

# Monarè

By Mrs. Richard S. Greenough

Night had fallen, covering the broad stretch of the plain with shadow. The little huts which clustered around the massive castle of Ilzerley were hidden from sight; and the presence of the castle itself could be perceived only from a long, pale ray of light which streamed from a narrow window, the window of the chapel where Walter of Ilzerley kept his vigil, watching his armor, for the next day was to see him dubbed a knight.

The castle was filled with lords and ladies from all the country round, come to assist at tomorrow's ceremony. There had been feasting and revelling, dance and song; but now all had retired to rest; and the young man knelt before the altar, companioned by solemn thoughts alone.

The chapel was narrow and high; from niches on either side grim effigies of saints looked down; ranged on either hand stood the suits of armor of the past lords of Ilzerley, each guarding as it were his own tomb. The pavement was worn and uneven. Overhead swung an iron lamp, suspended by a chain. It lighted but faintly the gloom of the chapel; its rays seemed gathered together upon Walter's form as he knelt below it, and were reflected from his snowy vest and curling golden hair.

He knelt and prayed that he might be strengthened worthily to fulfil the vows he was to take on the morrow. He thought of the long line of ancestors from whom he was descended, and his heart burned to emulate their noble deeds. He thought of the woe and wickedness that divided the earth between hem; and he longed to grasp his knightly sword to do battle for the oppressed. And as he mused and prayed alternately, the night wore on.

It was at the deepest and the darkest when a low wind swept through the chapel, and waved the banners on the wall. He thought he heard a sad human wail, but the wind died away. He listened. There was no sound. Again he mused and prayed, and again the wind swept through the chapel, louder, stronger than before; and it bore with it the sound of a woman's voice wailing,—

“Who shall deliver me from this captivity?”

Walter of Ilzerley started to his feet. He felt the golden curls rising on his head; but his heart was stout and firm, overflowing the while with tender ruth and compassion.

“Lo, here I stand, Walter of Ilzerley, whom to-morrow will see dubbed a knight; and I will strive, so help me God, to deliver thee from thy captivity.”

And as he spoke, a chorus of voices, from the suits of armor of the dead lords standing around, responded:—

“We attest the vow.”

And eyes looked steadfastly from the eye-holes of the before empty helmets, and the steel-clad and gauntleted right arms were raised, as if invoking the witness of God's sight, while the banners above waved solemnly, as if conscious of the vow. As the sound of the voices died away, a ruby ring fell at Walter of Ilzerley's feet. As it struck on the pavement before him, the flame of the lamp flickered and went out: but he was not left in darkness; a rosy light flashed from the ring, and filled the chapel with a soft radiance. It gleamed on the iron armor, on the stone saints, on the torn and time-stained banners, and on Walter's awe-struck face. He raised it and placed it on his hand; then, kneeling before the altar, he prayed, with earnestness unknown before, that God would grant him wisdom, valor, and patience to rescue from her captivity the lady who had called him to her aid.

The next day came, and with great pomp and solemnity the gray-headed old Count of Lestuys gave him the knightly accolade, and the two fairest damsels of the assemblage buckled on his golden spurs, and tied his scarf across his breast.

Great preparations had been made for feasting for many days. Minstrels and harpers had flocked to the castle; the pantry and buttery were filled to overflowing with mighty pasties, huge loaves of manchet bread, and great baskets of cakes made with spices and honey. Casks of the oldest and strongest wines were broached, and all was gladness and gayety. But the midnight voice sounded ever in Walter's ear, with its complaint,—

“Who shall deliver me from this captivity?”

He looked at the ruby ring. Its rays seemed hour by hour to pale. He determined to delay no longer, but to set forth that very afternoon. So while all the guests were assembled in the great hall, listening to the minstrels who were singing, turn by turn, the romance of Gui de Provens, he mounted his white horse, took his shield on which he had that day ordered the device of a ring to be painted with the motto, “I seek;” and, without bidding adieu to any one, he crossed the drawbridge, and went on his way.

As his gallant white steed passed across the creaking and groaning bridge, he tossed his head and snorted cheerily; and the ruby ring on Walter of Ilzerley's finger sent forth rays so brilliant that he could scarcely bear to look at it. They lay like a rosy line of light before him; and those whom he met shaded their eyes with their hands, and said,—

“Mort de St. Denis! that young knight's armor shines so bright that one can't look at him.”

For they did not know that it was the ruby ring that dazzled them.

He journeyed on all that day. The land was sad and sterile. At intervals rose dark and frowning fortresses, each with a little settlement of huts around it. In the immediate neighborhood of these strongholds he saw cultivated fields, horses and cattle peacefully grazing; but it seemed as if neither peasant nor animal dared venture outside that narrow circuit. The ground between was bare and wild. Ever and anon he would pass an abbey or convent with its towers and its ample domain. There he saw more thrift, wider fields and fairer crops; but there were few of these, not enough to redeem the look of desert solitude of the country.

As night drew on, he found himself on a bleak and sullen sweep. The earth looked as though fire had passed over it, and had left it strewn with ashes. Dismal fogs rose in the distance, and slowly crept forward as if to meet and encircle him. His horse turned his head towards his master and neighed plaintively, as if asking where they were to find shelter. Walter of Ilzerley looked anxiously at his ring as for guidance. As his eye rested on it, it shot forth a long ray that pierced the gathered fog and showed, on a small eminence before him, a low, gray hut. The young man cheered his horse with his voice, and raised him with the bridle; and, avoiding as he best might the pools filled with brackish water which were scattered over the plain, he pressed forward towards the solitary gray hut.

As he approached it, a towering form, clothed in a knight's surcoat, appeared at the door.

“Good knight, I crave your hospitality for the dark hours,” said the young man.

“Such as I have to offer is yours,” replied the knight in a deep, hoarse voice. And he drew near the steed, as the rider dismounted, stretching out his hand as if to take the bridle. But as he advanced, the horse trembled in every limb, laid his ears close to his head, and started back cowering. The knight turned on his heel without remarking the strange behavior of the steed, and led the way to a sort of cave behind the eminence.

“You will find fodder and water within,” he said.

The cave was dark; but the ruby ring lighted its every corner, and showed a clear stream trickling from a rock on one side, and a pile of dried grass.

The knight stood silent at the door while the young man rubbed down and caressed his tired steed. Then, when these kind offices were accomplished, he bade him follow.

He conducted Walter into the hut, which was furnished with a strange mixture of poverty and of luxury. On the rough wooden table lay a cloth brodered with hawks and hounds; on rude shelves stood silver flagons; and on the earthen floor was laid a carpet from Eastern looms. But, peculiar as were these things, Walter of Ilzerley's attention was still more powerfully attracted by a strange odor which pervaded the hut,—a smell as of some wild animal. He glanced around to see whether his host had not some slaughtered creature near. But nothing was to be seen.

The host bade Walter be seated, and gave him bread and wine.

"I have no meat to offer you," he said; and, as he spoke, his eyes grew small and green, he half smiled, and showed white, pointed teeth.

Walter of Ilzerley looked keenly at him; but the knight's eyes were as they had been before, and the points had vanished from his teeth.

"No meat is needed," said Walter; and he crossed himself and gave thanks ere he broke the bread.

