

William of Palerne

(William and the Werewolf)

anon

*a mid fourteenth century Middle English alliterative romance,
based upon the late twelfth century French romance Guillaume
de Palerne*

Translated and retold in Modern English prose

by

Richard Scott-Robinson

This tale has been translated and retold from: Walter W Skeat, 1867, reprinted unaltered, 1996. The Romance of William of Palerne. Published by N Trübner & Co, London, for the Early English Text Society. Story taken from a unique manuscript copy in King's College Cambridge MS 13.

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richardsr@hotmail.co.uk



William and the Werewolf

translated into Middle English by an author named 'William'
mid-fourteenth century, based upon a late-twelfth century Old French romance

A soþe hald wynli · ne wiste bi no wight · Yn daunger ne ligges · lysted and loked · Ac couryng ful dernly ·
ssal dele a dispit · pight in grete peryl · to perisse anon – There is no virtue in keeping hidden something that is true, since the knowledge may then be lost. And therefore, I shall not hide what I know and those who listen will learn; for hidden knowledge is like fine art sealed in a vault, bringing pleasure to nobody. Therefore I shall bring into the light an ancient story whose events took place in Apulia, in southern Italy.

The king there had a brother who, but for the king's only child, would have been heir to the kingdom. And by bribery this brother contrived to instigate a plot of infanticide, involving poison and the complicity of the boy's two guardians.

One day in an orchard, beneath the highest tower of the city, a walled orchard, housing the Royal Menagerie, the king came with all his knights and burghers to rest from a tiring feast day. The king sat beneath the shade of a tree with his wife, enjoying the comfort and little knowing what danger lurked unseen. For suddenly a huge wolf leapt out from behind some bushes, sending everyone fleeing for their lives. It took the young prince in its mouth and made off with him. A hue and cry was raised. The king's son has been taken!

'Help, gentle Mary!' the queen exclaims. 'What is everyone doing standing about! I shall die if he is not rescued!' The king calls for his horses; the town is in uproar, a frantic pursuit begins, the king at its head. But the wolf is evasive – it makes for the coast; the child's cries are heard – the wolf stays ahead of its pursuers, comes to the water, leaps into it and makes for the other side. And so the child crosses the water. He crosses the water. They have lost him.

Translated into Middle English by a poet we know only as 'William' sometime between 1350 and 1360, this retelling of the much older Roman de Guillaume de Palerne is noted for the rare occurrence in Middle English romance of a werewolf.

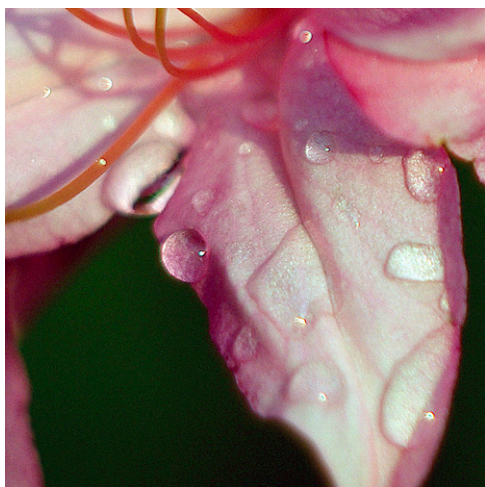
It is perhaps significant that this werewolf, who is active in the opening scenes, present throughout the second half of the story and at last revealed to be the son of the King of Spain, taxes the reader's credulity less than the transformations made by the main protagonists of the plot, the eponymous William and his lover Melior, the daughter of the Emperor of Rome: they transform themselves, by the donning of skins, first into two white bears and then into two deer. Convincingly, we are told.

This romance was translated into Middle English in the mid fourteenth century at the instigation of one Humphrey de Bohun, sixth Earl of Hereford and eleventh Earl of Essex, nephew to King Edward II of England. The Old French romance itself dates from the late twelfth century.

