

NICOLAE FILIMON 1819–1865



*In his youth, he was a peculiar figure among the bohemians of Bucharest. An intelligent, industrious and educated man, Filimon published many newspaper articles, feuilletons, translations, musical and theatrical reviews, writings on the history of music, and travel notes that reveal a subtle sightseer; and at the same time he counts among the first folktale collectors in Romania. His constant vocation was musical criticism, but he was also a pioneer of the Romanian novel, with *Upstarts*, *Old and New*: a praiseworthy author; in the words of contemporary fellow writer Ion Ghica, he remains a cultivated, analytic and sober spirit.*

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nce upon a time there were a king and queen, both young and good-looking, but they could not have children.

One day, a moor with pouted lips came to the king and said:

“Hail to you, your highness! I’ve heard about your wife who cannot have children. Here, I’ve brought you some herbs which she must drink and directly she will be with child.”

The emperor took the herbs from the moor and ordered for him on the spot a kingly steed together with a suit of gold clothes dazzling to the sight, then he called his queen, gave her the herbs to boil and drink up. The queen had the cook-woman boil the herbs without telling her what good they were. Not knowing their power, the cook tasted them, then took them to the queen to drink. It was not long before both the queen and the cook were with child. And when their time was come they each gave birth to a hale and noble babe,

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more handsome than all that's handsomest in the whole world and they named the babes one Laurel, the other Lavender.

One day the king went to war and left his son in his stead, entrusting to him a big bunch of keys and saying:

"Son, you can enter all the houses whose keys I have given you, but do not set foot in the house locked with the gold key, or else you'll be in big trouble."

As soon as the king left town, his son called at all the houses; in them he saw all sorts of very beautiful gems in the masses, but he liked none of these; at last he found himself in front of the house which the gold key could unlock, he paused a little before the door thinking of his father's compelling words, but, growing more and more impatient, he entered the house and saw a small glass telescope, looked through it and beheld a solid gold palace, more brilliant than sunshine and much more dazzling to the eye. And in it sat Lady Kiralina, young flower of the garden in bloom, as beautiful as a fairy at the loom.

After he'd been looking at her for a long while, he put the spying glass back on its shelf and went out of the house with tears in his eyes.

Not long afterwards the king was back home from the battle-field where he'd won the war. But instead of having his son to meet him and welcome him with joy, he only had the queen coming to him and telling him her son was ill. The king immediately perceived the cause of his son's sickness, he summoned all the men-doctors and women-doctors in the world, but they all said that unless and until he gave Lady Kiralina in marriage to his son, he would not get well. The emperor sent no end of envoys to woo Lady Kiralina, but it was all in vain, as her father did not want to give her off in marriage.

On hearing all this, the king's son decided to go in person and ask the father for his daughter's hand. So, he told all this to his sworn brother and one day they set out the two of them and were lost to sight. They walked for a whole summer day, from morning till dawn and got to the place of the North Wind's mother; they knocked on the door and a heavy wrinkled old woman came out and asked them what they wanted. They answered they wished to get shelter until the next day and inquired for the right road to Lady Kiralina's kingdom.

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The old woman looked at them in pity then said:

"I'd gladly let you into my house but I fear my son will come and turn the two of you into ice; why don't you go instead to my younger sister's place, as she can give you shelter and tell you the way to Lady Kiralina."

The king's son was off first and reached the place of the Rabid Wind's mother; then the two of them left this place too and got to the place of the Spring Wind's mother, where, knocking on the door, they had a tall, young and beautiful woman coming to meet them. Directly she saw the king's son, this woman addressed him so:

“Dear Prince-Charming, I know you’ve taken to the road in search of Lady Kiralina, to marry her; but you shan’t get as far as her kingdom without my son’s help. Stay here, the two of you, but I’d better hide you very thoroughly, or else, the moment my son senses the presence here of people from the other realm, he’s going to kill you.”

So saying, she clapped her hands three times and lo! a gold bird with a diamond beak and emerald eyes hopped from the stove, hid them both under her wings, and climbed onto the stove again.

Not long afterwards a sweet whizzing wind could be heard, wafting along a rose and rosemary perfume, the door opened up of itself and in came a handsome lad, with long hair made of gold, with silver wings and holding a staff in his hand wreathed with all kinds of herbs and flowers. No sooner was he in than he said to his mother:

“I can smell a man from the other realm, Mum!”

“You may smell this smell but I can tell ye men from the other realm would have no business coming this way.”

The wind let go then he sat down to table; and when he’d eaten a bowl-full of fresh doe milk and drunk some sweet-violet water from a marble pot, he started telling his stories.

Seeing him in a good mood, the mother said:

“Tell me, son, where is Lady Kiralina’s kingdom and what should one do to make her his wife?”