The knight breathed hard, and drops stood on his forehead, as he heard the holy words.

When the young man had ended his frugal supper, he arose and requested his host to show him where he was to sleep. The hermit knight drew aside a heavy curtain and revealed a small inner room wherein was a low bed, and bade him sleep, and sleep soundly. His eyes again grew small and green as he spoke; and, as he smiled, he showed again white, pointed teeth.

Walter of Ilzerley knelt before his cross-hilted sword, and, having prayed, took off his armor and lay down upon the low pallet. For some time he could not sleep. The strange odor, as of some wild animal, seemed to taint and poison the air. But at length weariness overcame him, and his eyelids closed.

He was wakened by a vivid flash like lightning across his eyes. He started to his feet, and instinctively grasped the sword which he had laid beside him. The ruby was sending forth fiery darts, and showed, below the heavy curtain of the entrance, the head and shoulders of an enormous wolf, with green eyes, and pointed, glistening teeth. Walter of Ilzerley sprang towards the animal, and smote upon its hairy, bristling neck with his good sword.

A human shriek rent the air; the monster changed before his horror-stricken sight; and there at his feet, the blood pouring from a ghastly wound in his throat, lay the knight who had bidden him welcome,—a were-wolf.

The young man stood for a moment without speech or motion; then he took from the shelf in the next room a tall, long-necked silver flagon, and filled it with the smoking blood; for in those days every one knew that a drop of the blood of a were-wolf, which never curdles, would bring to life his victims, no matter how long they had been dead. This being done, he had no mind to tarry longer in the dead monster's den; and so he saddled and bridled his horse, and rode away over the dark plain.

As the day began to break, he saw, rising from the surface of the plain, large heaps of white stones surmounted by wooden crosses. Most of them seemed to have been there for a long time, but one of them was freshly erected. As he approached, he saw, crouching on the ground beside it, a little boy. The young man's heart melted at the sight of the desolate child crouching on the ground damp with the night dew. He drew near. As the child heard the horse's steps, he looked up and showed a face pale with weeping.

“My child, what brings you here?” said the young knight. “Where is your home, and where are your parents?”

“I have no home. There lies my only parent, killed by the were-wolf, like all the rest,” said the child; and he sobbed and wept aloud.

Walter of Ilzerley descended from his horse, and, raising the silver flagon, poured from it one drop upon the stones.

Immediately the heap quaked, and was rent asunder, and forth came a man whole and unharmed, rubbing his eyes like one aroused from slumber.

“Why, Tristram, my son, I wake from an ugly dream. I thought the were-wolf had me.—But what makes you look so pale?” said the man as he patted the head of the child, who was staring at him with widely opened eyes, and cheeks paler than before.

The little boy did not speak, for he was too much frightened; but the young knight told him all that had happened; whereupon the man knelt down and thanked God and Walter of Ilzerley alternately.

The knight gave the man half of the blood, and bade him let fall one drop of it on all the heaps of stones; he charged him also to say himself, and to bid all that the wolf’s blood should bring to life to say, three Pater-nosters every morning and every evening for his success in the expedition on which he was bound; then he rode away where the ruby light pointed.

As he reached the border of the plain, he looked back, and saw a kneeling crowd; and, as he strained his ear, the morning wind brought to him the sound of their prayer and praise. And his heart was glad within him, and he journeyed on in the sweet light of the sun, over fields fair with flowers and glittering with dew. Little birds sang on the trees, and the May flies and butterflies sported around him, as he rode on his way, singing an old song of knightly valor and of ladies’ grace.

The sun was high overhead when he saw in the distance a castle by the sea. As he came towards it, he saw that it was broad and high, and looked as if it were the residence of some mighty lord; but no knightly banner floated from its walls. A large black pennon drooped sadly against its staff. Walter of Ilzerley rode forward and sounded the horn which hung ready for the use of travellers. A head appeared at the small grated window in the gate, and the porter asked who sounded, and what was his errand.

“Walter of Ilzerley am I called, and my errand is to redress a great wrong,” answered the young knight.

“Tarry awhile till I ask what is my lady’s will concerning you,” said the porter; and he retired from the grate, leaving the traveller much surprised at such an uncourteous reception. He looked around as he sat on his steed waiting. The peasants of the surrounding cottages were busy at their toil in the fields. They were more hale and cheerful than most of their class. They looked well fed and well cared for, but each man wore a black band upon his right arm; and the women and girls, whom he saw busy at their household tasks, all wore black caps and scarfs. Yet they talked and laughed gayly, and seemed to pay no heed to the gloomy tokens they bore.

His marvelling was interrupted by the rattling of the chains that supported the drawbridge, and the groaning of the portcullis as it was raised to admit him. He rode forward. As he entered the court-yard, he perceived that the porter and all the retainers were dressed in black. At the extremity of the court, on the lowest step of a broad flight of stone stairs, stood the seneschal, a venerable, white-bearded man, clothed in black like the rest.

“Welcome, Walter of Ilzerley,” he said; “my lady awaits you.”

The young knight dismounted, much astonished at all he saw.

He followed the seneschal up the broad stone stairs into a long and lofty room. On either side sat a row of young girls spinning. At the upper end of the room, on a raised dais, sat the lady. She had been beautiful; but sorrow had furrowed her forehead, and quenched the brightness of her eyes. She rose as the young knight approached, and extended her hand.

“Welcome, Walter of Ilzerley,” she said; “welcome to a doubly smitten house,—a house reft of its lord and of its child.”

“Were your sorrow, lady,” answered the young knight, “such as admitted of human aid, then would I bind myself to your service so soon as my present errand be fulfilled; but against such grief as yours the bravest arm lies helpless. I can but grieve with you.”

The lady turned to an old priest who sat in the deep embrasure of the window behind her, reading his breviary, and who had not even raised his head at the young man’s entrance.

“Father Anselm,” she said, “tell this stranger the story of my woe. Perhaps it may be granted to him to succeed in that enterprise wherein those that preceded him have failed.”

At these words all the black-robed maidens stopped their spinning, and fastened their eyes sorrowfully on the young knight, and sighed. It was as if a low wind had swept through the hall, and brought back to Walter of Ilzerley’s memory the midnight wail in the chapel.

The old priest closed his book, and rose, turning towards the youth.

“My blessing be upon you, my son,” he said. “The lady’s will shall be obeyed. Follow me to my cell. There will I tell you what grievous woe rests upon this house.”

Walter saluted the lady, glanced at the rows of black-robed maidens, who with bowed heads were again busy at their wheels, and retired with the old priest. He followed him through dark, winding passages, cut in the thickness of the stone wall, into his cell; narrow, but lighted by a window which looked out upon the sea. On a little wooden table stood a crucifix and a skull; and the stone floor before it was worn into a hollow where the knees of the good priest had been pressed in his hours of prayer.

