginnistan and the Mother exchanged forms, thus giving, it seemed, great pleasure to the Father. The Scribe was happy that the pair were leaving, especially as Ginnistan made him a farewell gift of her pocket-book in which the history of the house was recorded in detail. Only little Fable remained as a thorn in his flesh; for the sake of peace and quiet he could have wished for nothing better than to number her among those departing. Sophia spoke a blessing as they knelt before her and gave them a vessel filled with water from the bowl to carry on their journey.

The Mother was extremely anxious. Little Fable wished to go as well; but the Father, too involved outside the house, took little interest in the leave-taking. It was night, and the moon was overhead, when they left on their travels.

"Dear Eros," said Ginnistan, "we must hurry to reach my father; it is a long time since he saw me last, and he has searched for me tirelessly across the face of the earth. Do you see his pale face lined with grief? Your testimony will make me known to him in this unfamiliar body."

Eros took the paths of night

By the pallid Moon espied:

All in rarest gem bedight

The realm of Shadow opened wide.

Covered with a mist of blue

Hemmed with a golden seam,

He followed Fancy as she drew

Him over land and stream.

Courage filled the panting breast;

The youthful heart, desire:

Future joy upon him pressed

And fed his growing fire.

Yearning wept, all unaware

That Love came on apace:

Lines of tearfulness and care

Deepened on her face.

The little snake was true and firm

And pointed to the North.

They followed, with no fear of harm,

The guide that led them forth.

Through desert and the clouds' demesne

The cheerless path of Eros ran,

'Til he before the Moon was seen,

Hand in hand with Ginnistan.

The Moon sat on his silver throne,

Torn by grief, and set apart:

But when his daughter's voice was known

He drew her to his heart.

Eros stood by, deeply touched at their affectionate embraces. The old man, profoundly shaken, finally recollected himself and welcomed his guest. He seized a great horn and blew upon it with all his might, sounding a tremendous call throughout the primeval castle. The pointed towers, with their glistening gargoyles and steep black roofs, trembled. The castle came to rest; for it had passed over to the mountains beyond the sea. Servants swept in from every side. Their strange appearance and attire did not unnerve brave Eros, and to Ginnistan they were a source of great delight. She greeted her old acquaintances and they assembled before her with fresh heart, each, in accord with its nature, exulting.

The boisterous spirit of High Tide followed on gentle Ebb. Ancient Hurricanes lay down on the throbbing breasts of fiery, passionate Earthquakes. Showers of fine Rain searched for the many-coloured Rainbow who stood there paling, away from the Sun which holds a greater attraction for him. Berating the foolishness of young Lightnings, Thunder growled from behind innumerable Clouds which hovered in thousand fold charm and urged on the fiery youngsters. The two lovely sisters, Morning and Eve, took especial joy in the arrival of the two visitors and wept quietly as they embraced them. Words could not convey the spectacle of this strange retinue. The old king did not tire of gazing on his daughter. She felt a tenfold happiness in her father's castle, and never wearied of watching the familiar marvels and rarities. When the king gave her the key to his Treasure House, and granted her permission to arrange an entertainment for Eros, to divert him until the signal was given to retire, her joy was inexpressible.

The Treasure House was an extensive garden which, in variety and wealth, defied description. Among the imposing weather-trees stood countless fantastical castles of awesome design, each one surpassing the last. Everywhere there roamed large flocks of sheep with silver-white, golden and rose-coloured fleece, and the strangest creatures peopled the grove. Remarkable tableaux stood here and there and the attention was caught constantly by festive processions and strange vehicles which appeared everywhere. The flower-beds were full of the brightest blossoms, and the buildings piled high with all manner of weaponry; filled with the richest of rugs and tapestries; curtains, drinking bowls and every type of utensil and tool in an endless array. From a height they looked out upon a romantic country studded with cities and castles, temples and sepulchres: All the charm of inhabited plains offered alongside the

fearful attraction of wastes and towering mountains. The most beautiful colours were shown in the happiest blends. The mountain peaks flared like beacons in their caps of snow and ice. The plains rejoiced in freshest green. The distance was clothed in every shade of blue, and on the dark face of the sea there fluttered multi-coloured pennants from innumerable fleets. Here, in the background, a shipwreck could be seen, and in the foreground jovial peasants intent on a rustic meal: There, the sublime eruption of a volcano and the ravages of an earthquake: Here, lovers caressing fondly in the shade of trees. On one side, a fearsome battle, and below it an arena filled with absurd masqueraders: In another quarter of the foreground, an inconsolable lover gripping the corpse of a youth on a bier, with the weeping parents close by: In the distance, a fond mother with a baby at her breast and angels sitting at her feet or gazing down from the branches overhead.

