



The Multilingual Library for Children in Europe

Greek Traditional Story
English language version



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“Fairy tales are more than true:
not because they tell us that dragons exist,
but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”

Neil Gaiman



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Erotokritos

A shortened version of the epic poem in story form for the MultiLib project

Greek Traditional Story

English language version

Author: **Vitsenzos Kornaros**

Illustrator: **Nikos Blazakis**

In ancient Athens, a city famous all over the world, King Hercules and Queen Artemis reigned wisely for many years and everyone loved them. They also had an only daughter named Aretousa. Her face glittered like the sun and her beauty was famous throughout the kingdom.

King's most faithful counselor was Pezostratos, a wise man who often helped solve difficult problems. He had an only son, the brave Erotokritos. Erotokritos knew how to play the lute and sang so nicely that even the nightingales used to stop singing to hear him. He was a painter as well. He painted beautiful portraits that looked so real, ready to talk to you!



One day, Erotokritos had a walk with his best friend, Polydoros. They loved each other like brothers. Erotokritos shared all his secrets with Polydoros and frequently asked him for advice. That day Erotokritos was very thoughtful...

“My friend, it’s a few days now that I see you very thoughtful. Why are you so pensive? What bothers you?” asked Polydoros.

“My dear friend and loyal companion Polydoros,” Erotokritos replied, “since the day I first saw Aretousa at her window, I cannot get her out of my mind. As soon as night falls, I take my lute and go outside the palace to sing for her, although she does not know who I am. I suffer a lot and I don’t know what to do!”

“What are you saying, Erotokritos? You are not for such things,” said Polydoros and continued, “Aretousa is a princess. If people will come to know that you love her, who will save you from her father’s anger?”

“You are right,” Erotokritos replied and added, “this is what I think as well. So, I decided to go to Chalkida and try to forget her...”



Therefore, Erotokritos left Athens and stopped singing to the princess those songs that she so much liked without knowing who the singer was. His voice was so sweet that Aretousa had fallen in love with him without having ever seen him! One day, discussing with Frosini, her nanny, she revealed the secret to her.

“My dear Frosini,” said Aretousa, “I stayed again until late last night to hear this sweet-voice singer! No sign of him though. I wonder, “Who is he? How can I know his name?””

“What are you saying, my child? I’m very worried for you!” said Frosini.

“Stop worrying and help me find out who this young man is,” said Aretousa.

“I think you lost your mind,” said Frosini and continued, “what are you saying? Close the window and forget him. If your father hears about it, he will be angry. These are not proper things for a princess When the time to get married will come, he’ll make sure he will find the best prince! But if he suspects that you are not sleeping for an unknown singer, alas!”



Not much later, Pezostratos, Erotokritos' father, fell severely ill. Everyone at the palace was upset by the news. As soon as she learned it, Aretousa ran to visit him at home and to give him courage. As she entered, a great surprise was waiting for her! The first thing she saw was the lute of the unknown singer and a painting he had made. The painting depicted her laughing full of joy. On a piece of paper, she also found the lyrics of the songs of the singer! Aretousa was thrilled with what she saw. Her heart was fluttering with joy as she had realized that she finally knew who the sweet-voice singer was: Erotokritos!

A sudden noise interrupted her thoughts. She turned her head towards the window and her heart started to beat loudly. Erotokritos was approaching. He had just learned about his father's illness and had come to see him. Aretousa was shocked. Once she overcame the shock, she took the painting and the paper along with the lyrics and left quickly. She didn't want to be seen by Erotokritos. As the young man entered the house and saw that his things were missing, he became very upset.

The next day, Aretousa sent him red apples, a sign that she loved him! Excited about this sign of love, he ran to his beloved friend to tell him the news. But his friend Polydoros apprehensively advised him to be very careful as the King would punish him hardly if he would learn that he wanted to marry Aretousa.

Nevertheless this time Erotokritos was determined. As soon as his father regained his health, he revealed to him that he loved Aretousa and asked him to go to the King and talk to him.

"What are you saying, my son?" said Pezostratos and continued, "get real! The King will never agree."

"Father, I cannot live without Aretousa," said Erotokritos and continued, "better leaving Athens forever if I will not going to marry her."



In the meantime, at the palace, the King decided to organize a contest by inviting all the princes of Greece. He wanted to find the bravest prince to marry his only daughter. Indeed, on the day that was set for the contest, all the brave princes of Greece arrived to Athens. Princes from mainland and islands had come to challenge each other and to see who would be the bravest one.

All the people of Athens gathered to see the contest. At the end, Erotokritos who had been disguised as a White Horseman, was the winner. Nobody could find out who he really was. But as Aretousa gave him the winner wreath, she understood from his eyes who he was and, without saying a word, they gave each other a silent oath to keep loving each other for all their life!

Unfortunately, King Hercules had different plans. The next day he called Aretousa to announce that he had decided to marry her with the future king of Byzantium. As soon as she heard it, she replied to him: “Father, you know your word is always an order for me. But I cannot do what you tell me. I love Erotokritos, son of Pezostratos, your best advisor, and he is the man I want to marry!”

“What are you saying, my daughter?” said the King, “Erotokritos? This can’t be done. You will marry the one I tell you, otherwise ...”

“Father, do not insist, my heart beats only for Erotokritos,” said Aretousa and continued, “I cannot do what you ask me to do.”

“Get out of your mind that you, the future Queen of Athens, can marry Erotokritos. Forget it!” said angrily the King. “Forget him! Otherwise I will punish you and Erotokritos!”

Aretousa insisted, ergo she was imprisoned in the palace and Erotokritos was banished from Athens. Before he left, he met secretly with her. They swore to be forever faithful to one another.



Erotokritos wandered for years from one place to another searching for a suitable opportunity to return to Athens and marry Aretousa and... this is just what happened! All those who have patience always win in the end!

It had been three years since Erotokritos' exile when enemies began to besiege Athens. The siege was tough and Athens seemed to have lost the battle. For the Athenians' good luck, a masked knight appeared and began to wipe out the enemies until he saved the city! The King was so grateful to the savior of the city that he called the knight and offered him his kingdom. The knight asked him longingly to see the imprisoned princess. Inside the cell where she had been living for three years, he revealed his identity.





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