



Mariora Floriora

Moldavia

In all the wide Wonder Garden of Earth no nymph was so lovely as Mariora Floriora, the Sister of the Flowers. She was as bright as a tear of joy, as light-footed as a fawn. Her golden hair, soft as silk, fell in clusters on her white brow and in waves on her shoulders. On her lips was a scarlet blossom, in her mouth were pearls.

When she went forth to walk in the meadows, the flowers laughed with joy, and, opening their hearts, bowed before her; while their voices rang out like chimes:

‘Good-morning, sweet Sister Mariora Floriora! What will you have of us? Will you have the scent of the cowslip, or the perfume of the rose, or the fragrance of the violet? Take us, take us, Sister, and place us in your hair, or let us fall sleep upon your breast.’

So, listening and happy, she passed on her way near the hoary mountain. And at her smile it grew young again, and dressed itself in a robe of green and crystal.

The birds woke and sang:

‘All hail, Mariora Floriora! What will you have of us? Will you have our sweet voices? Or shall we fetch you honey in dewy cups? Or will you listen to the sighing of the gentle breeze?’

So all nature awoke and rejoiced, when Mariora Floriora, the Sister of the Flowers, walked abroad.

But one day she met a young stranger, mounted on a black horse with a white star in its forehead.

‘Sweet maiden standing among the flowers,’ said the stranger, ‘are you the daughter of a king or the shadow of a dream I once had?’

‘If you would know who I am,’ she answered, ‘ask my sisters the flowers, ask the mountain, the torrents, the singing birds, the waterfalls, and the skipping fawns.’

‘Then, truly,’ exclaimed the youth, ‘you are Mariora Fiorora, the Nymph of the Flowers and the maid of Aurora. You are my destined bride! I will dismount from my steed. I will remain with you for ever.’

Mariora Fiorora listened with a blush and with laughter. She hid her face in her curls, and peeped through them like a butterfly or a bird peeping from the leaves.

The stranger dismounted and seated himself beside her in the grass. She laughed again, and made a sign. A table loaded with delicious fruits rose from the ground. They ate and were happy.

Then she made another sign, and a chariot drawn by six white horses sprang up before her. She took the stranger by the hand, and they entered the chariot. The enchanted steeds neighed, and swiftly skimmed over the surface of the meadow, and flew to and fro across the mountain-top.

The sister flowers, seeing that they were forgotten, drooped their heads and faded. The birds stopped singing. The mountain took off its robe of green and crystal, and hid itself in a cloud, while all the leaves of the trees yellowed, withered, and fell.

But the lovely Mariora Fiorora thought no longer of her sisters the flowers, or of the birds and the mountain.

Then the Sun, looking down, drank the bright drops of dew from her golden hair, and transformed them into a cloud that rose slowly to the sky.

‘Mariora Fiorora,’ said the Sun, ‘you are fair and lovely, but you are fickle. The sweetest dreams will end! Do you know that your sisters the flowers are faded and are returned to the sky complaining bitterly?’

Your birds are silent, and your mountain is mourning. Punishment will surely overtake you, O Mariora Fioriora!

But she would not listen to him. She had thoughts for nothing but the stranger.

The air was soft, the mountain was bathed in pearly light. The little birds neither flew nor sang. Shadows were the only moving things.

Then came a plaintive sound through the air like a mother's voice mingling with the music of hells. The Earth trembled. Mariora Fioriora gazed fearfully around. A black cloud hovered dark and menacing above her head, like the Evil Spirit of the Storm. It spread its sombre and awful wings across the sky. It was the same cloud that was formed from the dewdrops in her hair.

Mariora Fioriora grew pale, and leaned toward the stranger.

'Farewell! O beloved!' she sighed. 'The Evil Storm Spirit has come from the mountain to tear me from your heart. I have forgotten my sisters the flowers, and they have complained of me in the sky.'


She wept as she spoke. And the cloud became darker. The thunder roared, and the lightning flashed. The winds moaned. And Mariora Fioriora hid her face in despair.

The black cloud swooped downward, and the Evil Storm Spirit, seizing her in his arms, flew away with her to the mountain. Then the Sun shone brightly once more, the sky was blue again.

And where now is Mariora Fioriora, the Nymph of the Flowers, the maid of Aurora? Is she wandering over nine lands and nine seas seeking the Wonder Garden where dwell all the nymphs and the stars?

When the silvery-white Moon rides high and serene in the heavens, Mariora Fioriora's plaintive murmurs are heard in the caverns of her mountain. □

Adapted by Frances J. Olcott (1919).

Public Domain. 