The scenes changed continually and finally transformed into one vast mystic spectacle. Heaven and Earth were reduced to Chaos. All horrors had broken loose. A mighty voice gave the alarm. Ghastly multitudes of skeletons with black banners came down like a storm from the dark mountains and attacked Life which, in youthful congregations, was involved in joyous festivity on the plain, foreseeing no attack. An awful confusion raged: The Earth trembled: The storm roared, and the night was lit by the glare of frightful meteors. With unimaginable cruelty the army of spectres tore the young limbs of the living apart. A funeral pyre was erected and, amid the most fearful lamentations, the children of Life were consumed by the flames. Suddenly, from the heap of black ash, a milky-blue stream sprang forth in all directions. The spectres made to flee, but the flood grew visibly and engulfed the hideous brood. Soon each horror was destroyed. Heaven and Earth commingled in sweet music. A beautiful, wondrous flower gleamed and floated on the gentle waves. A shining bow arched over the waters, peopled on either side with god-like beings seated on resplendent thrones. At the zenith sat Sophia holding the bowl in her hand and, beside her, a forceful man with a wreath of oak-leaves in his hair and a palm of peace carried in place of a sceptre in his right hand. A lily leaf dipped over the calyx of the floating flower and upon it sat little Fable singing the sweetest songs to the accompaniment of her harp. In the bowl of the flower lay Eros himself, bent over a beautiful, sleeping maiden who held him tightly in her arms. A smaller blossom closed over them, so that below the waist they appeared transformed into a flower.

The enraptured Eros thanked Ginnistan profusely. He took her lovingly in his arms, and she returned his caresses. Exhausted by the rigours of the journey and the great variety of the scenes he had witnessed, he longed for comfort and rest. Ginnistan, who felt warmly attracted to the handsome youth, was careful to make no mention of the water Sophia had given him to carry. She led him to a distant bathing place, took off his armour, and arrayed herself in a night-gown in which she looked mysterious and seductive. Eros plunged into the stormy waves and emerged exultant. Ginnistan dried him and rubbed his strong limbs which were taut with youthful freshness. In the heat of desire he recalled his beloved and, in sweet delusion, embraced the alluring Ginnistan. Without further thought he succumbed to a heedless passion and at last, after the most voluptuous delights, he fell asleep on her enchanting breast.

During this time a sad transformation had come about at home. The Scribe had enlisted the servants in a dangerous conspiracy. His hostile mind had long sought the opportunity to take control of the household management and to relieve himself of his burdens. He had discovered it. Firstly his underlings seized the Mother and put her in chains of iron. The Father was held likewise, kept on bread and water. Little

Fable heard the uproar in the room. She crept behind the altar and, discovering a secret door in its rear side, managed with great skill to open it and find a stairway leading down inside. She pulled the door closed behind her and climbed down the steps in darkness. The Scribe burst violently into the chamber to revenge himself on little Fable and to take Sophia captive. Neither was to be found. The bowl was also missing. In his fury he shattered the altar in a thousand pieces without, however, remarking the secret stairway.

Little Fable descended for quite some time. Finally she emerged into an open courtyard enclosed by a majestic colonnade and shut off by a huge gate. Everything was dark here. The air was like a monstrous shadow: Black rays beamed from a body in the sky. All the forms were clearly distinguishable, since each object presented a different shade of black and cast a faint radiance behind. It seemed that light and shade had reversed their roles here. Fable was delighted to be in this novel world. She examined everything with childlike curiosity. At last she came to the gate before which, on a massy pedestal, there lay a beautiful Sphinx.

"What is it you seek?" said the Sphinx.

"My own inheritance," replied Fable.

"Where do you come from?"

"From ancient times."

"You are still a child."

"And shall stay a child forever."

"Who will stand by you?"

