

THE PALACE OF VENGEANCE

There was once a King and Queen of Iceland who, after twenty years of marriage, had a daughter, whose birth gave them all the more joy because they had despaired for a long time of having children who would one day succeed to their kingdom. The young princess was named Imis; her nascent charms promised as soon as her infancy all the marvels that are seen to shine in a slightly more advanced age. No one in the world would have been worthy of her if Amour, who believed it to be his honor to be able to subject such a marvelous person to his empire one day, had not taken care to have born in the same Court a Prince as charming as Princess Imis was lovable.

That Prince was named Philax and he was the son of a brother of the King of Iceland; he was two years older than the Princess, and they were brought up together with all the liberties that infancy and the proximity of blood give. The first movements of their hearts were given to admiration and tenderness. They could not see anything as beautiful as one another, so they did not find anything elsewhere that could deflect them from the passion that they felt for one another, even without yet knowing what it was called.

The King and the Queen saw that love born with pleasure; they loved young Philax; he was a Prince of their blood and no child had ever given rise to such high hopes. Everything seemed to accord with Amour to render Philax the happiest of men one day.

The Princess was about twelve years-old when the Queen, who loved her with an infinite tenderness, wanted to consult a fay, whose prodigious science was then greatly renowned, regarding her destiny. She departed in order to go find her. She took Imis with her, who, in the dolor of quitting Philax, was astonished thousands of times over that anyone could think of the future when the present was so agreeable. Philax remained with the King, and all the pleasures of the Court could not console him for the absence of the princess.

The Queen arrived at the fay's castle; she was received magnificently, but the fay was not to be found there. She lived ordinarily on the summit of a mountain that was some distance from her castle, where she remind alone, occupied with the profound knowledge that rendered her so celebrated throughout the world. As soon as she knew of the Queen's arrival she came back; the Queen introduced the Princess to her and informed her of her name and the hour of her birth, which the fay knew as well as she did, even though she had not been there; the fay of the mountain knew everything. She promised the Queen to give her a response in two days, and then returned to the summit of the mountain.

At the commencement of the third day she came back again, invited the Queen to go down into a garden, and gave her a book of palm leaves, firmly closed, but ordered her only to open it in the presence of the King. In order to satisfy her curiosity at least to some degree, the Queen asked her various questions regarding her daughter's fortune.

"Great Queen," the fay of the mountain said to her, "I cannot tell you exactly the species of misfortune by which the Princess is menaced; I can only see that Amour will have a large part to play in the events of her life, and that no beauty has ever given birth to such violent passions as those that Imis will inspire."

It was not necessary to be a fay to promise lovers to that Princess. Her eyes already seemed to demand of all hearts the amour that the fay assured the Queen that they would have for her. Meanwhile, Imis, much less anxious about her destiny than the absence of Philax, was amusing herself picking flowers; but, occupied by her tenderness and her impatience to depart, she forgot the bouquet that she had begun to make and, while dreaming, threw away the flowers that she had initially amassed with pleasure. She went to rejoin the Queen, who said adieu to the fay of the mountain. The fay embraced Imis, and gazed at her with the admiration that she merited.

“Since it is not possible for me, beautiful Princess,” she said, after a moment of silence that had something mysterious about it, “to change the order of Destiny in your favor, at least I will try to help you avoid the misfortunes that it is preparing for you.”

After those words she picked a bunch of lilies of the valley herself, and addressed young Imis. “Always carry the flowers that I am giving you,” she said to her. “They will never wither, and as long as you have them about your person, they will protect you from all the evils with which Destiny threatens you.” Then she attached the bouquet to Imis’ hair, and the flowers, obeying the fay’s intentions, as soon as they were on the Princess’s head, arranged themselves and formed a kind of spray, whose whiteness only seemed to make it manifest that nothing could efface that of the complexion of the beautiful Imis.

The Queen departed after having thanked the fay a thousand times and returned to Iceland, where the entire Court was awaiting the return of the Princess with impatience. Joy had never seemed more brilliant and more amiable than it was in the eyes of Imis and those of her lover. The mystery of the spray of lilies of the valley was only explained to the King; it had such an agreeable effect in the beautiful brown hair of the Princess that everyone merely took it for an ornament that she had chosen for herself in the fay’s gardens.

The Princess said much more to Philax about the chagrin she had felt in not seeing him than about the misfortunes that destiny promised her. Philax was alarmed nevertheless, but the joy of finding one another was present, and the misfortunes were as yet uncertain; they forgot them, and abandoned themselves to the sweet pleasure of seeing one another again.

