



“**A** MAN who will cross the path of your son will be the cause of great misfortunes to you.”

Such was the prediction of the oldest magician at the Court of the King of the Richanians, and it was in consequence of this prediction that the King issued a severe edict. Each time that his son and heir, Ali, left the palace it was the duty of a crier to inform the people. Then in an instant the streets became empty, the houses were closed, the doors of the town were carefully guarded. Deserted and silent, Richa was like a dead city.

Several years passed in this manner without any catastrophe taking place; and the King was rejoiced in his heart because the wise measures he had adopted had defeated the sinister prediction.

Now, one day the criers had announced that Prince Ali would proceed to the Baths at the eighth hour. Thus, the

streets through which the Prince passed, surrounded by his escort, were entirely deserted. As far as the eye could see no living thing appeared in the abandoned streets, and all the houses were closed as in a time of general mourning. Notwithstanding, at a spot near the baths, stretched on the ground behind one of the pillars of the arcades, a mendicant slept. At the sound of the approaching horses' hoofs he suddenly awoke and, leaning upon his elbow, half rose, the better to see the passing cavalcade. But in an instant the soldiers of the Prince's guard rushed upon him, beating him with the butt-end of their muskets, and drove him howling from the spot.

The next day a revolution took place. The King was assassinated by conspirators against his throne. Prince Ali escaped death by a miracle, and left his country to live in exile an existence full of sadness and wretchedness.

Ali, however, was a young man of more

than ordinary intelligence. He meditated profoundly over the misfortunes which had befallen him, and was not long in satisfying himself as to their cause.

"All our troubles," he reasoned, "commenced on the day after I met the mendicant, who was maltreated by my bodyguard. I am convinced that this mendicant was a magician in disguise, who is now avenging the outrage we inflicted upon him. I have no doubt this magician is the Lord Abd-el-Kader of Djilane—the most powerful of necromancers. I have often heard that he loves to mingle with the people, dressed in the poorest garb. Therefore I will go to seek the Lord Abd-el-Kader; I will kneel before him, and bow my head in the dust. Abd-el-Kader is generous as he is powerful, and I am sure he will forgive me."

On the same day Ali set out on his journey, walking the whole distance, as he was very poor; but he was obliged to walk a long and weary way. His only nourishment consisted of the dates he gathered on the road; to quench his thirst he drank at the nearest spring. Each day he sheltered himself for a little while beneath the shade of the palm trees. When refreshed by sleep he started again, plodding on thus almost without cessation, day and night. Exhausted with fatigue, his feet bruised, and his legs sinking under him, he was near the point of falling to the ground, when suddenly appeared before him the great magician of whom he was in search.

Ali prostrated himself, and his forehead touched the dust. Then with a supplicating voice he said:—

"Oh, mighty Abd-el-Kader, my father gravely offended you on my account. Your

vengeance was just. You have caused my father to perish, and you have sent me into exile to live a life of misery and wretchedness. No doubt the Fates ordained it should be thus. But see to what a state I am reduced. I am come to crave your clemency, because I can no longer live under the weight of your anger. I have journeyed many days and nights. I am footsore, and my strength is exhausted. Oh, master, your goodness is equal to your power. Will you not forgive the most unfortunate of princes?"

The good Abd-el-Kader was touched by his sincere repentance.

"I forgive you, my son," said he. "Rise, and remember the words I am about to speak. I will make your fortune, and will restore to you everything that you have lost by the fault of your father. Promise only always to obey me, to undertake nothing without consulting me, and to follow without question my orders. Now go to the neighbouring

forest and set your spring. A bird will come and be captured. Bring it to me."

Ali entered the forest, as he was told, set his spring, and concealed himself in the brushwood. Almost at the same instant he heard the whirring of wings, and a beautiful bird appeared. So dazzling was

his plumage that the shade of the forest was brilliantly illuminated by it. Ali put forth his hand and seized the beautiful bird. The captive struggled, and at last escaped and flew away, leaving in the hands of his would-be captor nothing but a bunch of his marvellous plumes.