"I stand alone. Where are the Sisters?" asked Fable.

"Everywhere and nowhere," answered the Sphinx.

"Do you know me?"

"Not yet."

"Where is Love?"

"In the imagination."

"And Sophia?"

The Sphinx muttered inaudibly to herself and rustled her wings.

"Sophia and Love!" cried Fable triumphantly, and passed through the gate.

She stepped into an awesome cavern and went cheerfully towards the ancient Sisters who plied at their mysterious labour by the miserly light of a lamp which gave forth darkness. They pretended ignorance of their small visitor, who moved busily from one to another with sweet endearments. Finally one of them, eyeing her askint, croaked in a harsh voice:

"What do you want here, you n'er-do-well? Who lets you in? Your childish prancing disturbs this steady flame and the oil is used up to no purpose. Can you not be seated and find some work?"

"Dear kinswoman," said Fable, " It matters little to me if I am idle. I really had to laugh at your doorkeeper. She would have like to hug me to her breast, but she must have eaten too much: She was unable to stand. Let me sit beyond the door and give me something to spin: I cannot see very well here and, what is more, I need leave to sing and chatter, and that might disturb you in your profound meditations."

"You shall not go outside, but, in the side room a ray of light from the upper world breaks through a crack in the rocks. You may spin there if you have skill enough. There are great heaps of scraps and oddments here. Twist them together. But be wary; if you are lackadaisical, or if the thread snaps, then the twine will bind you and strangle you."

The old woman chuckled maliciously and continued her spinning. Fable gathered an armful of threads, took a distaff and spindle, and skipped singing into the side room. She looked through the crevice and saw the constellation of Phoenix. Pleased with this good omen she began to spin joyfully and, with the door left ajar, sang in a quiet voice:

Children of the past,

Within your cells awake:

Leave the beds of rest,

For soon the dawn will break.

I weave your threads of life

Into one web alone!

Farewell, the years of strife:

Your being shall be one!

Each in the other dwell

And, in the one, live all:

One heart within you swell:

One breath arise and fall.

Sorcery and Dream

And things of Spirit yet,

Into the cavern stream:

The holy Sisters fret!

The spindle whirled with unbelievable proficiency between her little feet while she twisted the slender thread with both hands. As she sang, numerous tiny flames appeared slipping through the opening in the door and swarming through the cavern in the semblance of hideous spectres. The old crones meanwhile, had kept on with their spinning in a bad temper, waiting for the abject cries of little Fable; how terrified they were when, without warning, a monstrous nose peered over their shoulders and, on looking around, they saw the entire cavern filled with grotesque beings bent on every kind of mischief. The Sisters clung to each other, wailing in fearful chorus, and would have turned to stone from sheer fright had not the Scribe entered the cavern at this moment bearing a mandrake root. The tiny flames withdrew into the cleft in the rock and, because the black lamp had been overturned in the confusion and extinguished, the cavern itself became bright. The old hags were pleased when they heard the Scribe approaching, but filled with hatred for little Fable. They called her forth, snarled fiercely at her, and forbade her to spin anymore. The Scribe sneered complacently because he thought that little Fable was now in his power and he said:

"It is fortunate that you are here and can be put to work. I hope that there will be no lack of punishments. Your good genius guided you here. I wish you long life and great satisfaction."

"I thank you for your good wishes," said Fable. "It seems apparent that the day is yours. All you require is an hourglass and scythe to look just like the brother of my kinswomen here. If you should ever have need of goose-quills, just pluck a handful of that soft down from your cheeks."

The Scribe seemed on the point of attacking her, but she smiled and said:

"If you value that fine heads of hair and your bright eyes, be careful and consider my nails; you have little else to lose."

Suppressing his rage he turned to the Sisters who were wiping their eyes and groping for their distaffs; for, since the lamp had been extinguished, they could find nothing and so heaped insults on Fable.

"Give her leave to catch Tarantulas for the preparation of your oil," he said cunningly. "I am happy to tell you, by way of consolation, that Eros flies about ceaselessly and will keep your shears in good use. His Mother, who so often forced you to spin the threads longer, will fall a prey to the flames tomorrow."