The wolf carries the child on a journey that takes them into the forest outside Rome. For eight days, amongst the wild animals, the wolf provides for the infant, makes a den in the earth, lines it with grass and dry leaves, making a comfortable refuge so that

the child wants for nothing. At night the wolf sleeps with the young prince, embracing this king's son with its four feet and the little infant becomes so used to the wolf that all seems quite normal to him and he is openly pleased at what the wolf brings and willingly obeys the animal.

Hit bi-fel in þat forest · þere fast by-side · þer woned a wel old churl · þat was a couherde – Now in that forest there lived an old man, a cowherd, who for many years had kept, over winter, the cattle of many of his neighbours, a common herd; and what happened, as our books tell us, was that the cowherd brought his cattle very close to the hollow where the child lay. The man had a dog with him for company, and to help him keep the cattle. This cowherd sat in the shade with his dog not two hundred yards away from the child, mending shoes, as was his sideline. All this while the werewolf was hunting for food for the little boy. Surrounded by the melody of the woodland in May, the little child stole cautiously out of his den. And once out in the open, the sweet May perfume and the song of the birds so pleased him that he wandered further from the refuge and played for a long time, listening to the birdsong. The cowherd's dog at this time, by chance, caught the scent of the little boy and as soon as he came to the infant, truly, he began to bark terribly and to hold the child at bay. The child was scared out of his wits and began to cry very loudly in fear, shrieking so much that the sound reached the ears of the cowherd, who knew at once that it was the voice of a small child. He leapt up and ran towards the noise that his hound was making. But by this time the infant had been driven back into the



den where he cowered and sobbed in a state of terror. The dog stayed at the hole, barking. And when the cowherd arrived, he got down onto his hands and knees and looked into the blackness to see what his dog was barking at. And there he saw the lovely child, weeping in that horrible hollow, clothed like a king's son.

So ends the first part of this tale. All who would like to hear more should offer an 'Our Father' to the High King of Heaven for the noble Earl of Hereford, Sir Humphrey de Bohun, nephew of old King Edward who lies at Gloucester. For he is the first to have this tale translated from French into English for the benefit of all Englishmen; whoever prays thus, may God grant him bliss!

The cowherd's wife looked after the little boy as though he were her own son. He grew to be strong and bold, ran about the place like a whirlwind and could be trusted to look after the cows and take them to the best pasture, with no need of any help from a grown-up. He had a bow and learnt to shoot arrows in the woods, to hunt birds and small animals; so many, to tell the truth, that when he came home each night with his herd, he would always bring with him rabbits and hares, pheasants and other

game birds; enough to feed the whole household. He had many friends.

One day, as he tended his cows, the Emperor of Rome rode into the forest to hunt, with many of his noblemen and retainers, and it transpired that they found a great wild boar. There followed a hard pursuit, with hounds running and horns blowing. The emperor approached the boar along a path, intent upon holding it at bay and destroying it, but he managed to lose his way, until there was no sound of hound nor horn. He found himself alone. The emperor, on his capable horse, stumbled upon a track and listened for any sounds that might guide him, and just then, a werewolf crossed his path, chasing a great deer. The emperor followed as quickly as he could, came to where the youth was and looked about, but the deer and the werewolf were gone. Then he caught sight of the lad, saw how fine-looking he was, how well-proportioned and strong, and the emperor thought, in faith, that it must be a child of the Otherworld!

The boy came to meet him and courteously greeted him. The emperor returned his greeting and asked his name and who his parents were; he commanded him to tell. The child replied quite soberly: 'William, Sir, men call me. I was born nearby, beside this wood. My father is a cowherd, and his wife, in all honour, is my mother.'

When the emperor had heard this, he wondered, as well he might, and said: 'Young man, quickly, I urge you, go and call your father to me for I wish to speak with him.'

'No, Sir, by God!' said the boy. 'He shall be put in no danger from me, ever!'

'But it may be to his advantage,' insisted the emperor. 'Bring him here, I urge you.'