“You’ve asked me a very difficult question, mother! But listen, nonetheless: Lady Kiralina’s kingdom is a long way off, ten years away from here; yet one can make all this journey in the twinkling of an eye, should he go to the black wood near the tar water which shoots stones and fire up in the air, sky-high and should he then mount on the wicked fairies’ log that can take him over the tar water; but should anyone hear all this and tell somebody else about it, may he turn into stone from foot to knee. Once arrived at the kingdom, he must make a gold stag and enter it, so as to get to the Lady’s room and steal her; whoever hears this and is going to let on to anyone else may he turn into stone from foot to waist. When he has married her, the North Wind mother will bear him such a grudge for it that she will send there a Jew with some beautiful shirts, thinner than the spider’s web, and Lady Kiralina will buy them; and should she fail to sprinkle them with a turtle dove’s tears, the moment she puts them on will she fall dead; may he who hears this and lets on to anyone turn into stone from head to foot.”

While the wind was saying all this the king’s son had fallen asleep; and the cook’s son had stayed wide awake so he heard each and every word.

The next day, after the Wind had left, the king’s son asked the wind’s mother if her son had revealed anything to her; now, fearing she might turn into stone, the wind’s mother answered she hadn’t found out anything.

Then, the cook’s son and the king’s went along the road straight on, and they walked and they walked for a whole summer day, and by sunset

time they heard a big noise and an awful roar, then they saw a big burning-tar river throwing stones up in the air, sky-high. The king's son got frightened, but the cook's son said:

"Don't be afraid of anything, come along into this forest and do what I'll say."

When they got as far as the middle of the forest, he saw the wicked fairies' log, they mounted on it the two of them and spurred it thrice; it turned into a carriage drawn by twelve fire horses that rose as high as the Rabid Wind in a trice, then descended at the gates of Lady Kiralina's palace. When they had got off, the carriage turned into a log again and they found they'd got in front of a palace made of moonstone with the gates made of cypress wood. And in one casement above stood Lady Kiralina dressed in raiment made of gold embroidered with pearls.

The moment she set eyes on the king's son, Lady Kiralina fell for him, but she loved him so much that she was taken ill and felt she was in at the death.

At that the king her father moved heaven and hell to save her, but everything was in vain. At long last, a hag came and said to him:

"Hail to you, your highness! May you live long and well! If you wish to see the daughter of your bright highness well again, go look for the gold stag who sings like all the birds in the world, bring it into your house for a mere three days, then you'll see that she's going to pick up and be all hale."

The king had the harbinger call out in the entire kingdom; and after three days, the cook's daughter hit the log three times and it turned into a handsome gold stag; then he put inside it the king's son and posted himself before the doors of the palace.

On seeing the stag, the king descended and asked the cook's son if his ware was for sale.

"It's not for sale, just for lending," the cook's son answered only too boldly.

"Very well then. What do you ask for lending him to me a mere three days?"

"Give me one thousand gold coins."

They struck a bargain and the king took the stag into Lady Kiralina's room; then he went away to see to his business.

On finding he was alone with Lady Kiralina, the stag started to sing such a wistful song that both wood and stone were made to shed tears. Lady Kiralina fell asleep, and the king's son came out of the stag, kissed her brow, then got back into the stag.

The next day, Lady Kiralina told her women that she'd dreamt twice she'd been kissed by a handsome youth. Then one of the women who was more versed told Lady Kiralina that directly the stag starts singing she should pretend to sleep; then, the moment she feels someone kissing her, she should lay hands on that person.

Just when the night closed in, the stag started singing a woeful song. Lady Kiralina pretended to sleep; and when Prince Charming came by her side to kiss her, she embraced him and said:

“From now on you shan’t make your escape, for I’ve craved for you too long.”

They petted each other like two doves until the day dawned; and by midday the king came together with the cook’s son to get the stag back. Lady Kiralina started to cry and would by no means part with the stag; but the cook’s son whispered to her:

“Ask leave of the king to see the stag off as far as the outskirts of the town, for we’ve got a carriage drawn by twelve fire horses waiting for us there; we shall all climb into it and go to the kingdom of your beloved Prince Charming.”

Lady Kiralina asked leave from the king to do this and she was granted it, she saw the stag off with pomp as far as the outskirts of the town; then Laurel hit the stag’s belly three times, and lo! he became a carriage drawn by twelve fire horses; then, taking Lady Kiralina’s hand with one of his and Lavender’s hand with the other, they jumped into the carriage and were as good as lost to sight. And after going on and on, all along the time of a summer day until dawn, like the word of this tale that is drawing near to the time of its own end, they emerged from here in the other realm and reached their country.

On receiving the news of his son’s advent, the emperor hurried to his encounter accompanied by an army of soldiers without number, then wedded him to Lady Kiralina and made a royal wedding feast in their honour, that lasted for three days and three nights.