When he saw that Fable shed a few tears at this news, he tickled himself to induce laughter and, handing part of the root to the old crones, he walked away with his nose in the air. With angry voices the Sisters ordered Fable to search out Tarantulas, albeit they kept a store of oil, and she hurried away. She pretended to open the gate but, instead, slammed it shut noisily and slipped silently to the back of the cavern where a ladder hung down. She climbed it rapidly and soon reached a trapdoor which opened on the chamber of Arcturus.

The King sat surrounded by his counsellors when Fable appeared. The Northern Crown graced his head. In his left hand he held the Lily, in his right hand the Scales. The Eagle and the Lion sat at his feet.

"Monarch," said Fable, as she bowed to him respectfully: "Hail to your well-founded throne! Glad news for your suffering heart! A speedy return of Wisdom! An eternal awakening to peace! Rest to restless love! Transfiguration of the heart! Long life to antiquity and form to futurity!"

The King touched her with the Lily on her guileless brow.

"Whatever you ask will be granted you."

"I will ask three times. When the fourth time comes, Love will be at the door. Now, give me the Lyre."

"Eridanus! Bring it here!" cried the King.

Eridanus streamed from the ceiling with a rushing sound, and Fable drew the Lyre from his sparkling waters.

Several times Fable sounded the Lyre prophetically. The King ordered a goblet to be passed to her. She drank a little from it and then, with many expressions of thanks, hastened away. She glided across the sea of ice in beautiful curves and sweeps, invoking a joyous music from the strings. Beneath her feet the ice gave forth the most glorious sounds. The Rock of Grief took them for the voices of his returning children searching out their way and answered with a thousand-fold echo.

Fable soon arrived at the shore. She met with her mother, who looked haggard and wan, and had become thin and solemn, revealing in her noble features traces of hopeless sorrow and touching faith.

"What has happened to you, dear mother?" said Fable. "You appear to have changed completely. But for my intuition I would not have recognised you. I had hoped to refresh myself once again at your breast. I have pined a long time for you."

"I thought from the first," she said, "that the Scribe would not catch you. The sight of you restores me. My circumstances are wretched and poor enough but I shall soon find consolation. Perhaps a moment of rest will fall to me. Eros is close by: If he sees you and you distract him with idle conversation perhaps he will stay for a while. In the meantime, you may come to my breast. I will give you what I have."

She took the little one upon her lap, gave her the breast and, as she smiled down on the child enjoying her refreshment, continued:

"It is I who am to blame for the wildness and inconstancy of Eros. Yet I cannot regret it, for the hours that I spent in his arms have made me immortal. I thought I would melt away beneath his fiery caresses. Like a god-like brigand it seemed as if he wished to destroy me cruelly and to triumph proudly over his quivering prey. We awoke late from our forbidden frenzy in a state of curious transformation. Long silver-white wings covered his pale shoulders and hid the delicious fullness and curves of his body. The power which had surged to speed his growth from boy to youth seemed to have passed into those splendid wings, as he had become a boy again. The constant ardour of his face was transformed into the wayward fire of a will-of-the-wisp, his profound earnestness into artful roguery, his thoughtful calm into childish whimsicality, his noble poise into clownish restlessness.

"I was drawn irresistibly to this wilful boy by a powerful compulsion, and felt keenly his mocking smiles and indifference to my pitiable entreaties. I saw my aspect change. My carefree contentment disappeared and gave way to a sad affliction, a sensitive timidity. I would have preferred to conceal myself with Eros from the eyes of the world. I did not have the courage to meet his quizzical gaze and felt horribly shamed and humiliated. I thought of nothing but him and would have sacrificed my life to deliver him from his hurtful ways. Yet I could only adore him, however deeply he might wound my feelings.

"Since the time when he arose and deserted me, however touchingly I called on him with burning tears to remain, I have followed him everywhere. He seems fully determined to torment me. Hardly do I catch up with him when away he flies, maliciously. His bow plants confusion everywhere. Although in need of comfort myself I can do nothing but comfort the unhappy ones. The voices which cry to me point out his way and their woeful lamentation when I am forced to leave them cuts me to the heart. The Scribe pursues us in a terrible fury and vents his spite on the wretched stricken ones.

"The fruit of that strange night was a host of mysterious children who resemble their grandfather and

who take their name from him. Winged like their father they accompany him constantly and torment the poor creatures who are struck by his arrows.