Meanwhile, the Queen rendered the King an account of her voyage, and gave him the fay’s leaves. The King opened them, and found these words written there in golden letters.

*Destiny for Imis, under a flattering hope,
Hides a rigorous punishment;
She will be rendered unfortunate
By the long curse of her happiness.*

The King and Queen were greatly afflicted by that oracle, and sought in vain to be able to explain it. They did not say anything about it to the Princess, in order not to give her an unnecessary dolor.

One day, when Philax had gone hunting, which happened quite often, Imis was walking alone in a labyrinth of myrtles. She was very sad, because she thought that Philax was too late in returning, and she reproached herself for an impatience that he did not share with her.

She was occupied with her reverie when she heard a voice that said to her: “Why are you afflicted, beautiful Princess? If Philax is not sensible enough to the good fortune of being loved by you, I have come to offer you a heart a thousand times more grateful, a heart vividly touched by your charms, and a fortune sufficiently brilliant to be desired by anyone other than you, of which the entire world would recognize the empire.”

The Princess was very surprised to hear that voice; she had believed that she was alone in the labyrinth, and as she had not spoken, she was even more astonished that the voice had responded to her thought. She looked around, and saw a little man appear in the air, mounted on a cockchafer.

“Have no fear, beautiful Imis,” he said to her, “you have no lover more submissive than me, and although today is the first time that I am appearing before you, I have loved you for a long time and I see you every day.”

“How you astonish me,” the Princess said to him. “What! You see me every day, and you know what I am thinking? If that is the case, you must have seen that it is futile to have amour for me. Philax, to whom I have given my heart, is too lovable ever to cease to be its master, and although I am not content with him, I have never loved him so much. But tell me who you are and where you have seen me.”

“I am Pagan the Enchanter,” he said to her, “and my power extends over the whole world, except for you. I saw you in the garden of the fay of the mountain. I was hidden in one of the tulips that you picked; at first I took for a fortunate presage the hazard that had made you choose the flower where I was. I flattered myself that you would take me away with you, but you were too occupied with the pleasure of

thinking about Philax; you threw the flowers away after having picked them, and you left me in the garden, the most amorous of all men. Since that moment I have sensed that nothing could render me happy but the hope of being loved by you. Think of me, beautiful Imis, if it is possible for you, and permit me sometimes to remind you of my amour.”

After those words he disappeared, and the Princess returned to the palace, where the sight of Philax, whom she found again, dissipated the fear she had had. She was in so much haste to hear him justify the long time he had spent hunting that she almost forgot to tell him about her adventure. Finally, however, she told him what had happened in the myrtle labyrinth.

In spite of his courage, the young Prince feared a winged rival, against whom he might dispute the Princess at the expense of his life. But the spray of lilies of the valley reassured him against enchantments, and the tenderness that Imis had for him did not permit him to fear that it might change.

When she woke up the day after the adventure in the labyrinth, the Princess saw twelve little nymphs flying in her chamber, mounted on honey-bees, who were carrying little golden baskets in their hands. They approached Imis’s bed, saluted her, and then went to put the baskets on a white marble table that appeared in the middle of the room. As soon as they were set down, they became an ordinary size. After having quit their baskets, the nymphs saluted Imis again; one of them came nearer to her bed than the others, and dropped something on top of it. Then they flew away.

In spite of the astonishment that such a novel spectacle gave her, the Princess picked up what the nymph had dropped beside her; it was an emerald of a marvelous beauty. It opened as soon as the Princess touched it; she found that it contained a rose leaf, on which she read these lines:

*Let the universe learn with astonishment
The incredible effect of your eyes;
Even the torments are desirable
That you render me in loving you.*

The princess could not get over her surprise; finally, she called her ladies in waiting; they were as astonished as Imis at the sight of the table and the baskets. The King, the Queen and Philax came running at the rumor of that adventure; the Princess only suppressed from her story the letter from her lover. It was only to Philax that she thought she ought to render an account of it. The baskets were examined with care and they were all found to be full of precious stones of an extraordinary beauty and great value, which further increased the astonishment of the spectators.

The princess did not want to touch them, and, having found a moment when no one was listening, she approached Philax and gave him the emerald and the rose leaf. He read the letter from his rival with a great deal of pain. In order to console him, Imis tore up the rose leaf in front of him.

But how dearly that sacrifice cost them!