“Be seated, my son,” said Father Anselm, as he drew forward a wooden stool, and offered it to the youth. He sat down himself upon the low truckle-bed, folded his hands, and heaved a deep sigh. After a pause, during which ‘Walter pondered what grief this might be, and what courage and fortune might be necessary to remove it, the old priest thus began:—

“Do not think, my son, that this castle was always the gloomy abode that you now see it. I remember when troops of lords and ladies made it gay with jest and song from morn till midnight. Every day there was hunting and hawking, tilting and jousting; for the count and countess were young, and loved pleasure, like all the young and fortunate. Good were they, and pious also; and on the first day of every month, they and all their guests and all their household, carrying lighted tapers, walked in solemn procession to the shrine of St. Mary of Aspramont, a league away, on the high hill that overhangs the sea.

“It was fourteen years ago,—I shall never forget that glad and sunny morning which was to have so black a close,—fourteen years ago the drawbridge was lowered, and forth walked Count Egbert in his gorgeous dress, leading by her hand his lady all blazing with gold and jewels, both bearing great waxen tapers half an dl high. And all the lords and ladies, magnificently attired and bearing lighted tapers also, and all the household, followed, save two or three old servants who were too infirm to walk so far, and the count and countess’ little daughter, their only child, a babe a twelvemonth old, with her nurse. The nurse stood on the lower step of the great stone stairs, and held the child in her arms; and the little thing sprang and laughed for joy as she saw the goodly company and the lighted tapers pass by. Each lord and lady saluted her and bade her good-by as they passed; for she was a sweet and gracious child, and all loved her. Her father and

mother looked back and smiled and beckoned with their hand at her as they left the court-yard; but they did not dream that that was to be their last look on their little one.

“The procession passed over the drawbridge and through the pleasant fields, chanting St. Mary’s hymn as they went. The sweet voices of the ladies and the deep tones of the knights sounded as though nightingales were singing beside the swelling sea.

Strange was it that the moment which saw the count and countess bent on such pious intent should have brought to them the misery of their lives. As they rose from their knees before the shrine, one of the knights looked towards the sea and shouted, ‘Holy Virgin, the pirates!’

“They all rushed to the edge of the cliff; and there, below them, they saw a great Saracenic galley just entering the bay before the castle. The ladies shrieked and knelt, all save the countess. She snatched the dagger from her husband’s belt, and sprang down the steep. The count and all the knights and retainers followed, bounding like deer over the stones, down the broken and rugged way, the countess before them. The way was long,—too long. The castle was hid from their sight by the thick wood. They darted through its shadows, and came out upon the sunny plain. The pirates were already in their boats. Ere the knights could reach the shore, they had gained their vessel; the wind was filling her sails and bearing them away.

“The countess had flown towards the castle. As her husband and his friends, baffled, for they had no vessel wherewith to chase the pirates, crossed the drawbridge which had been left lowered for their return, they saw the murdered bodies of the old servants stretched upon the reddened stones of the court-yard.

“ ‘My child!’ cried the count in a tone of anguish; and he rushed towards his little daughter’s room. It was empty of child and nurse. On the floor lay the countess, still and white as though dead. They brought her back to life with much labor and pains; but from that day neither she nor her husband ever smiled again, nor did they ever renew their pilgrimage to St. Mary’s shrine, which was a great wrong to the saint. They shut themselves up in their private apartments, and mourned without ceasing. No more mirth or song enlivened the castle, and hospitality was given to strangers for one night only. They brooded over their loss till they fancied themselves aggrieved by Providence; and they had no thought for the still greater distresses of the poor around them, who that year, for it was a year of famine, saw their children perishing before their eyes for lack of food.

“Another great misery befell on that year. It was the appearance of the were-wolf, which has ever since desolated the country.”

At the mention of the were-wolf, the young man bent forward and listened still more attentively.

“The Sieur Nicolas de Maupré was a haughty and lawless lord, whose chief occupation was in waylaying travellers, and his chief pleasure in torturing them until they were fain to ransom themselves at the cost of all they possessed. This wicked lord, as I say, one day disappeared; and no one could imagine what had become of him, until many others disappeared also, and the rumor spread in the country that a were-wolf had taken up its abode near by. Then every one knew that the wicked knight had turned himself into a were-wolf; and all the people since then have lived in terror of their lives, and many have been destroyed in spite of all their precautions; for there lives no beast or being so treacherous, so wily, and so cruel, as the were-wolf. Anathema maranatha!”

And the priest crossed himself.

“But I must go on, and bring my sorrowful history to its close. One afternoon the count wandered forth across the meadows on a solitary walk. Hours passed, the evening meal was ready to be served, but he did not return.

The countess was at prayers in the chapel, and did not perceive her lord’s absence; but those of the household began to feel uneasy. They were all watching if they could catch sight of the count returning, when in the dusky twilight they beheld the figure of a boy running towards the castle. As he reached the walls, he shouted,—

“ ‘The count! the were-wolf!’ and sank down upon the stones.

“All the retainers seized torches and weapons and rushed forth in search of their master, taking courage from their numbers; for not one of them, much as they loved their lord, would have dared venture out alone with the chance of meeting the monster.

“Guided by the lad’s directions, they sought and found a little brook which ran babbling down from a steep rock into the sea; and on its bank lay all that remained of the count. He had fought manfully against the beast, as the torn and trampled ground proved; but what can one mortal man do against a were-wolf?

“With groans and sobs the retainers took up their lord’s remains and bore them to the castle; and not one of them but wept like a child when the countess met them ere they reached the drawbridge. I will not describe her grief. One should have seen it to know what it was.

“The count was buried in the chapel, before the altar; and there three times a day, at morning and noon and night, the countess kneels, and listens to a mass for the dead. And her affliction has borne good fruit. She spends all the rest of her time in caring for the sick, the poor, and the afflicted; deeming her second bereavement a chastisement sent from heaven because of the rebellious manner in which she received the first. And all the country around blesses her, and grieves because of her grief.

“But now, my son, I must leave you, unless, indeed, you will accompany me to the chapel; for noon is at hand, and I must say the mass for the dead.”

“One instant, my father,” said Walter of Ilzerley; “tarry one instant. Surely by the hand of superhuman wisdom was I brought hither.”

And the young knight told the priest how he had slept in the den of the were-wolf, and had slain him, and had brought away his blood. And the old man lifted up his hands and thanked Heaven, while tears of joy ran down his withered cheeks and dropped on his brown robe. Then he led Walter to the chapel, and bade him stand at the foot of the count’s tomb.

He had scarcely taken his place there when the countess appeared, followed by all her servants and retainers, and knelt to listen to the mass. But, instead of the service for the dead, the old priest chanted out, in a broken voice, a canticle of thanksgiving. The countess and all her servants were greatly astonished; the more so that they saw the young knight standing with a joyful face, holding a silver flagon upraised in his hand.

When the priest had ended the canticle, he said in a loud voice,—

“Daughter, arise and rejoice. The days of thy mourning are ended.”

Thereupon Walter of Ilzerley poured a drop of the were-wolf’s blood upon the tomb. And the tomb opened in the middle, and the count arose and came forth, shading his eyes with his hand, as one whom a sudden light wakens. And the chapel was filled with the cries of fright and joy of all the servants and retainers; but the count and countess spake never a word, but stood fast locked in each other’s arms.