And wonderful plumes they were! Soft to the touch, warm to the eye, coloured with exquisite and varied tints. On waving them



"ALI PUT FORTH HIS HAND AND SEIZED THE BEAUTIFUL BIRD."

the Prince saw that the light produced upon them a thousand kaleidoscopic effects ; just as when the jewel-merchant plunges his hand into his treasure-box is to be seen the sparkle of diamonds or the milky beauty of pearls, the flame of rubies, the soft green of emeralds, and the changing blues of turquoises or sapphires. And all these tints of the wonderful feathers seemed to blend into a harmony caused by their diversity. Even the rainbow itself was rivalled by the delicate colours of these wonderful feathers.

Ali looked at them without appreciation of their beauty, for despair was in his heart. "Alas!" he sighed, "I have failed to fulfil the first command of my master."

"Do not grieve, my son," said a voice, which Ali recognised as that of Abd-el-Kader. "Take these plumes, return to your native country, and offer them to the present King of the Richanians."

Ali immediately set out upon his journey, greatly comforted by the kind tone of the magician. On his arrival at Richa he went to the palace and offered the plumes to the King, as he had been told. As soon as the King saw them he was thrown into ecstasy.

"How marvellous are these plumes!" he exclaimed. "To possess them I would have given all the treasures of my kingdom. He who brings them and offers them to me of his own free will is dearer to me than any of my subjects."

And from that day Ali was installed at the palace, and the King overwhelmed him with presents and dignities.

But all these favours naturally excited the jealousy of the courtiers. Courts are always full of plots and counterplots. Of this Ali soon had an experience. The King had a Grand Vizier whose name was Slimane, who up to that time had been all-powerful. Slimane, foreseeing in the new favourite his future rival, conceived an enmity towards him, but he was artful enough not to show this sentiment outwardly, and reflected long on the best means of quietly suppressing Ali. At last, after maturing his plans, Slimane went to the King and said:—

"O King, the plumes given to your Majesty by Ali are unquestionably beautiful in the extreme. But the bird to which they belong is far more beautiful. I am astonished that Ali has only brought you a few feathers, and has not esteemed you worthy to possess the bird itself. He knows where it is to be found. If he loves you truly, he will bring it to your Majesty."

The King, thus prompted by the crafty

Slimane, sent for Ali forthwith, and forbade him to appear again in his presence until he was ready to bring the marvellous bird.

Ali heard this edict with consternation. "What is the good," he sighed, "to have restored me to prosperity, since it was to be of such brief duration?"

"Do not afflict yourself, my son," replied a voice which Ali instantly recognised; "but return to the forest and again set your springe."

Ali obeyed, and arriving at the forest had no sooner made his preparations than the bird again came and was caught in the trap. This time the young Prince took good care not to allow it to escape, and, filled with joy, he brought it back to the King. As soon as the monarch saw the fairy bird Ali was restored to his favour. He embraced him, and said:—

"You are the most worthy of my subjects. I owe you more than life, and I will cherish you always."

Ali rejoiced at this promise of the King, and was simple enough to believe him sincere.

Meanwhile, Slimane was filled with rage at the turn of events, nor was it long before he had invented a new perfidious plot against the unfortunate Ali. He went to the King and said, "Sire, thanks to my wise counsels you possess a rare and beautiful bird. But how much more beautiful is the Princess Halyme, of whose solitude it was the only charm. The Princess Halyme is as lovely as the day, and I am surprised that your Majesty has not been thought worthy to contemplate her dazzling beauty. Ali knows where to find her. If he loves your Majesty, as he pretends, he will conduct this peerless Princess to the most powerful of Kings."

When the King informed Ali of what had taken place, and intimated his Royal pleasure that the Princess Halyme should be forthwith brought to his capital, Ali replied boldly, "Sire, it shall be done," for he had already consulted his patron, Abd-el-Kader.

"I can inform your Majesty," he added, "that the Princess Halyme is even more beautiful than Slimane has told your Majesty. In fact, her loveliness surpasses all that man can imagine. I will depart at once, Sire, and I promise to conduct her hither. But an enchanter holds her prisoner in an island far away in the great sea which surrounds the world. In order that I may approach it I must be provided with a ship made of gold and pure silver, constructed from the treasures in the vaults of your Grand Vizier."

And thus was the crafty Slimane adroitly caught in his own trap. The Grand Vizier knew too well the character of the King to doubt that he would be compelled to accede to Ali's demands. He therefore thought it wiser not to risk the loss of his head by a refusal. Thus, making a virtue of necessity, he gave to his successful rival the key of his treasury.

In a few weeks the ship of fine gold and silver was built. Her keel and sides were of solid gold, partly covered by a sheet of silver. The masts, oars, and rudder were of gold and the sails of the finest silver cloth.