A few days passed without the Princess hearing any mention of Pagan. She believed that her scorn for him had extinguished his amour, and Philax flattered himself with the same hope. The Prince went back to hunting, as he was accustomed to do. He stopped on the edge of a spring to refresh himself.

He had the emerald on him, which the Princess had given him, and, remembering that sacrifice with pleasure, he took it out of his pocket in order to look at it; scarcely had he held it for a moment, however, that it escaped from his hands, and as soon as it touched the ground, it changed into a chariot. Two winged monsters emerged from the spring and harnessed themselves to it.

Philax looked at them without fear, because he was incapable of having any, but he could not help feeling some emotion when he found himself transported into the emerald chariot by an invisible force and immediately lifted into the air, where the winged monsters enabled the chariot to fly with a prodigious facility and rapidity.

Meanwhile, night fell, and the hunters, after having searched the entire wood for Philax in vain, returned to the palace, to which they thought he might have returned. They did not find him there, and no one had seen him since he had gone hunting with them. The King ordered them to go back to search for

the Prince. Everyone in the court shared his anxiety. They returned to the wood and traveled the surrounding area; they only came back at daybreak, without having learned anything about the Prince.

Imis had spent the night in despair at the absence of her lover, the cause of which she could not understand. She went on to a terrace of the palace in order to see the people who had gone to search for Philax returning, and hoped to see him returning with them, but no words can express the excess of the dolor by which she was seized when she did not see Philax arrive and she was told that it was impossible to determine what had become of him.

She fainted, and was carried away, and one of the women who hastened to put her to bed detached from the head of the Princess the spray of lilies of the valley that protected her from enchantments. As soon as it was removed, a cloud obscured the room and Imis disappeared.

The King and Queen were in despair at that loss and could never be consoled for it.

On recovering from her faint, the Princess found herself in a chamber of coral of various colors, with a floor of mother-of-pearl, surrounded by nymphs, who served her with a profound respect. They were beautiful, clad in magnificent and elegant garments. To begin with, Imis asked where she was.

“You are in a place where you are adored,” one of the nymphs said to her. “Have no fear, beautiful Princess, you will find here everything that you could desire.”

“Philax is here, then,” said the Princess, with a surge of joy that appeared in her eyes. “I only want the happiness of seeing him again.”

“You have remembered an ingrate for too long,” said Pagan then, making himself visible to the Princess, “and since that Prince has quit you, he is no longer worthy of the love you have for him; combine chagrin and concern for your glory with the passion I have for you. Reign forever in this palace, beautiful Princess; you will find immense riches here and all the pleasures imaginable will be attached to your steps.”

Imis only replied to Pagan’s speech with tears. He quit her, for fear of aggravating her dolor. The nymphs remained with her, and tried to console her by means of their cares. A magnificent meal was served to her, but she refused to eat.

The following day, however, the desire to see Philax again made her resolve to live; she ate, and in order to dissipate her dolor, the nymphs took her to various places in the palace. It was entirely constructed of gleaming seashells, mingled with precious stones of different colors, which had the most beautiful effect in the world. All the furniture was made of gold, and of a workmanship so marvelous that it was evident that it could only have come from the hands of fays.

After having shown Imis the palace, the nymphs took her into the gardens, the beauty of which was indescribable. She found a brilliant chariot there harnessed to ten red deer, conducted by a dwarf. Imis was asked to enter the chariot; she obeyed. The nymphs sat at her feet; they were taken to the sea shore, where a nymph informed the Princess that Pagan reigned on that island, of which he had made, by the power of his art, the most beautiful place in the world.

A sound of instruments interrupted the nymph’s discourse; the sea seemed to be entirely covered by little coral boats the color of fire, filled with everything that could compose a very elegant maritime fête. In the middle of the little boats there was one much larger than the others, on which Imis’s monogram appeared everywhere, formed by pearls. It was drawn by two dolphins.

It approached the shore. The Princess boarded it with the nymphs; as soon as she was there, a superb collation appeared before her, and she heard a marvelous concert, performed in the boats that surrounded her own. Her praises were sung therein, but Imis did not pay any attention to any of it. She went back to her chariot and returned to the palace, overwhelmed by sadness.

In the evening, Pagan present himself before her again. He found her even more insensible to his amour than she had so far appeared to be, but he was not put off and he put his faith of his constancy. He was unaware as yet that in amour, the most constant are not always the most fortunate. Every day he put on fêtes for the Princess, diversions worthy of attracting the admiration of everyone except the person for whom they were invented. Imis was only touched by the absence of her lover.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE BOOK