That night bonfires blazed so broad and high from the walls of the castle, that they reddened the whole sky; and troops of horsemen from all the fortresses for fifteen miles around came

hurrying to see what had happened, and to offer their aid. They were all bid right welcome; and oxen were roasted whole, and a great row of wine-casks was brought up from the cellars, and broached and ran without stint or measure. As each successive troop came into the court-yard, and were met by the joyful news, they set up such a shout of joy that it echoed from the castle walls far over the meadows and back to the distant hills. Never was there known such gladness and revelling.

But Walter of Ilzerley, when the evening meal was ended, retired from the great hall, bright with the blaze of a hundred torches, and glad with the voices of the count and countess' fast arriving friends, and took his stand upon the walls and looked towards the dark, scarce seen sea, wondering what errand it might be that he was to undertake at the countess' behest when his present enterprise should be ended. He was standing, his eyes fixed upon the ruby ring which shone brightly on his hand, but shot forth no guiding ray, when Father Anselm approached him, and begged that he would deign to follow to the presence of the count and countess.

He found them in a small, round room, built in one of the towers. In the middle of the floor stood a child's cradle, the bedclothes tossed here and there in confusion, as if the little creature had been but just snatched up. Around were strewn little playthings; and on a chair lay a child's embroidered dress, but every thing looked old and tarnished.

The countess was standing, her hand clasped in her husband's, her face buried on his shoulder. She raised her head as the young knight entered, and he saw that she had been weeping. The count's face also was sad and sorrowful. The lady spoke.

"Walter of Ilzerley, God knows whether or not I am grateful to you for what you have done this day. Not because I lightly esteem the service already rendered do I sue you for another boon. Father Anselm has told you of our child. Nothing in this room has been touched since she was stolen from it. Each night of these long years have I come hither to mourn for my darling. Two months ago, I was kneeling here at midnight, when I heard a soft low wind come sweeping over the sea, and it bore to my ears my daughter's voice wailing,—

"Who shall deliver me from this captivity?"

When Walter of Ilzerley heard these words, the blood rushed in a mighty column to his heart, and his breath stopped; but he was silent, and the lady went on:—

"Since then two knights have come to this castle, and to each have I told my daughter's prayer. Each has ridden away on the morrow in search of her. From that quest neither has returned. But I feel that to you, perhaps, may be granted what has been denied to the other twain; and I implore you, Walter of Ilzerley, by all that you hold dear in this world and the next, to hear a mother's prayer, and pity a mother's anguish."

And so saying, the countess knelt before the young man's feet, and raised her clasped hands, beseeching him.

Walter of Ilzerley raised the lady, and swore never to return to Christian lands till he had found the maiden, and delivered her from the captivity wherein she was bound.

Then the count grasped him by the hand, and said,—

"Young knight, great as is my debt to you, it is as nought to that which it will be when you restore to me my child. And when she is given back to us, should your eyes love to rest upon her, we will give her to you, as your wife, and she shall have a dowry meet for a king's daughter."

But Walter of Ilzerley still kept silence on the voice that had come to him in the midnight chapel, for he felt as if it would be parting with a precious thing, were any save himself to know of it.

He thought of the maiden all that night, nor had he once closed his eyes to sleep, when the first red streaks of morning shone in the eastern sky. But he felt no fatigue, so bent was his mind upon freeing the count's daughter. He arose, and put on his armor, and, taking leave of the count and countess, he mounted his white horse, and rode away; while all the retainers bade him adieu, and shouted, "God speed you, brave knight," as he crossed the drawbridge, and came out upon the open plain.

The morning sun shone bright overhead, and the little white clouds floated on the soft blue of the sky, like fairy vessels on a waveless sea. The water danced and sparkled in the light, and the hum of the busy insects, as they flew from flower to flower, filled the air with pleasant sounds. The ruby light lay like a crimson path over the glittering water, and was lost in the distance of the glancing waves.

The knight reined up his horse upon the yellow beach, and looked around for a boat. In a little creek near by he saw a skiff, which two fishermen were dragging into the water.

"Friends, name your price," said the knight, "but I must have your boat."

"It is worth two pieces of gold to us," said the fishermen. The knight gave them four, and, mounting into the little boat with his horse, he pushed off to sea, following the crimson track.

A gentle wind drove forward the skiff, so that the knight had no need to ply the oars. He sat in the stern, his armor flashing back the sunlight; his eyes fixed on the distance where the crimson light pointed; Isis face full of manly courage, yet soft with tender thought.

Three days and three nights did he, with his good steed, float over the sea, borne on by the gentle wind which never varied nor died away; and, on the morning of the fourth day, he saw the minarets and gilded cupolas of a great city on the shore before him. As he floated nearer, he saw the accursed crescent flashing from every high point, and he knew that he had reached the country of the infidels. Suddenly the ruby light vanished, and a shadow seemed to fall upon him. He looked around. The sun was shining brightly as before; but the reflection of his own figure, of his horse, and of the boat, had disappeared, and he saw that he, and all that belonged to him, had become invisible. The boat pressed forward till it reached the shore; and Walter of Ilzerley, leaping from it, knelt on the sands, and thanked Heaven for having brought him so far safely on his way, and implored its assistance in what he had yet to accomplish; then mounting his horse, he turned towards the bronze gates of the city.

As he passed through the portal, a blind beggar, sitting beside the way, held out his hand and begged for alms.

"Fool," said a tall negro who was lounging in the sunshine, "hold your peace. No one comes this way."

The blind man answered,—

"I know by the measured trembling of the ground that a horse and rider are passing by." But the negro could see nothing; and he called to his comrades that the blind man had better eyes than they, for that he could perceive a horse and rider where there was nothing but dust and sunshine. And they all laughed and jeered at the blind man.

The young knight left them behind, and went on through the crowded street that lay before him. It was shaded from the heat of the sun by awnings of crimson silk, which were stretched across from the tops of the houses; and beneath were endless rows of stalls filled with gorgeous silks and jewelry and spices, and merchandise of every sort. Veiled women, preceded by black eunuchs, mingled with the swarthy and turbaned crowd, and shouts and cries and bargaining and chaffering resounded on every side.

Suddenly a blast of trumpets was heard from the upper extremity of the street; and every sound was immediately silenced, and all the people ranged themselves on either side, as a band of slaves dressed in green, with crooked cimeters shining in their hands, came down the way, preceding twelve officers wearing enormous turbans, mounted on black mules, and bearing brazen trumpets. When they reached the centre of the street, they stopped, and the officers sounded their trumpets and made proclamation, saying,—

“O people, listen! Thus saith the sultan, the master of the earth, the ruler of the sea, and the numberer of the stars:—

“Know, O ye people who are so blessed as to live in the city which we honor with our presence, that some child of unfathomable perdition hath stolen from our special treasury, locked with a hundred keys, guarded by a hundred slaves, entered through a labyrinth with a hundred windings, our most precious possession, the ruby ring lost in a wager to our ancestor, the great King Solomon, by the King of the Genii, and handed down ever since that day, in our most glorious and excellent house.

“Out of our great and wonderful clemency, we hereby proclaim that although he who has dared to aspire to the possession of this inestimable gem deserves a thousand deaths; yet, let him return it, and he shall receive free pardon for the offence, and shall furthermore be rewarded with two hundred purses of gold.”