'I will then,' said the child, 'and trust that you will keep your word not to harm him.'

'Yes, in all safety,' said the emperor, 'and God give me joy.'

So the child went to his father's house and called him, for he truly believed him to be his father, and said: 'Sweet Sir, a great lord wishes to see you, one of the noblest men I have ever seen. Go to him, quickly; don't keep him waiting.'

The cowherd complied, reluctantly, muttering as he went with the boy, and soon they approached the emperor. The cowherd started to shake with fear when he understood that this was his highest lord, and knew that if he lied, the deceit would be swiftly detected. Therefore he told the truth – how he had found William in the forest nearby, dressed like a king's son beneath a hollow oak tree, how the boy was discovered by his dog, and how for many winters he had fed and clothed him.

'I thank you greatly for telling me the truth about this child,' said the emperor. 'Your labour shall not have been made in vain, but shall be rewarded, I promise. But the boy must come with me, you must understand. I will look after this child now.' When the emperor had said this, the cowherd was very upset, but dared not refuse the will of his lord. He granted him, in God's name, to take the child.'

Listen lords, if you are of the Leaf!

The emperor rode gladly with the boy and eventually caught up with his huntsmen, who in the meantime had made many kills. Boars had fallen to their pursuit, bears, hinds, stags and many other animals as well. When the men saw their lord arrive, they all wondered at the boy seated behind him and asked where he had found the child. He told them that God had sent him, and said no more. Then he rode back into Rome, with the child behind him.

The emperor had a daughter, a very beautiful girl who was about the same age as William. Her name was Melior. She was well-mannered and clever for her age, and her father led William to her and said: 'Dear daughter, I have a present for you! This noble boy – treat him well, for he appears to be a fine young man. I came across him while hunting.' And then he told her the whole story. 'And therefore, my dear daughter,' he said, 'look after him well for my sake, for I believe him to be from a noble family. He is very handsome, as you can see, and we may yet learn who he is. My sweet daughter, take care of him.'

So now William lives at court, an amiable, honest, courteous and prudent young man, much loved by all. He can play chess, hunt with hawks and with hounds, and can surpass all in Rome at these pursuits. On a horse and regaled in his armour, there is no finer-looking young man amongst all the nobility. All pale beside him. He is a lord amongst them. And the emperor honours, loves and cherishes him as his own son, the son of his own wife, and takes William everywhere with him. And in their turn, the great lords and barons, for their love of the emperor, love him also. And the ladies, and the damsels? Certainly, there is not one of them so fair, so estimable, so proud, clever or wise that she would not, if given the chance, instantly become his sweetheart!

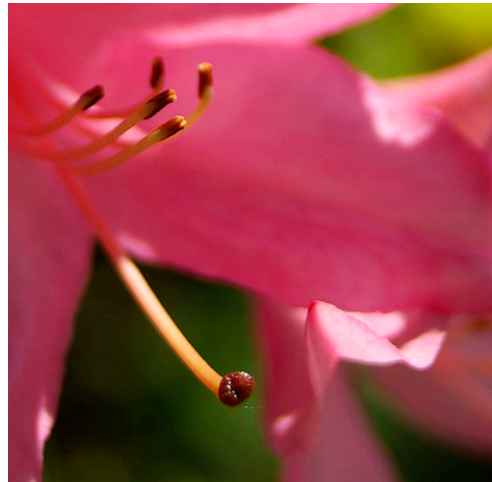
Three years William spent in Rome, and he grew into a tall and strong young man, confident in company, courteous to the ladies, and much admired. When Melior hears his praises sung, and sees the truth of it, that he is indeed better spoken and more courageous than any of his peers, soon her thoughts and her heart turn towards him. Then comes the sorrow and the sadness, all other things forgotten, and she rebukes herself: 'Heart,' she laments, 'what is it that makes me grieve and complain when there is no reason to? Oh God, what evil is it that makes me so restless that I sing and sigh in one breath; sink into sadness only to rise again in joy? My heart is mine, and then I shrink and feel such pain, to tell the truth, that I am struck down; but quickly, in a rush of emotion, the recovery I feel when I chance to hear of William. His face is etched on my heart. I can do nothing to remove it. And I wish to do nothing, so pleasant it is to be with him; I would rather love him than be free of all ills!