To construct such a marvellous vessel, as may be imagined, made a considerable inroad upon the gold and silver of the Grand Vizier. In short, it was a terrible blow to the avaricious Slimane, who had been many years amassing these treasures, which he now saw disappear by the car-load, to be thrown into the crucible. He shed tears of rage over his loss, but only when no one could see him—above all, the King; for his first duty was to show always to his master a smiling visage.

The magnificent golden ship weighed anchor; upon the vast sea which surrounds the world she sailed away towards the enchanted island, where a powerful spell held prisoner the adorable Princess Halyme, weeping over the loss of her marvellous bird. At the wheel stood the magician Abd-el-Kader, whilst Ali, leaning over the taffrail, scanned the horizon. These two alone constituted the entire crew and passengers of the golden ship armoured with silver. During an entire moon they sailed upon the ocean, when at last they perceived from afar a rock rising from the sea. It was the mysterious prison where the Princess, beautiful as the dawn, was held in bondage. At the end of the bay rose the palace; upon the terrace

dreamed the Princess Halyme, robed in snowy veils of white.

As soon as she saw the ship of gold anchored in the bay she was seized with curiosity to examine closely this new wonder. She even desired to handle the oars, touch the sails, and contemplate her fair visage mirrored in the golden masts. Thus she accepted the hand which Ali held out to her, and sprang lightly upon the deck. Instantly



"SHE SPRANG LIGHTLY UPON THE DECK."

the ship was in motion, sprang like a living thing through the waves, and in less time than it takes to write it the shores of the island were already so far that the eye could scarcely distinguish the bare outlines.

But Halyme had not called for help, Halyme had not wept with fear. She contented herself with clasping more strongly the hand of Ali. And thus was the beautiful Princess rescued from her prison.

One may easily imagine the feelings of the King when this enchanted pearl was presented to him. A gem whose pure lustre, unseen by all, had only shone upon a desert island in the midst of the vast ocean which surrounds the world. Ali was magnificently rewarded. Amongst other splendid presents he received the gift of the ship with which he had carried off the Princess—the ship of gold covered with silver armour.

Few pitied the avaricious Slimane, who was deprived of all his wealth and found himself reduced to miserable penury, whilst his rival, enriched by the spoils bestowed upon him by the King, flourished in opulence.

Of course, the King immediately fell violently in love with the Princess Halyme. "The time is now come," said he, "when you must choose between Ali and me. If you will consent to be my wife I will give you half of all my wealth, and you shall be Queen of the Richanians."

"Sire," replied the Princess Halyme, "I give your Majesty thanks. But before I accept your offer you must cause a funeral pile to be erected, surrounded on all sides by a deep ditch. Then your Majesty and Ali must each mount his horse, and to him who succeeds in overcoming this obstacle my hand will be given."

The King accepted the test, so overwhelming was his love for the Princess. Still, he was by no means easy in his mind concerning the result.

"Fear nothing, Sire," whispered the crafty Slimane to the King. "It is Ali who must make the first attempt to ride across the ditch and the funeral pile. Leave it to me, your Majesty; I will cause to be built a pyre so enormous, and there shall be dug a ditch so wide, that Ali will certainly be killed in the attempt to ride over them."

This cunning idea of the artful Slimane pleased the King enormously.

It was a memorable day, and one which became a record in the history of the Richanians. The people, hastening to Richa from every part of the kingdom, were ranged in a circle in the vast plain. They gathered,

too, upon the mountains and the hills which surrounded the city. It was like a gigantic circus, into which thronged a bustling, noisy crowd, waiting with anxiety for a spectacle without parallel. In the centre was raised a colossal pyre, which certainly measured several hundred feet in every direction. Around this was a yawning ditch, 100ft. wide and deep as an abyss. Already the fire which had been communicated to the base of the enormous funeral pile caused a column of flame and smoke to rise into the clouds. The fateful moment came when the signal was about to be given.

Slimane, in imagination, already tasted the sweets of vengeance.

The King laughed silently in his braided beard.

As for poor Ali, he was disconsolate. "This is the time," he sighed, "when I stand most in need of the help of Abd-el-Kader. But what could even he do against such an extreme danger as this? I fear, alas, it is the end of all my hopes! I must resign myself to perish—to die is nothing in itself; to me the most terrible trial is the loss of my beautiful Princess."