Comments

It is striking that this story of neglect and disregard for the natural environment has been told for generations in a country that, during its time as a Soviet socialist republic (between the 1960s and 1980s), caused extreme degradation of its natural environment. Such devastation resulted as a consequence of agricultural and industrial development which failed to take environmental needs into account. The massive use of pesticides and fertilisers containing persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and the lack of the necessary controls on industrial emissions, led to severe soil erosion and persistent underground water pollution. This resulted in a dramatic rise in rates of disease in Moldova, as well as a disturbing increase in infant mortality.

Degraded soil in the Republic of Moldova reached 30% of its territory in 2004, when the country signed up to the Stockholm Convention regulating the use of toxic substances in agriculture. However, at the same time, Moldova had only 10% forest cover, as a large part of the country had been devoted to agriculture. This then led to a major economic crisis due to the agricultural collapse as a result of environmental destruction (Duca, Isac & Barbarasa, 2004; Pamujac, 2008).

Obviously, the rule of the materialism associated with modernism – shared by communism and capitalism at the two extremes of the same continuum – led both Eastern and Western Bloc countries to suffer massive destruction of their ecosystems. Viewing land, rivers and seas as lifeless entities, and animal, tree and plant species as living entities, *albeit soulless*, has led to seeing everything as mere ‘resources’ at the service of humans. This has gone hand in hand with a worrying lack of empathy for the suffering of other living species.

The consequences of this worldview are what we are witnessing now, as we detailed in the Volume 0 of *The Earth Stories Collection* (Cutanda, 2019).

In this sense, the legend of Mariora Floriora might have kept alive some awareness of care for the environment, if it had continued to be told among the Moldovan people. But centuries of contempt for myths, legends and folktales by modernist rationalism, which constantly saw these stories as the products of barbaric societies and naive minds, must

have prevented their spread. This is particularly true following the advent of radio and television, which has come to replace the traditional evening storytelling in families.

However, this story is not only a metaphor for the Moldovan people, but for humanity as a whole. To understand it in this way, we must see the *Zina* (as the nymphs are called in Moldova) as a symbolic reflection of humankind itself. While humanity developed through traditional peoples and oral cultures there was, in general terms, a deep understanding of and close cooperation with the natural world, as evidenced by the fact that:

Recent research demonstrates that while the world's 370 million indigenous peoples make up less than five percent of the total human population, they manage or hold tenure over 25 percent of the world's land surface and support about 80 percent of the global biodiversity. (Raygorodetsky, 2018)

We certainly have a lot to learn from them.

Thus, *Mariora Floriora's* metaphor would represent, to us, a humanity bewitched by modernism and a consumer society – the young man with the black steed and the star on his forehead – which promised to make us happy forever, but ultimately, led to climate change and the mass extinction of species. This will do nothing but ruin our 'love story' with our hedonistic young man with the star on his forehead – consumer society.

All that now remains is to try to appease the Moldavian *Zméu*, the Evil (climate) Spirit of the Storm as much as possible, in the hope that we are not too late ... as happened to *Mariora Floriora*.

Sources

Cutanda, G. A. (2019). *The Earth Stories Collection: How to Make Another World Possible with Myths, Legends and Traditional Stories*. vol. 0. Granada: TESC Press.

Duca, G.; Isac, A. & Barbarasa, I. (2004). Persistent organic pollutants state in the Republic of Moldova. *Environmental Engineering and Management Journal*, 3(3), 373-378.

- Grenville Murray, E. C. (1854). *Mariora Floriora*. In *Doine: The National Songs and Legends of Roumania*, pp. 4-16. London: Smith, Elder and Co.
- Olcott, F. J. (1919). *Mariora Floriora*. In *The Wonder Garden: Nature Myths and Tales from All the World Over*, pp. 430-434. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Pamujac, N. (2008). The complex approach in solving environmental problems in usage of pesticides in Moldova. In *Obsolete pesticides in Central and Eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asia Region: Start of clean up. International Forum, 9., Chisinau (Republic of Moldova), 20-22 Sept 2007*. USM. pp. 97-101
- Raygorodetsky, G. (2018). Indigenous peoples defend Earth's biodiversity – but they're in danger. *National Geographic*. Available on <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/can-indigenous-land-stewardship-protect-biodiversity->

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead.- We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead: The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.

Preamble: Universal Responsibility: To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities.

Preamble: Universal Responsibility: Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

Principle 2b: Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

Principle 4: Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.

Principle 4a: Recognize that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations.

Principle 5: Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.

Principle 6b: Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.

Principle 6c: Ensure that decision making addresses the cumulative, long-term, indirect, long distance, and global consequences of human activities.