'My eyes are to blame, they are the cause of all this trouble. But are they not just servants to my heart?

'Then my heart is to blame; to blame for becoming so besotted with a strange young man who does not even know where he comes from, but was found in the woods tending cattle!

She turned over to sleep, rebuking her heart, vowing to seek amends; but then, sighing, she said to herself: 'But how foolish! How stupid to blame my heart! How can I seek amends from my own heart? Am I not its master? But he acts so well, and through his own virtue has risen above all his peers to such an extent that no duke is as handsome nor conducts himself so nobly. Though he was found as an orphan in the forest, he was dressed in royal clothes when the cowherd found him in the animal burrow. And when he came here, from the outset he has settled in so naturally that none could fault the way he speaks and acts. Since coming here he has done nothing wrong, but has been so accommodating and helpful that everyone has praised him and all the kings and dukes worship him. He is not the son of a cowherd!

'I could love him. And since he is so well respected, and every lord is happy to please him, then I have possibly misjudged my heart. It has guided me nobly towards this young warrior and has settled with wisdom on he whom all men praise. From now on I shall follow my heart, then, through thick and through thin, and let my love settle where it will; forever. I offer God this gift; that no other shall have my love while William lives.'



And when her mind was made up, she sighed: 'Alas! I don't think there is any remedy for this. If I tell him the truth, how I ache for him constantly, he will think I've gone mad, or that I'm playing a joke on him, and that will destroy me.'

Thus the maiden Melior tossed and turned; and after the space of a week she was getting no sleep, she was eating nothing, nothing lightened her spirit, and she showed every indication of being ill. But no doctor could diagnose what was wrong with her. She began to lose weight and took on a pallid complexion.

The honourable Melior had many maids assigned to her, and among them she had a favourite whom she loved the most, a worthy damsel, her own cousin, the daughter of the Duke of Lombardy, and her name was Alexandra. And from the very beginning of her illness, Alexandra tended her mistress, for she loved her above all others. And when she saw her so unwell, she waited for the right moment and then said: 'For the sake of Mary, Queen of Heaven, and all whom you love most, here on Earth, tell me what is wrong!'

Melior was cheered and, sighing, said: 'Ah, courteous cousin, I put myself in your hands, that you may find some remedy. This sickness is worse than any I have ever suffered. I would explain better if I could. It concerns a knight whom I hold in my heart. William, whom all men praise; no man on Earth wins more worship. No matter who I speak to, my thoughts are on William. I speak to him in my thoughts. I cannot get him out of my mind. Please help me. I can't take much more of this!'

'I will do my best,' said Alexandra, calmly. At this, Melior's spirits rose and her sorrows

lessened. Alexandra went off and tried to think of the best way to let William know what was happening, without her actually telling him, for which Melior, she knew, would rebuke her. She was very cunning and knew a lot about spells and witchcraft, so that night, as William slept alone in his room, she sent him a strange dream, in which Melior came to him, clothed seductively, and kneeled before him, weeping, saying: 'Ah! My lover! Look at me! I am Melior, see how ill I am for your sake! I put myself in your mercy, for only you can save me. Darling, take me in your arms, and do whatever you want with me, or I shall die of love because of you.'

William was delighted – he dreamed. He couldn't believe his luck! And when he awoke, his dream seemed so real that he thought Melior was still with him as he kissed the pillow. But it was only a dream. 'Ah! Jesus!' he sighed. 'Melior lay in my arms and wanted to be mine forever, she wanted me to be her lover – she pleaded with me to take her! Oh what a beautiful dream that was.'