"But here comes the procession of the happy ones. I must leave. Farewell, sweet child. His nearness fires my passion. May you prosper in your undertaking."

Eros swept by without so much as a friendly glance for Ginnistan, who hastened towards him. But he turned to Fable amiably and his small companions danced happily around her. Fable was delighted to see her foster-brother again and sang a merry song to the accomplishment of her Lyre. Eros seemed to verge upon reflection and let fall his bow. The little ones fell asleep on the grass. Ginnistan was able to hold him, and he suffered her tender caresses. Finally, Eros himself began to sway, nestled in Ginnistan's lap, and drifted into slumber, covering her with his wings. The weary Ginnistan was filled with joy and never took her eyes away from the handsome sleeper.

During the singing, Tarantulas appeared on every side, drawing a glittering net over the blades of grass and moving nimbly along their threads in time to the rhythm. At this point Fable comforted her mother and promised her help soon. The music echoed softly from the cliff: A lullaby for those who slept. Ginnistan sprinkled a few droplets from the closely guarded vessel and the sweetest dreams descended on them. Fable took the vial and proceeded on her journey. The strings of her Lyre were never stilled and the Tarantulas followed the enchanting sounds on hastily spun thread.

Presently she saw the leaping flames of the funeral pyre in the distance, towering above the green forest. Sadly, she looked up to the sky and was heartened to catch a sight of Sophia's blue veil which floated and swirled over the earth, covering the vast depths eternally. The Sun hung in the sky, fiery red with anger; but the powerful flame sucked at the light and stole it and, however hard the Sun tried to hold its own, it grew paler and more flecked. The conflagration became white and intense as the Sun went into its decline. It drew off the light with increasing power and soon the glory of the daystar was consumed and it remained merely as a faint glowing disc whose every convulsion of envy and rage hastened the flight of the escaping rays of light. Finally nothing was left of the sun but a black, burnt-out cinder, which fell into the sea. The flame had become brilliant beyond words. The funeral pyre was consumed. The flame lifted slowly and moved towards the North.

Fable went into the courtyard, which looked desolate: The house, also, was fallen into ruin. Briars grew from the cracks in the window ledges and all manner of vermin swarmed over the fallen stairways. In the chamber she heard a fearful uproar. The Scribe and his followers had been gloating over the Mother's death in the flames, but were now in an awful panic witnessing the destruction of the Sun.

They had striven in vain to quell the flame and had not escaped without injury from their enterprise. Pain and fear drew fearsome curses and lamentations from them. Their terror increased when Fable stepped into the room and they rushed at her with cries of rage in order to vent their fury on her. Fable slipped behind the cradle and her pursuers rushed blindly into the web of the Tarantulas, which took vengeance on them with countless bites. The whole assembly began at once to dance wildly; at which

Fable played a sprightly tune. Laughing roundly at their ludicrous antics she walked to the altar and cleared the ruins to uncover the hidden stairway, down which she passed with her retinue of Tarantulas.

The Sphinx asked: "What strikes more suddenly than lightning?"

"Vengeance," said Fable.

"What is most transitory?"

"Wrongful possession."

"Who knows the world?"

"He who knows himself."

"What is the eternal mystery?"

"Love."

"With whom does it reside?"

"With Sophia."

The Sphinx drew back abjectly and Fable entered the cavern.

"I have brought Tarantulas for you," she said to the old Sisters, who had lit their lamp again and were very busy at their work. They started with fear, and one of them ran to her to stab her with the shears. Inadvertently, she stepped on a Tarantula which stung her in the foot. She screamed piteously. The others attempted to help her and were likewise stung by the enraged Tarantulas. Hereafter they could not lay hands upon Fable, but sprang about wildly.

"Spin us light dancing clothes at once," they cried furiously to the little girl. "We cannot move in these stiff skirts and we are stifling in the heat. But be sure to soak the thread in spider-juice so that it will not snap. And weave into it flowers that have grown in fire, otherwise your life is forfeit."

"Gladly," said Fable, and stepped into the side room.

"I will bring you three choice flies," she said to the garden spiders which had fastened their delicate webs all around the ceiling and walls. "But first you must spin me three light and pretty dresses. I will fetch the flowers that are to be woven into them at once."