Then the brazen trumpets sounded again, and the slaves and the officers moved forward, and the street became more noisy than before; for all the people were wondering and lamenting over the loss from the sultan’s treasury, of that wonderful ring.

But Walter of Ilzerley, as he looked around, saw one old woman, dressed as became the slave of a very rich person, who neither wondered nor questioned. She was very pale, and shook all over as she asked the merchant, by whose stall the knight had stopped his horse, whether the blue vest embroidered with gold which her mistress had ordered were finished.

“The vest is finished, and the embroidery is the finest that was ever seen in the city,” answered the merchant; “but, know you, that were it not for so illustrious a lady as an inmate of the palace of our exalted master, the sultan, I should have said it had been designed for a dog of a Christian.”

“What do you say?” screamed the old woman, in a shrill, quavering voice.

“Look, then,” said the merchant, holding up the vest: “is not here on the breast, hidden under the waving lines of the ornaments, the outline of the unclean cross?” And he spat on the ground in sign of abhorrence. “If the lady see it, she will never wear the vest, although she sent the pattern herself.”

The old woman said nothing, but paid the merchant three pieces of gold, and, taking the vest, made her way along the street as fast as she could.

The young knight followed her; but, although he took great pains not to press against any one, the crowd was so great that he constantly pushed those on the right and on the left; and they, not seeing the invisible horse and rider, felt greatly aggrieved, and angrily berated those nearest them, who, knowing themselves innocent of any discourtesy, were not slack in angry retort: and so it happened that the whole street fell into confusion, and threats and blows were exchanged on every side; and so great grew the tumult, that the merchants rose in haste and closed their shops and withdrew the awnings, and the rays of the sun poured down so fiercely that it was like a fiery rain; and so the crowd dispersed to seek shelter elsewhere; while Walter of Ilzerley followed the old woman as she passed through many long and winding streets. At length she halted at a door in a high stone wall. It was the only opening in the face of the wall, which was of great extent.

The old woman knocked three times; and the door was opened by a frightfully ugly slave, whose eyes stood out so far that he looked as if he could see all around him without turning his head. Walter of Ilzerley sprang from his horse, and followed the old woman as she entered; but, although he made all the haste he could, he did not succeed in passing the door ere the frightful slave closed it, and the young knight was caught between the door and the doorpost.

The slave wondered and pushed in vain, for the door could not close, of course, since there was a knight clothed in armor in the way. At last the slave opened widely the door in order to push it to with greater force, and so released the young man, who immediately sprang forward; but the old woman had disappeared through one of the many doors which opened into the circular hall in which he found himself.

He had no clew to guide him in his search, so he opened at random the door nearest him. He saw before him a long, dark, and narrow passage, at the end of which faintly glimmered an uncertain light. He advanced towards the ray, which proceeded from the key-hole of a heavy door, thickly studded with iron nails. A faint odor of gums and spices came to his nostrils; but he could see nothing within save by stooping to look through the key-hole, and to that no knight could condescend. So he drew his sword from its scabbard, and with its hilt knocked loudly at the door. After a short delay it was opened, and the head of an old man clothed, although it was summer, in a furred robe, appeared. His wrinkled forehead was high and broad; his beard was as white as snow; but his eyebrows were black and heavy, and from beneath their shade his small, keen eyes looked piercingly forth. As he cautiously opened the door the young knight passed within.

The old man peered down the passage, then muttering to himself, again closed the door. The room, or rather vault, into which the young knight had penetrated was vast and gloomy. The walls were of stone whereon were deeply graven strange devices and symbols, mixed with Chaldean characters and Coptic signs. In the middle of the vaulted ceiling was a small, round aperture, through which, looking up as through a black tube of great length, the stars could be seen at mid-day. The air was heavy with strange perfumes, which seemed to proceed from a bronze tripod, upon which was burning a fire whose flickering and uncertain flames supplied its only light to the vault.

The old man, still muttering to himself, resumed the occupation which the knight's summons had interrupted. He took some spices and some fine powder of charcoal, and made a paste, which he moulded into the form of a ring, over which he made various signs, turning it constantly, and ever and anon turning it to the four points of the compass. Then he dropped it into the middle of the fire. Immediately a bright flame sprang up, and, detaching itself from the fire below, remained in the shape of a fiery cross, suspended in the air. When the old man saw this, he gnashed his teeth and stamped on the ground.

"What accursed mystery is this?" he exclaimed. "Three times am I foiled. And what shall I say to the sultan when he demands what I have discovered? The ring is without a doubt in Christian hands; but how it came there, it passes my science to discover."

As he said this, the magic flame paled and died away; and, the fire on the tripod likewise sinking, the vault became dark. The old man lighted a tall, green taper at the decaying blaze, and placed it upon a table whereon lay a large, black-covered book, which he began attentively to study. Walter of Ilzerley approached, and looked over the old man's shoulder as he bent over the book, and he saw there written the exact description of the ring, and an explanation of its virtues. There he learnt that the ring had the power, on the approach of danger, of rendering its possessor invisible, and knew why he had become lost to mortal sight from the moment he approached the

shore of the infidels. He was reading with avidity the account of all the properties of the ring which had so mysteriously been bestowed upon him, when a loud knock was heard at the iron-studded door. The old man reluctantly arose and opened it; and a slave, richly dressed, entered with a concerned air, and, glancing uneasily around, knelt, and, bending his forehead till it almost touched the ground, said,—

“O most powerful and mighty sage! The sultan, our master, desires your presence forthwith.”

The old man, supporting his steps with an ivory cane carved with strange devices, followed the messenger, who seemed in a great hurry to get out of the vault. Walter of Ilzerley accompanied them through numberless passages and halls, until they came to a large room, filled with richly attired officers and slaves, who all drew aside respectfully as the old man passed. At the extremity of the room was a curtain of green brocade, before which stood ten gigantic slaves clothed in yellow, and holding naked cimbers in their hands. They made way as the old man advanced; and the slave who had summoned him drew aside the curtain, and held it up for him to enter. The knight followed close.

As he crossed the threshold, he found himself in a spacious and lofty apartment lighted with many-colored rays. The ceiling was painted to imitate the overhanging branches and green leaves of a forest, and birds of gorgeous plumage swung from it in cages of golden wire. Their songs mixed with the tinkling of a fountain which rose from a crystal tank in the middle of the room, around which grew flowers in rich abundance. Along the walls, which were of cedar inlaid with gold, were divans and cushions of embroidered damask fringed with pearl; and on the marble floor were spread carpets so soft that the footsteps falling on them gave back no sound.

On the divan at the upper end of the room sat a young man magnificently dressed. He was handsome, though very haughty in face and bearing.

The old man knelt and touched his forehead three times to the ground as the curtain fell behind him.

“Approach, O most venerable sage!” said the sultan, “and say how your search has sped. Have you found a clew by which to track the audacious criminal who has dared to violate the sanctity of our private treasury, and to steal from it the ring?”

The sultan knit the black arches of his brows till they met, and his moustaches quivered as he spoke.

“O most glorious and gracious of sultans!” answered the old man; “something truly have I discovered, though less than I had hoped. But that which I have learned makes the loss of the ring more unaccountable than before. I know to a surety that the gem is at this moment in Christian hands.”