'But why would a maiden as noble as Melior lower herself so much as to love me, when she is the daughter of an emperor? God forbid that I should even think of it! And besides, if I were to behave in any other way than that of an ordinary man at court, it would be noticed, to my harm. I have nobody who would protect me from the emperor's rage.'

So William tried to cast off the dream, but could not cast Melior from his thoughts. Not for all the world could he do so. And by degrees, he began to share the symptoms of Melior's illness. He wouldn't eat, became lethargic, couldn't sleep, and did not know how to fend off the pain he felt in his heart.

One morning, he got up in his usual woeful state, hid himself in a cloak and hood, and went into a garden, a beautiful garden enclosed by a high wall. This private retreat was close to Melior's room, and William took a seat beside an apple tree. And the pain would come in waves, and he ate nothing, but felt himself completely nourished just by looking at her window.

No one dared spy on him, but they let him do as he pleased. And each morning he went alone to the garden.

But now we turn to Melior, who asked Alexandra if she'd thought of any way of helping her yet.

'I've looked many times for a herb,' replied Alexandra, 'but with only a little success. But we could go into the garden, for there are flowers and there is birdsong, and who knows but you may find something to make you happy there.' For Alexandra knew, by her witchcraft, that William would be there. And when the two girls arrived in the garden, the flowers were out in profusion and the bushes and trees were full of birds, singing. There were thirty thrushes speaking excitedly together, as their nature dictated, and there were many other birds also, making a lot of noise in celebration of the rites of mating, and of May. But for all this mirth, Melior remains sad, for she is in love and

nothing can raise her spirits. At last, Alexandra said: ‘Madam, dear Melior, I think I can see a man over there. Whether he is a knight or a bachelor, he looks a little unwell. Shall we go and ask what troubles him, and find out who he is?’

‘Ah, now my heart lightens!’ thought Melior, ‘for it is William.’

‘My love, may God bring you joy,’ said Melior when they reached him, and William understood. Her sweet words struck him dumb. He could not speak. Joy had rendered him mute. His complexion became white, then as quickly, he blushed. That word ‘love’, ‘my love’, had laid him low; its arrow had pierced into his heart and sapped his strength completely.

‘Have mercy, Madam, on this man,’ said Alexandra, turning to Melior. ‘He is nearly driven to death for your sake.’

‘How so, for my sake? I have not angered him.’

‘Certainly, Madam, that is true,’ said Alexandra. ‘But unless you grant him what he longs for, and let him be your lover, and quickly, he will not last the day out, I suspect. Therefore, let him live for a little longer, since he loves you so much.’

Alexandra saw that neither of them would miss her, and so she wandered away, out of sight, believing that William and her mistress might wish to be alone together. So she went about in the garden, gathering flowers and making sure that nobody intruded upon them. And William and Melior spent all day making love, until William had had all his will. Then, as the sun was setting, Alexandra stole towards them.

‘Madam,’ she said, ‘have you taken the herb I got for you? Then I truly believe that your sorrow has passed, for each of you is a good doctor to the other. All the surgeons of Palermo could not have worked a better miracle!’

William jumped up, ashamed, but Alexandra begged forgiveness for the intrusion, and they both reassured and thanked her.



It happened one summer that the Duke of Saxony came into Italy with a great army and waged unprovoked war. When the emperor was told that his people were under such duress, he was at a loss to understand the reason for it and sent messengers everywhere with urgent dispatches to those who owed him homage and to those who were simply his friends, urging them to come to Rome as quickly as possible, equipped with horses and arms and ready for war.

When William learned of this gathering army, he was delighted and went straight to the

emperor. Kneeling, he said: 'Sir, for God's love, grant me a favour; make me a knight so that I can go to these wars, and I pray that I shall not fail you.'

The emperor was pleased and granted his request. And the following morning, William was made a knight; and more for the emperor's sake than for his. And the emperor knighted a further eighty young men, equipped them all with horse and arms as a noble lord should, and placed William in charge of them all.