The garden spiders were willing and began to weave rapidly. Fable stole across to the ladder and made here way to Arcturus.

"Monarch," she said. "The wicked are dancing and the good rest. Has the flame arrived?"

"It has arrived," said the King. "The night is passed and the ice is melting. My consort can be seen in the distance: She who was my enemy is burned. Everything begins to live. I may not show myself yet, for by myself I am no King. Ask what you will."

"I need," said Fable, "flowers that have grown in fire. I understand you have a skilful gardener who knows how to grow them."

"Zinc!" cried the King. "Give us flowers!"

The flower gardener came forward from the ranks, brought a pot full of fire, and sowed it with gleaming pollen. In a short while the flowers sprang up. Fable gathered them in her apron and started back. The spiders had worked hard and nothing remained but to fasten on the flowers; a task which they undertook at once with taste and skill. Fable was careful not to snap the ends of the threads which still held to the weavers.

She carried the dresses through to the exhausted dancers, who had collapsed, dripping with perspiration, to recover awhile from their novel exertions. With great dexterity she undressed the scrawny beauties, who were not without abuse for their little handmaid, and clothed them in the new garments which were neatly made and fitted perfectly. While thus occupied, she praised the charm and sweet disposition of her mistresses, and the crones were well pleased with her flattery and the daintiness of the dresses. They had found their breath again, meanwhile, and inspired by a fresh desire to dance they whirled around jauntily, artfully promising the young child a long life and great reward.

Fable went into the side room and addressed the garden spiders: "You may now feast on the flies I have put into your webs."

The spiders were already impatient with the pulling and tugging, for the ends of the threads were still inside them and the old crones leapt about wildly, so they ran out and fell upon the dancers. The old women looked to defend themselves with their shears but Fable had silently made away with them. As a result, they succumbed to their hungry fellow-craftsmen, who had not tasted such delicious fare for a long time and sucked them to the very marrow. Fable looked up through the cleft in the rock and caught sight of Perseus with his mighty iron shield. The shears flew to the shield of their own accord, and Fable requested him to clip Eros' wings with them, and then to immortalise the Sisters with his shield and so finish his great work. She then left the subterranean realm and ascended joyously to the palace of Arcturus.

"The Flax is spun: The lifeless is again without Life: The living will rule, shaping and using the lifeless:

The inward will be revealed and the outward hidden: The curtain will rise soon and the play commence. I shall petition you once more, and then spin days of eternity."

"Blessed child," said the Monarch, touched. "You are our liberator."

"I am merely the godchild of Sophia," said the little girl. "Grant that Turmaline, the flower gardener, and Gold may accompany me. I must gather up the ashes of my foster-mother, and the ancient Bearer must rise again so that the Earth may float and not lie upon Chaos."

The King summoned all three and commanded them to attend on little Fable. The city was bright and the streets were bustling. The sea broke with a roar against the hollow crags and Fable travelled across in the Kings' chariot with her companions. Turmaline gathered the flying ashes carefully. They circled the Earth until they reached the old Giant, down whose shoulders they climbed. He seemed to be paralysed by a stroke and could not move a limb. Gold placed a coin in his mouth and the flower gardener thrust a bowl below his loins. Fable touched his eyes and emptied her small jug on his brow. As soon as the water had flowed over his eyes, into his mouth, and down his body into the bowl, a spark of life quivered through all his muscles. He opened his eyes and drew himself up vigorously. Fable sprang back to join her companions on the rising Earth and bade him a friendly good morning.

"Are you here once again, dear child?" said the old Giant. "I have dreamed of you time and again. I had always thought you would appear before the Earth any my eyes grew too heavy for me. I must have been sleeping for a long time."

"The Earth is light again, as it always has been for the good," said Fable. "The ancient times are returning. Soon you will be amongst old acquaintances. I shall spin happy days for you, and you will not be without a helper, moreover, so that you may sometimes share in our joys, and breathe youth and strength in the arms of a lover. Where are our old, generous friends, the Hesperides?"

"At Sophia's side. Soon their garden will bloom again and the golden fruits send forth their fragrance. Even now they move about and gather the drooping plants."