The sultan started to his feet.

“In the hands of a dog of a Christian!” he exclaimed. “May he and his prophet perish together.”

At these impious and insulting words, Walter of Ilzerley lost patience, and, drawing hastily near, he smote the sultan on the face. The blow was well planted, and it tingled sharply on the sultan’s olive cheek.

“What demon, miserable old man, have you dared to bring hither with you?” he shouted in a rage, laying his hand on the dagger in his sash. “If you were less useful, your head should within five minutes make acquaintance with the bowstring. Begone I and know that unless, ere three days be over, I see again the ring, I will forget all your past services, and only remember this unheard-of affront.”

So saying, the sultan, foaming with rage, clapped his hands together. The curtain was withdrawn, and the old man, half terrified to death, retreated in haste.

The sage had hardly left the room when the curtain was again lifted, and an officer, apparently of high rank, entered and prostrated himself as the old man had done.

“What news do you bring, Mustapha?” said the sultan. “Dare not to say that your quest has been unsuccessful.”

“Most illustrious of sovereigns,” replied the officer, “this is what I have discovered. On the night before the ring was found to be lost, some fishermen out at sea saw, in the air overhead, a bright stream of rosy light, which flashed from the direction of the city towards the country of the Christians. The night was dark, but so bright was the passing radiance that it streamed like a ruddy pathway over the water, and lighted up all the sea. Further than this, O most merciful of masters! your slave has not been able to trace the ring.”

The sultan made no answer, but sat deep in thought for a while, twisting his long, curling moustache and looking on the ground. Then he made a sign to the officer to withdraw.

The sultan clapped his hands together as the officer retired, and a slave entered and prostrated himself.

“Let the great council be summoned,” said the sultan; and the slave withdrew.

After a few moments the green curtain was widely withdrawn, and a procession of very old men entered. They all wore green turbans, and their white robes were girded about them by costly shawls. After the due prostrations, at a sign from the sultan they seated themselves cross-legged, folded their arms over their breasts, and waited for him to speak.

“It is known to you,” said the sultan, “that our inestimable ruby ring has been audaciously stolen from our especial and private treasury.”

Here all the old men bowed their heads.

“I know, from certain information, that it has passed into the unclean hands of a Christian.”

Here all the old men spat on the ground, in sign of contempt and abhorrence.

“Furthermore, I have learnt that it is at this moment in the country of the Christians; and I have summoned you, to communicate to you my sovereign will and pleasure that an embassy be immediately despatched to the king of the Christians, demanding the instant return of the ring, and announcing that, should it be refused, I will ravage his country with fire and sword, and will destroy every city and walled town within its borders.”

When the great councillors had heard the sultan, they all replied in chorus,—

“O most powerful and illustrious sultan! to hear is to obey.”

And they left the room in the same order wherewith they had entered it; and Walter of Ilzerley joined their procession, and passed out with them.

The exterior hall looked out upon a large and shaded garden. Between the trees were seen light kiosks, whose trellised walls were wreathed with roses and jasmine; and from the velvet lawns rose numberless sparkling fountains, cooling the sultry air with their incessant rain.

Unknowing in what direction to turn in order to seek for the old woman who had bought the vest embroidered with the Christian cross, sadly perplexed at the labyrinth of halls and passages which filled the sultan’s palace, the young knight passed out through an open door into the garden, and, plunging into one of the thickets of flowering shrubs, threw himself down upon the ground to consider what he was next to do.

He had not yet succeeded in arriving at any definite conclusion, when he heard footsteps coming up the broad walk which led close by him. He raised his head, and saw a hunchbacked old Egyptian female dwarf, whose contorted ugliness seemed insufferably hideous, seen as it was amidst the graceful flowers and silver fountains, and light and glory of the garden. The dwarf advanced till she was close to him; then she stopped, and said,—

“Follow me.”

Walter of Ilzerley started to his feet, thinking that the ring had lost its power of concealing him; but, as he stood upright in the sunshine, he saw that his figure cast no shadow upon the ground, and then he perceived that the dwarf must be a sorceress.

He came from the thicket and followed her through the garden, until, turning into a lonely and scarcely trodden path, she stopped at a small, carved minor. She opened it by pressing upon a spring hidden under one of its ornaments, and passed within, followed by the knight. She ascended a narrow and winding staircase, and paused at a door at which she tapped. As the door opened, the dwarf turned her head and beckoned to the invisible knight. The door was opened by the old woman whom he had seen that morning bargaining for the vest. The young man's heart leaped for joy as he saw her; and with eager steps he passed into the room, for he felt assured that he should find there the maiden he sought.

The room was small, but richly decorated and furnished in the Oriental style, with painted arabesques, and the ceiling was carved with curious workmanship; but the knight saw nothing save the figure of a maiden, who was whispering to herself as he entered,—

“Who shall deliver me from this captivity?”

Seated beside an open window, which looked forth upon the sea, and leaning her cheek upon her hand, she was steadfastly gazing upon the glittering expanse of the water. She wore a blue vest embroidered with gold, which half betrayed, half concealed the graceful outlines of her figure; her head was covered on one side by a little embroidered cap, and on the other was placed a bouquet of jewelled flowers; while her long, soft, brown hair, unconfined, fell in heavy waves almost to the ground. On her white arms were clasped golden bracelets; and her little, rosy feet were thrust into crimson slippers embroidered with gold.

The knight had never seen any loveliness to be compared with that of the maiden; and he stood in a trance of wonder and admiration, gazing upon her as though he would never weary.

After a while the maiden turned from looking over the water and spoke in a sorrowful tone to the dwarf.

“Good mother, four days and four nights have I watched the waves; and yet I can see no knight coming to my rescue.”

And she sighed, and, turning her head, again fixed her eyes upon the sea.

“I can't help that,” answered the dwarf, shortly. “Some people see things where there is nothing to be seen, and others see nothing where there is something to be seen. I don't make people's eyes.”

And the dwarf sat down on a pile of cushions, and sulked.

The maiden answered nothing, and did not seem to hear the cracked and dissonant tones of the Egyptian; but the old woman who had opened the door rolled up her eyes and groaned, as if to express her disapprobation, though she evidently did not dare to speak.

As if weary of watching, the maiden left the casement, and, crossing the room, seated herself on the pile of cushions beside the dwarf. She took the old Egyptian's brown and wrinkled hand in her soft, white fingers, and said coaxingly,—

“But tell me one thing, good mother: how did you obtain for me the ruby ring? Tell me only that.”

“Don't tease me,” said the dwarf. “You would be sorry enough if I did tell you. The words I should be obliged to speak would shatter the walls, and bring a host of demons about us.”

At these words the old woman whom the young knight had seen in the street, clasped her hands, and implored the maiden not to persist in her entreaties.

“For,” said she, “know, my blessed lady, that I can scarcely sleep at nights as it is, knowing as I do that Monarè could have us all strangled by demons ere morning, if she chose. And, if I were once to see a demon, I should die of fright outright, as, indeed, it is a wonder that I did not that day the pirates carried us away. But of that you knew nothing, sweet, unconscious babe that you were.”

And the old woman began to weep.

“Don’t prate so,” said the dwarf, crossly.

