

FACT AND FICTION

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649134427

Fact and fiction by Lydia Maria Child

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LYDIA MARIA CHILD

**FACT AND
FICTION**

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TO

ANNA LORING,

THE CHILD OF MY HEART,

This Volume

Is AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

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THE CHILDREN OF MOUNT IDA.

"Spirit, who waftest me where'er I will,
And seeest, with finer eyes, what infants see,
Feeling all lovely truth,
With the wise health of everlasting youth,
Beyond the mores of bigotry's sick eye,
Or the blind feel of false philosophy—
O Spirit, O Muse of mine,
Frank, and quick-dimpled to all social glee,
And yet most sylvan of the earnest Nine—
O take me now, and let me stand
On some such lovely land,
Where I may feel me as I please,
In dells among the trees."

IN very ancient times there dwelt, among the Phrygian hills, an old shepherd and shepherdess, named Mygdomus and Arisba. From youth they had tended flocks and herds on the Idean mountains. Their only child, a blooming boy of six years, had been killed by falling from a precipice. Arisba's heart overflowed with maternal instinct, which she yearned inexpressibly to lavish on some object; but though they laid many offerings on the altars of the gods, with fervent supplications, there came to them no other child.

Thus years passed in loneliness, until one day, when Mygdomus searched for his scattered flock among the hills, he found a babe sleeping under the shadow of a plane tree. The grass bore no marks of footsteps, and how long he had lain there it was im-

possible to conjecture. The shepherd shouted aloud, but heard only echoes in the solitude of the mountains. He took the child tenderly in his arms, and conveyed it to Arisba, who received it gladly, as an answer to her prayers. They nurtured him with goat's milk, and brought him up among the breezes of the hills, and the boy grew in strength and beauty. Arisba cherished him with exceeding love, but still her heart was not quite satisfied.

"If he had but a sister to play with him," said she, "it would be so pleasant here under the trees."

The boy was three years old, and beautiful as a morning in spring, when his foster-parents carried him down to the plains, to a great festival of Bacchus, held during the vintage. It was a scene of riot and confusion; but the shepherd loved thus to vary the loneliness of his mountain life, and Arisba fondly desired to show her handsome boy, with his profusion of dark glossy curls bound in a fillet of ivy and grape leaves. Her pride was abundantly satisfied; for everywhere among the crowd the child attracted attention. When the story was told of his being found in the mountain forest, the women said he must have been born of Apollo and Aurora, for only they could produce such beauty. This gossip reached the ears of an old woman, who came hobbling on her crutch, to look at the infant prodigy.

"By the Adorable! he *is* a handsome boy," said she; "but come with me, and I too will show you something for the Mother of Love to smile upon."

She led the way to her daughter, who, seated under a tree, apart from the multitude, tended a sleeping babe.

"By the honey sweet! isn't *she* pretty, too?" exclaimed the old woman, pointing to the lovely infant, whose rosy lips were slowly moving, as if she suckled in her dreams. "My son, who hunts among the hills, found her on the banks of the Cebrenus, with one little foot dipped in the stream. Methinks the good Mountain Mother scatters children on our Phrygian hills, as abundant as the hyacinths."

"Then she is not your own?" eagerly inquired Arisba.

"No; and, pretty as she is, I do not want her, for I have ten. But what can I do? One must not leave babes to be devoured by wild beasts."

"Oh, give her to me," cried Arisba: "My boy so needs a playmate."

The transfer was readily made; and the child-loving matron, rejoicing in her new treasure, soon after left the revellers, and slowly wended her way back to the silent hills.

A cradle of bark and lichen, suspended between two young olive trees, held the babe, while Arisba, seated on a rock, sung as she plied the distaff. The boy at her side built small altars of stones, or lay at full length on the grass, listening to the gurgling brook, or watching the shadows at their play. Thus peacefully grew these little ones, amid all harmonies of sight and sound; and the undisturbed beauty of nature, like a pervading soul, fashioned their outward growth into fair proportions and a gliding grace.

For a long time they had no names. They were like unrecorded wild flowers, known at sight, on which the heart heaps all sweet epithets. Their fos-

ter-parents spoke of them to strangers as the Forest-found, and the River-child. A lovelier picture could not be imagined, than these fair children, wreathing their favourite kid with garlands, under the shadow of the trees, or splashing about, like infant Naiades, in the mountain brook. On the hill side, near their rustic home, was a goat's head and horns, bleached by sun and winds. It had been placed on a pole to scare the crows; and as it stood there many a year, the myrtle had grown round it, and the clematis wreathed it with flowery festoons, like the architectural ornaments of a temple. A thrush had built her nest between the horns; and a little rill gushed from the rock, in a cleft of which the pole was fastened. Here the boy loved to scoop up water for his little playmate to drink from his hand; and as they stood thus under the vines, they seemed like children of the gods. But the most beautiful sight was to see them kneeling hand in hand before the altar of Cybele, in the grove, with wreaths about their heads and garlands in their hands, while the setting sun sprinkled gold among the shadow-foliage on the pure white marble. Always they were together. When the boy was strong enough to bend a bow, the girl ran ever by his side to carry his arrows; and then she had a smaller arrow for herself, with which she would shoot the flowers from their stems, as skilfully as Cupid himself.

As they grew older, they came under the law of utility; but this likewise received a poetic charm from their free and simple mode of life. While the lad tended the flocks, the maiden sat on a rock at his feet, spinning busily while she sang summer melodies to