One day, Lady Kiralina was standing in the window frame and watching the road, when, lo! here comes a Jew with blouses for sale. Lady Kiralina called him upstairs and bought from him two blouses finer than the spiders web, then put on one of them. Not long afterwards she fell ill, but it was so serious that she’d actually got at the point of death.

Laurel found out about the Lady’s sickness and entered, about midnight, in the chamber where she was sleeping, then he sprinkled all over her turtle dove’s tears and left; but the guards posted at the door went to King Lavender and reported they’d seen him kissing her highness, Lady Kiralina.

The moment he heard this, the king was rabid with anger and ordered Laurel’s head off. But when they arrived at the appointed place where he’d be put to death, Laurel spoke to the king and said:

“May you live long, your highness! For the sake of our brotherly kinship and for my love of you, please summon all the great boyars of your kingdom, ‘cause I have a weighty word to tell them all; then you can order my head off.”

The king convened the kingly council and arranged for Lady Kiralina to be present too. Next, he brought Laurel and said:

“Come, villain, say out all that you have to say.”

Then Laurel began as follows:

“Once upon a time there was a kingly son who fell for the daughter of a Prince from the otherworld; and as he could not live without her, he set out together with his sworn brother to find her or lose his own life among those untrod lands. After going far and wide into the world and searching all the corners, they got to the house of the North Wind’s mother and asked her to tell them the way that could take them to the king’s daughter that they’d gone away from home to find. The North Wind’s mother send them to the Spring Wind’s mother, who welcomed them and promised them to ask her son about it. She kept her promise; directly the wind came she asked him and he spake so: ‘Lady Kiralina’s kingdom is ten years’ away from them; but this journey could be made in the twinkling of an eye, should anyone be found able to go to the black wood near the tar water which shoots stones and fire up in the air, sky-high; there would that someone find the wicked fairies’ log that he’d have to mount to get over the tar water. Once arrived at the kingdom, he must make a gold stag and enter it, to get to the Lady’s room and steal her. When he has married her, the Rabid Wind’s mother will bear him such a grudge for it that she will send there a Jew with some beautiful shirts, thinner than the spider’s web, and Lady Kiralina will buy them; and should she fail to sprinkle them with a turtle dove’s tears, the moment she puts them on will she fall dead in a matter of three days.”

After the wind said all these things to his mother, he cast an oath on her in case she told anyone what she’d learned from him: to turn into stone from head to foot.

The next day, the king’s son asked the wind’s mother if her son had revealed anything to her; but the latter, fearing that she might turn into stone, told him she hadn’t found out anything. But the kin’s sworn brother hadn’t slept that night so he heard every single word of the wind. So, keeping this great secret hidden from the king’s son, he took him along to the black wood, they mounted on the wicked fairies’ log and crossed the water to the other side.”

The moment Laurel finished saying these words, he turned into stone from foot to knee. The boyars of the council got terribly frightened when they saw this miracle happening. Laurel began telling the story anew and said:

“After they got to Lady Kiralina’s palace, the sworn brother hit the log three times and turned into a gold stag and put the king’s son in it, who managed to become acquainted with the girl thanks to this ruse and he stole her.”

Having said these last words too, he turned into stone from the knees to the waist. The king and the queen who’d seen he was innocent took to crying now and started asking him dearly to stop telling the story. But he would not do so but went on to say:

“After the emperor was wedded to Lady Kiralina, it was not long before the queen bought two blouses from a Jew, put one of them on and directly she fell very seriously ill . Knowing the reason of this sickness, he entered the queen’s room one night and, seeing she was sleeping he sprinkled turtle dove’s tears over her and saved her from death. ”

When this story was over, Laurel turned into stone from head to foot; and King Lavender together with Lady Kiralina cried for three uninterrupted days and nights, then took hold of the stone body of the benefactor and brought it in their chamber, so as to remember him always.

Then they lived some more time and gave birth to a child.

One morning king Lavender entered the queen’s rooms and told her that he’d dreamt of a woman dressed in white clothes who told him that if he wished to bring his brother back to life, he should slay their child and spread its blood on the stone. The queen said she’d dreamt a dream of the same kind, so between the two of them they slew the child, and after sprinkling the statue with the blood, it began to move, then came to life entirely and said:

“Dear God! ...I surely slept a heavy sleep, and no question.”

“Well now, brother, well, well, well. You’d have slept the longest sleep, had we not slain the child to sprinkle you with his blood.” Then Laurel made a little cut on his finger and let the blood fall over the child who came back to life in the twinkle of an eye; and the king who could not contain his joy, ordered a season of joy to begin throughout the country.

And I climbed up in a saddle and I let you know my riddle.

*English version by
Ioana ZIRRA*