“Isn’t it bad enough to be stolen by pirates without being told of it all the time? Don’t be such a croaking night-owl. I wonder, for my part, why the pirates took you. You never could have had any good looks to boast of.”

The old woman, forgetting for the moment her fears, was about to make an angry retort, when the maiden interfered and with gentle words composed the menaced quarrel; then, kissing tenderly the frightful Egyptian dwarf, she said,—

“Good mother, how can I thank you for all that you have done for me? If I obtain my freedom, I will show you what my gratitude is worth.”

“Don’t talk to me of gratitude,” interrupted the dwarf. “I want to know if I haven’t cause of gratitude to you. Who was it that saved me from those Mussulman hounds in the bazaar who were going to tear me in pieces for a witch, only because I shortened the leg of one who was going to kick me, so that he couldn’t put it down again? Don’t talk to me of gratitude! It makes me cross.”

But the maiden took no heed of the dwarf’s perversity. She kept her seat by her, and caressed her cheek with her white hand.

“Well, good mother,” she said, “since you will not tell me how you obtained the ring, tell me at least to whom it was that I sent it with my nightly prayer.”

“A good knight and a true,” answered the dwarf abruptly.

Walter of Ilzerley, at these words, could have fallen at the dwarf’s feet and embraced her knees for very thankfulness, so great was his desire to stand well in the esteem of the beautiful, imprisoned maiden.

“A good knight and a true,” repeated the maiden thoughtfully. “But, good mother, tell me something more. Is he young? Is he fair to look upon?”

But the dwarf would not answer a word to the maiden’s questions, and only reiterated,—

“A good knight and a true.”

Suddenly the maiden sprang to her feet and stood in the attitude of one listening; and the knight perceived the sound of many feet, and the clashing of arms from the garden beneath. He looked from a window that opened over the garden, and saw the old sage advancing at the head of a body of armed slaves. In his hand the old man carried a small, purple snake, which, hissing, stretched out its head in the direction of the little carved door. The old man entered, followed by the slaves, and they heard the noise of many ascending steps. The maiden stood pale and still in the middle of the room, while the old nurse crept trembling into a corner, and the dwarf clenched her teeth and stamped on the floor.

The door was wrenched open from without, and the old man appeared on the threshold. Behind him stood the slaves, filling the entry, and crowding on the stairs. The little purple snake in the sage’s hand raised the crest upon its head, and hissed loudly and angrily, turning towards the window where the knight was standing.

As the dwarf caught sight of the snake, her look of rage and perplexity changed into an expression of triumph. She crept behind the maiden, whose flowing robe concealed her from view, and, crossing her hands behind her, she mumbled a few unknown words.

As she spoke them, the little snake writhed violently; then, springing from the old man's hand, it darted to the window, and disappeared.

The old man tore his hair.

"Ten purses of gold to whoever catches the snake!" he shouted. And he and all the armed slaves rushed down the stairs in pursuit of the little purple snake; and the sound of their voices and trampling steps died away.

The old nurse, shaking and trembling, crawled forward and closed the door; while the hideous Egyptian dwarf threw herself on the floor, and rolled her head about in an ecstasy of delight.

"Oh, what a fool, what a world-renowned fool, is that sage! Call him a sage, indeed! Why, if I were to pull out an eyelash, that eyelash would have more knowledge in it than he has in his whole body. I waist to know if he ever lived, like me, in the secret chambers of the great Pyramid, where the books of my ancestors, the Egyptian priests, are stored? What does he know, the bungler! He didn't even know who I was. And to bring that absurd little snake here where I am! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the dwarf rolled about and shrieked with laughter, while the old nurse looked at her aghast, and ever and anon crossed herself; and the maiden stood pressing her hand against her heart, as if to still its frightened beatings; for, at the appearance of the armed slaves, she had anticipated nothing less than instant death.

At length the dwarf's laughter came, as all things will, to an end.

"Do stop crossing yourself," she said peevishly to the old nurse. "Can't any one have a little quiet merriment, but you must put on a long face, and scratch crosses all over yourself?" And she turned her back upon the old woman, and, approaching the trembling maiden, took hold of her hand, and drew her to a divan.

"Sit down, my pearl, my white dove," she said caressingly. "Don't shiver so. Do you think your old Monarè would let any one hurt you? I will make that old fool repent of having frightened my child."

And she began to mutter some strange words. But the maiden laid her hand upon the Egyptian's mouth, and prayed her not to harm the sage.

"You'll make me forget all the curses I ever learned," said the dwarf, sulkily; "but if you don't want him hurt, it's all the same to me."

The maiden rose, and looked out anew upon the waves.

"Good mother, I can see nothing," she said. "When will he come?"

"That's a reasonable question," replied the dwarf, "seeing that he has been in the room for half an hour."

The blood rushed crimson into the maiden's cheeks as she glanced around.

"There's no use in looking for him," said the dwarf. "You can't see him, but I can. Young knight, don't stand there like a stone, with your eyes as wide open as if you were trying to eat her with them. Come here and kiss her hand."

But the young knight did not dare to advance towards the beautiful maiden; and she, on her side, drooped her head, and turned shyly away from that part of the room to which the dwarf directed her eyes.

"I never saw such tiresome people," said the dwarf, in a pet. "There's this young knight, as handsome as he can be, if you could only see him, come over the sea three days and three nights

from the country of the Christians, because you called him; and now that he is here, you turn away and won't hold out your hand, and he is afraid to come and take it. I am angry. Hold out your hand; and you, Sir Knight, come forward."

When the maiden heard herself thus rebuked, she held out her hand, blushing all over like the sky at sunrise; and Walter of Ilzerley, advancing, fell on his knees and raised it to his lips. As she felt the invisible lips pressed upon her hand, the maiden uttered a little cry, and drew close to the dwarfs side.

"Don't be frightened," said the dwarf. "You know that you have been looking out of the window four days and four nights, hoping to see him."

At this the maiden blushed more deeply than before, and looked imploringly at the Egyptian.

"Well, well," said the dwarf, "I didn't say any thing, did I? But I must tell now this young knight what he has to do."

So saying, she turned to Walter of Ilzerley. "As soon as it is dark the guards will make their rounds. When they appear you must attack them."

The maiden, hearing this, exclaimed,—

"O good mother I surely you do not wish the knight to fight single-handed against six!"

Walter of Ilzerley would have assured her that he was willing to fight single-handed against sixty, for her sake; but the same charm that rendered him invisible deprived him of the power of speech. He could but clench the handle of his sword and wish for the moment that should prove how little he valued danger in her cause.

He had not long to wait, for the night was fast coming on. It was no sooner dark than heavy steps were heard ascending the stairs; the door was thrown open, and showed the chief of the guard and his armed soldiers, each holding a lighted torch in one hand and a naked cimeter in the other. They gloomily looked around the room to assure themselves of the presence of all its inmates. At that instant Walter of Ilzerley threw from him the ring, and stood in shining armor and with flashing eyes before their astonished sight. They raised their cimeters and rushed upon him, but he sprang to meet them with uplifted sword. The quiet little room was filled with the clashing of weapons and the fierce cries of the guards; but the fray did not last long. One after another fell under the heavy blows of the Christian knight, until all six lay stretched upon the ground.