When the emperor knew the mood of his people, he made ready his army and set out. It was well provided for, with food enough so that its progress was not compromised by any necessity to forage. They marched with such speed that they soon came to within scouting distance of the army of the Duke of Saxony. The duke was informed of this development and immediately sent proud warriors to parley with the emperor and to try to goad him into committing his forces quickly to battle.

His ploy was successful. The armies gathered on the field of combat. Trumpets sounded to stiffen the hearts of the warriors, forces engaged and many men were slain in the first few minutes of the battle; and to tell the truth, the emperor seemed to be getting the worst of it after a while.

William heard the emperor's piteous complaints to heaven, and to his army, and was distraught. He rallied his young knights. 'Have no regard for your own lives,' he cried, 'for our noble lord needs help! Whoever fails for lack of courage, may wildfire burn him up!'

Then turning his horse, William rode towards the enemy. He galloped in to where the fighting was hardest, and whirled his sword about so fiercely that, to speak the truth, within a short while, six of the greatest Saxon warriors lay dead. One was the Duke of Saxony's nephew, another, his steward.

'Kill that knight who is doing us so much harm!' cried the duke, frantically. 'Look how wickedly he lays into our noblemen. No one seems able to steal a march on him!'

A squadron set off, hardened warriors all; they wounded William badly and threw him from his horse. Then they tied him up and turned to take him to the duke.

But William's men had seen this and were riding to the rescue. The young knights battled their way through the ranks of the enemy until they reached the company that was leading William away, and there they wrought such havoc that they were able to bring him out. They unbound him and brought him his horse, and when William was remounted he leaped back into the fray, lending support to all around him! Whoever felt the edge of his sword was killed without mercy; and always he fought his way towards the duke. As soon as the duke saw this, he seized a lance and rode towards him. William responded and they clashed together. William struck so hard that the duke's shoulder was pierced by the lance through his shield, and both horse and man were hurled to the ground. Sir William leapt down from his own horse, drew his sword and said earnestly to the duke: 'Sir, you wanted to bring me to heel, but now, thank God,' he joked, 'the

boot is on the other foot! And as your former prisoner, I shall now happily pay you your ransom. Yield to me at once, or you shall die!’

The battle was over. All the enemy forces fled. He who had the best horse had the best chance of staying alive, for the emperor’s men pursued the retreating army ruthlessly. And William rode with the boldest warriors, as he had all day, and few he met with managed to escape. Had the day been longer, none of the enemy would have avoided capture, but it grew so dark that the pursuit had to be called off, and some got away.

In the morning they heard Mass and then the emperor called together a council of knights. Five hundred high-ranking Saxon noblemen had been captured.

William was given good doctors to attend him and they were happy that his injuries were not life-threatening. The emperor sent messengers to his daughter to say that he was returning safely. The messengers found Melior and delivered the news, that her father would return in good health within a fortnight, and Melior thanked them happily.

‘Did the Duke of Saxony give you any trouble?’ she asked.

‘Are you joking?’ they replied. ‘We would have been massacred had it not been for one man on our side, who has lengthened all of our lives by the skill of his fighting!’

‘Who was that?’ she asked.

‘Sir William,’ they replied. ‘He has the world in his hands. There is no king in Christendom he could not overcome. Had it not been for him, your father and all his empire would have been lost.’

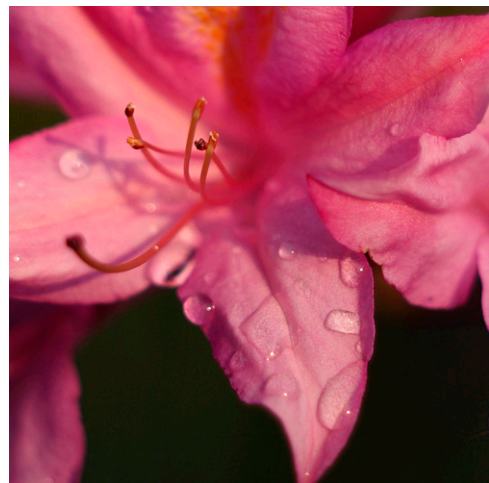
‘Is William with my father? Is he well?’