"Do not distress yourself," said a voice which Ali recognised with joy. "Turn your gaze towards the East, and profit by the assistance which your friend sends you."

Ali turned as directed by Abd-el-Kader, and saw a horse ready caparisoned; but what a horse! Could the name of that noble animal be given to the miserable-looking beast which met Ali's astonished eyes, and whose ribs seemed about to break through its transparent skin? And what trappings for such an occasion! Its bridle consisted of ropes of straw, the reins were pieces of string, and the saddle was roughly made of boards loosely tacked together and badly nailed, whilst from the pommel hung a pair of long spurs, also of wood. Notwithstanding the unpromising aspect of this singular steed Ali unhesitatingly mounted upon his back, seized the reins of string, put on the wooden spurs, and in this ridiculous guise rejoined the Royal retinue. As soon as he appeared thus mounted a roar of laughter burst from the crowd. This was followed by groans and hisses, a thousand times repeated by the surrounding echoes. The few who were disposed in his favour thought Ali had suddenly been bereft of his senses. If he intended, thought they, to face the danger nobly, why had he not selected a thoroughbred charger from the stables of the King, instead of straddling such a sorry steed as this?

Ali heard nothing of these murmurs. He rode boldly towards the funeral pile, which seemed like a mosque on fire. On his way he passed before the Princess Halyme, and as he saluted her he gave her a look full of love. Then, leaning forward upon his grotesque saddle of wood, he plunged his spurs into the side of his Rosinante, which instantly bounded into the air, disappeared for a second in the flames, and was seen to alight on the other side of the ditch, galloping forward with strength and grace.

ness and suppleness that it might be imagined they had wings. Let them be brought hither! I ordain that all the great lords of the Court and all the officers of the army shall mount and follow me!"



"HE GAVE HER A LOOK FULL OF LOVE."

Then on all sides was heard a shout of enthusiasm. Ali presently returned to the place where the Princess Halyme viewed this tournament of a new description, and the looks the lovers exchanged were significant of the sentiment which filled their hearts.

At sight of this the King was very much enraged, and he gave way to a fit of passion. "You fools!" he exclaimed; "you think that a great exploit, no doubt! Do you not suppose that your King is able to perform so trifling a feat? I will show you that it is merely child's play. I have in my stables horses of the purest blood; many of them can outstrip the wind in speed, and others in leaping over obstacles have so much light-

It was soon seen that the King was in a high state of exaltation, and, indeed, labouring under an attack of insanity, but none dared disobey him. A groom led forward the most high-spirited steed from the Royal stables, a Syrian horse, richly caparisoned as on days of great ceremony. The King leaped into the saddle. To be impartial, it must be admitted that he was a brilliant horseman. With great ease he restrained the noble animal trembling with ardour and pawing the ground with impatience. Then he clapped spurs to his sides and rode to the place where the Princess Halyme was seated, where he curbed with a hand of steel his impetuous steed. Then suddenly he again spurred his horse to the quick, who bounded forward like an arrow.

The throng of courtiers followed their King, the frightened horses rushed after their

leader in a fantastic gallop, and the entire cavalcade appeared seized with frenzy. At this terrible moment they presented a weird spectacle, when, still preceded by the maddened King, horses and men rushed into the fiery gulf. For an instant, a mere second of time, the rich embroideries of their costumes, the jewels which ornamented their turbans,

Minutes and hours passed which seemed to the beholders like centuries; the fire of the funeral pile slackened, then ceased altogether; but nothing was seen of the King and his brilliant Court—they had all perished in the flames.

When the crowd saw that all was over, from the surrounding hills arose a cry from thousands of throats:—

“Long live our King Ali!”



“KING, HORSES, AND MEN RUSHED INTO THE FIERY GULF.”

and the gems which decorated the trappings of their horses flashed in the light of the fire from the funeral pile, then all were engulfed in the gigantic brazier, millions of sparks flew into the air and were wafted away by the wind, then a cloud of ashes was raised above the pyre and fell in a rain of cinders, and once again the flames sprang up more vigorously than before.

Thus acclaimed, Ali advanced towards the Princess Halyme, and knelt upon one knee before her; with a radiant smile, Halyme raised her lover from the ground and embraced him in the presence of the multitude.

And thus it was that Prince Ali wedded the Princess Halyme, and became King of the Richanians.