"That is well done," said the dwarf, who had watched the combat with great delight, clapping her hands and screaming with laughter as each successive guard fell to the ground; while the maiden had thrown herself upon her knees, and, burying her face in her hands, was praying earnestly; and the old nurse had crept under a pile of cushions, where nothing was visible of her save her feet.

"Now," said the dwarf, "take from the sash of the chief of the guard the key which you will find there. It opens every lock in the palace. "With that we can let ourselves out."

The knight took the key from the sash of the chief of the guard, as the dwarf had directed; then taking up the ruby ring, he offered it to the maiden.

"Do as I bid you," said the dwarf, "and put it on your hand again."

The knight would have expostulated, but the Egyptian grew angry, and stretched her hand towards him, making a sign. Immediately the ruby ring slid up his finger, and he again became invisible. He tried to remove it, but it remained fast, and he had nothing to do but to submit.

Led by the dwarf, they descended the stairs, and crept stealthily along the garden. As they came near the guard-room, they heard the soldiers wondering why their chief did not return.

"I always thought harm would happen to some of us," said one of the soldiers, "ever since that Egyptian hag came into the palace. Let us go and look for them; for it grows late, and they should have been back long ago."

And, leaving the guard-room, all the soldiers came in a body into the garden, and spread themselves through it, searching for their comrades. The maiden and her attendants had crouched down in a thick clump of rose-bushes, which grew so high and broad as to quite conceal them. They remained there, until, at a loud shout, which proceeded from that part of the garden on which the little carved door opened, all the soldiers rushed thither, and they heard their cries of rage and astonishment. Then, quickly rising from their hiding-place, the maiden and the women hurried on, accompanied by the invisible knight. They passed into the deserted guard-room, and thence through many passages, until they reached the circular hall into which the knight had come on his first entrance into the palace.

"Stop here," said the Egyptian. "I must go forward and see whether the slave at the door is awake."

She stole cautiously forward, and saw the slave sitting cross-legged on the ground, his great eyes shining in the dark passage like two enormous opals. She came back grinning.

"Now I will show you something amusing," she said; and she began to draw with her finger in the air the outline of a gigantic lion. When she had finished, she blew on the air-drawn figure, and it took the form and color of life, and bounded forward with open jaws and fiery eyes in great leaps towards the negro, who, seeing this unexpected sight, yelled, and took to flight, rolling with incredible agility over and over on the floor like a ball.

The Egyptian shrieked with laughter, as the slave, pursued by the phantom of a lion, disappeared. Then leading forward her companions, she unlocked the little door, and they all stood outside the palace, in the street. The knight lifted the maiden upon his invisible horse, and, leading it by the bridle, followed the steps of the dwarf, who conducted them through many dark and silent streets, down to the water's edge.

As they neared the shore, they were startled by a sudden glare; and, looking up, they saw in the distance a great column of fire rising from the watch-tower of the sultan's palace; and the night wind brought to their ears the sound of the clashing of arms, and loud voices.

"We must hurry," said the dwarf; "but, first, I will make sure that we shall not be pursued."

So saying, she stooped and scraped together a handful of sand. Then she bade them enter a boat which lay near by.

The knight lifted the maiden from the horse, and carried her to the boat; for, in truth, she was so terrified that she could not have taken a step. The old nurse hobbled in after them, casting many an affrighted glance over her shoulder at the fast increasing, angry blaze; and the Egyptian took her place, standing in the stern; while the knight dipped the oars into the water, and rowed out to the open sea.

As the boat advanced, the dwarf let the sand fall, grain by grain, from her hand; and, as it fell, the water behind them turned to sand, and all the boats and galleys were buried fast in it, so that they could not be stirred. They saw, as they rowed away, a great crowd, led by the soldiers of the guard-room, come rushing down to the water's edge to pursue them. They heard their angry shouts and cries, and saw their unavailing efforts to raise the half-buried vessels.

The Egyptian turned as the last grain of sand fell from her hand, and, seating herself, composedly said,—

"Now we are safe. Lay down your oars, we do not need them."

A gentle wind sprang up as she spoke, the ruby ring sent forth its rosy light, and the young knight became visible. As he assumed his shape, the maiden raised her eyes timidly to his, intending to thank him; but, perceiving his look riveted upon her, she blushed, and turned away. As the knight looked upon her lovely face, and thought of the delight of her parents when they should receive the maiden from his hands, his eyes filled with tears of joy, and he almost forgot his own promised happiness in the thought of theirs.

Three days and three nights they floated over the sea, borne on by the gentle wind, which never changed nor died away, lighted by the sun by day, and by the rosy radiance of the ring at night. On the fourth night they saw a light far off on the water's edge, at the end, as it were, of the pathway traced by the ruddy rays.

When the dwarf saw the light, she heaved a deep sigh, and said to the knight,—

“Give me now the ring. You have no further need for it.”

And the knight drew from his finger the ring, and gave it to her. Then she said to the maiden,—

“Child, when you saved me from those who were about to take my life, I vowed one day to repay an equal benefit to you. Look at that light, far in the distance. It shines before your home. There, on the shore of the sea, stand your father and your mother, with out-stretched arms, waiting to embrace you. I have kept my vow. Kiss me, my child.”

The maiden pressed her sweet lips to the old Egyptian's withered cheek, but suddenly she felt upon them nothing but air. The dwarf had vanished utterly, and the rosy light also.

“Monarè! Monarè!” cried the maiden, but no voice replied. Only in the distance, from the bosom of a little white cloud, came a breath that sounded like “Farewell.”

The boat sped on, wafted by the wind; and, as it approached, they saw the light higher and broader, and they could distinguish the figures of the count and the countess, surrounded by all their friends and retainers, holding high in the air torches whose waving light flashed out upon the sea, and showed the crowd of eager faces all turned upon the fast advancing boat.

As the keel grated on the shore, Walter of Ilzerley leaped from the boat, bearing the maiden, and delivered her into her parents' arms.

They wept aloud for joy as they kissed and folded to their hearts the beautiful maiden whom they had last seen as a babe in her nurse's arms; and their retainers shouted for gladness in welcome to the daughter of the house; they pressed with joyous acclaim around the knight who had rescued her from the captivity wherein she had been bound, and greeted over and over again the old nurse who had been lost to sight for so many years.

When her parents had kissed and blessed the maiden, Father Anselm advanced, and laid his hand upon her head. Then the maiden and her parents, and Walter of Ilzerley, and all around, knelt upon the shore; and the old priest lifted up his voice, and blessed the maiden, and praised and thanked God.

There was revelling at the count's castle for all that week; and not only the rich and gay, but the poor and lonely rejoiced also, for the count and countess sent out and summoned all the poor of the whole country round, and feasted them in the court-yard, for they wished the sympathy of all in their great joy and happiness. And on the seventh day the maiden was married to the knight by Father Anselm, in the chapel of the castle, before a great crowd of lords and ladies, who had assembled from all the castles far and wide. But there was none among all the ladies who could compare for beauty and gentleness and grace with the maiden, as she stood in her long white robes and snowy veil beside the knight who had delivered her from her captivity.