Fable departed and hurried to the house. It had fallen into complete ruin. Ivy grew over the walls. High bushes cast their shade on the former courtyard and soft moss cushioned the ancient stairways. She entered the room. Sophia was standing by the resurrected altar. Eros lay at her feet in full armour, looking grave and nobler than ever before. A magnificent chandelier hung from the ceiling. The floor was paved with a variety of stone, and a wide circle, consisting entirely of noble and apposite figures, was inlaid around the altar. Ginnistan was bending over a bier on which the Father lay, apparently in deep sleep. She was weeping. Her bloom of sweetness was infinitely enhanced by this evidence of devotion and love. Fable offered the urn, in which the ashes were collected, to the holy Sophia who took it tenderly in her arms.

"Sweet child," she said. "Your zeal and loyalty have won a place for you among the eternal stars. You

chose that part of you which is immortal. The Phoenix belongs to you. You will be the soul to our life. Rouse the bridegroom now. The herald will call and Eros must seek out Freya and awaken her."

Fable was indescribably happy to hear these words. She called her companions, Gold and Zinc, and approached the bier. Ginnistan followed their actions expectantly. Gold melted a coin and filled the hollow in which the father lay with a glittering flood. Zinc wound a chain around Ginnistan's breast. The body floated on the shimmering waves.

"Bend down, dear mother," said Fable, "and lay your hand on the heart of your beloved."

Ginnistan leant forward. She saw her reflection multiplied many times. The chain touched the waves, her hand his heart. He awoke and drew the enraptured bride to his bosom. The metal was becalmed and became a bright mirror. The Father rose, his eyes flashed and, handsome and regular as his form was, his whole body seemed nonetheless to be an exquisite infinitely mobile liquid which revealed each impression by the most sensitive movements.

The happy pair approached Sophia who pronounced blessing over them and admonished them to take due counsel of the mirror, which reflected everything in its true state, destroyed all illusion and held fast eternally to the primal archetypes. She then took up the urn and emptied the ashes into the bowl on the altar. A gentle turbulence signalled their dissolution and a light breeze ruffled the garments and tresses of the bystanders.

Sophia handed the bowl to Eros, who passed it to the others. All partook of the divine drink and, with ineffable joy, were inwardly aware of the Mother's friendly greeting. She was there in all, and here mysterious presence seemed to transfigure everyone.

Their expectation was fulfilled and surpassed. They perceived what hitherto they had lacked, and the room became an assembly of the blessed. Sophia said: "The great mystery has been revealed to all, and yet remains eternally unfathomed. The new world is born from suffering and the ashes are dissolved in tears to become the drink of eternal life. The heavenly Mother dwells in everyone, in order that each child be born eternally. Do you feel the sweet birth in the beating of your hearts?"

She poured the remnants in the bowl down into the altar. The Earth quaked in its depths. Sophia said: "Eros, hasten with your sister to your beloved. You will see me again presently."

Fable and Eros hurried away with their companions.

A mighty springtime had spread across the Earth. Everything rose up and stirred. The Earth floated closer beneath the veil. The moon and clouds moved Northwards in joyful turmoil. The castle of the King shone with radiant splendour over the sea, and the King stood at the parapet with his retainers in all his magnificence. Everywhere they could see whirlwinds of dust in which familiar figures seemed to be forming. They met numerous bands of youths and maidens who streamed to the castle and welcomed

them with shouts of delight. On many a hill sat a happy, newly-risen couple in a long-awaited embrace, taking the new world for a dream and ceaselessly reassuring themselves of the beautiful truth.

The flowers and trees grew, putting forth greenery with all their might. Everything was renewed in spirit. Everyone talked and sang. Fable greeted old acquaintances everywhere. Animals drew near to the awakened humans in friendly deference, and plants waited on them with fruit and fragrance, adorning them most prettily. No stone lay any longer on a human heart, and every burden fell away to form a solid footing.

Fable and Eros came to the sea. A barque of polished steel was moored by the shore. They went on board and slipped the rope. The prow turned itself to the North, and the vessel cut through the dallying waves as if it were flying. Whispering reeds checked the headlong flight, and it touched gently ashore.

They hurried up the broad steps. Eros marvelled at the regal city and its treasures. The fountain, come to life again, played in the courtyard: The grove murmured with the sweetest music, and a wondrous life seemed to wake and pulse through its ardent stems and leaves, its fruits and brilliant flowers. The aged Hero received them at the gates of the palace.

"Venerable ancient," said Fable. "Eros has need of your sword. Gold has given him a chain, one end of which reaches down to the sea, whilst the other winds about his heart. Take hold of it with me, and lead us into the hall where the princess rests."

Eros took the sword from the Hero's hand, placed the hilt against his breast, and set the point forward. The double doors of the hall flew open and Eros approached the sleeping Freya in ecstasy. Suddenly there was a crash of thunder. A glowing spark leapt from the princess to the sword; the sword and chain grew bright. The Hero caught up little Fable, who was close to fainting. The plume of Eros' helmet waved erect.

"Cast down the sword," cried Fable, "and awaken your beloved."

Eros let the sword fall, flew to the princess, and kissed her sweet lips passionately. She opened her large, dark eyes and recognised her beloved. A long kiss sealed the eternal union.

The King descended from the dome, leading Sophia by the hand. The constellations and the spirits of Nature followed in glittering ranks. Inexpressibly bright daylight filled the hall, the palace, the city, and the sky. A countless throng crowded into the wide, royal hall and in silent reverence watched the lovers kneel before the King and Queen, who blessed them solemnly. The King took from his head a diadem and set it on the golden locks of Eros. The aged Hero dismantled Eros' armour and the King wrapped his cloak around him. Then he placed the Lily in his left hand and Sophia fastened a rich bracelet over the clasped hands of the lovers. At the same time, she set her crown to Freya's brown hair.

"Hail to our sovereigns of old!" the people cried: "They dwelt among us always, and we did not know

them! Blessings upon us! They will reign over us for ever! Bless us also!"

Sophia said to the new Queen: "Cast the bracelet of your union into the air so that the people and the world may remain united with you."

The bracelet dissolved on the air, and presently, circlets of light could be seen around every head, and a shining aureole formed over the city and the sea and the Earth, which celebrated an eternal festival of spring.

Perseus entered, carrying a spindle and a small basket. He presented the basket to the new King. "Here," he said, "are the remains of your enemies." Within it lay a slab of stone, in squares of black and white, and beside it a number of figures of alabaster and black marble.

"It is a chess set," said Sophia. "All war is conjured onto this board and into these pieces. It is a memorial of the past, fraught times."

Perseus turned to Fable and gave her the spindle.

"In your hands this spindle will delight us for ever, and from your own being you will spin an unbreakable golden thread for us."

The Phoenix flew with a melodious sound to her feet and spread its wings before her, whereupon Fable mounted and it soared with her above the throne and hovered there. She sang a heavenly song and began to spin: Thread which seemingly unwound from her own breast. The people succumbed to further ecstasy and all eyes fastened on the sweet child. A fresh shout of joy came from those by the door. The old Moon entered with his strange retinue, and behind him the people bore Ginnistan and her bridegroom in a triumphal entry.

They were garlanded with flowers. The regal family received them with the most heartfelt tenderness, and the new royal couple proclaimed them their regents on Earth.

"Grant me," said the Moon, "the realm of the Fates, whose strange dwellings are at this moment newly risen in the courtyard of the palace. There I will delight you with festivities, in which Fable shall aid me."

The King granted his request; Fable nodded her assent; and the people looked forward with pleasure to the odd and entertaining diversions.

The Hesperides congratulated the new monarchs on their accession and asked for protection in their gardens. The King made them welcome, and countless joyful ambassadors came likewise in their turn. At the same time, the throne had changed imperceptibly into a magnificent bridal bed, over whose canopy hovered the Phoenix with little Fable. Three caryatids of dark porphyry held up the rear, whilst

the front was borne on a sphinx of basalt.

The King embraced his blushing beloved, and the people, following the King's example, embraced each other. Nothing could be heard but sweet endearments and the whisper of kisses.

Finally Sophia said: "The Mother is among us. Her presence will gladden us for ever. Follow us into our dwelling: There, in the temple, we shall dwell eternally and guard the mystery of the world."

The empire of Eternity is founded;

In Love and Peace all opposition ended.

Gone forever is the woeful dream of pain:

Sophia, priestess of all hearts, will ever reign.