‘He is with your father,’ they replied, ‘but he is not well; he was badly wounded.’

‘For Mary’s love!’ exclaimed Melior.

‘He is sound enough now,’ they assured her, ‘and he can ride without any fear of reopening his wounds.’

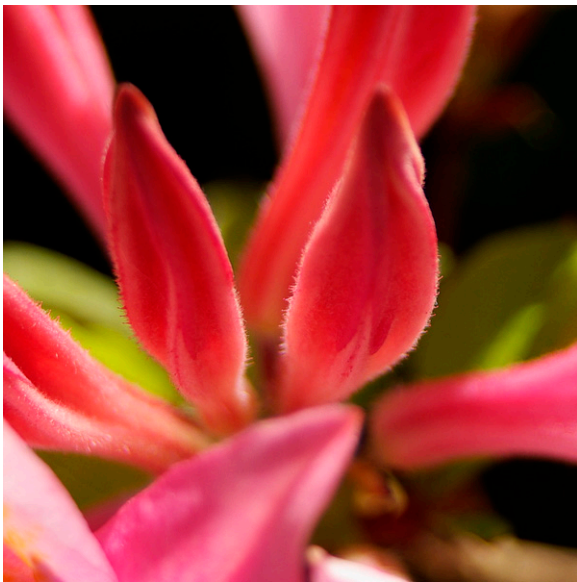
Melior then was joyful at their news; in fact, no woman has ever been happier. Her lover had won great praise and done such valiant deeds! The celebrations lasted for the entire week, and then the emperor, with all his knights, arrived at the palace and was received by the people of Rome in triumph. Melior, with many maidens, went to her father and greeted him, and then greeted William; and nobody thought anything of it. But she whispered to William, so that no one should hear, that he should come quietly to her chamber as soon as he could. And he, by guile and subterfuge, granted her desire as soon as he was able to; he dared not do so openly for risk of betrayal.



It would take too long to describe the joyful celebrations that followed the emperor's triumphant return, and the sad mourning also, for the loss of loved ones slain in battle, when their names were made known. But happiness soon prevailed as the festivities grew. And William went to Melior's chamber when he saw an opportunity, and played with her as he wished, as they both wished – games of love, unperceived by anyone except Alexandra, as it had been for a long time.

Not long afterwards, Easter came around, and as the emperor was in Rome for that solemn season he summoned all the lords and ladies of that city to his palace, and they were well served with food and drink throughout the festival. Then thirty knights appeared from out of the blue. They entered the hall, knelt down before the Emperor of Rome and greeted him courteously on behalf of the Emperor of Greece and of his son.

'He who set mankind above all things, may he save you, and all your people,' said the emperor to the messengers, who were beautifully attired in glittering gold.



Then one of the Greek knights began to deliver his message. 'My lord, and noblemen,' he said. 'Listen! The Emperor of Greece has commanded us to bring you his greetings and to tell you that he has a son, one of the most proved and doughty of all men here on Earth, and who will inherit his father's titles in due course. He has often heard spoken of your fair daughter, how lovely she is, how attractive and shapely, and because of this praise, and for love of yourself, he requests that his son might marry her. I urge you, do not invent difficulties or murmur disapproval. Embrace this agreement wholeheartedly and let it be fulfilled with speed, for if you do, I dare say your daughter will have more gold than you have silver, and wield power over more wonderful cities and impregnable castles than you have small towns! We seek an immediate answer. Your lords are all assembled, their advice is ready to hand, so there is no reason at all to delay your decision.'

The emperor called a council of noblemen, to sound out their opinions, and they all agreed that it was a splendid idea. A date was set for the wedding. The messengers were entertained, urged to stay for as long as they liked, and when they left, personal gifts of gold and silver were given to them.

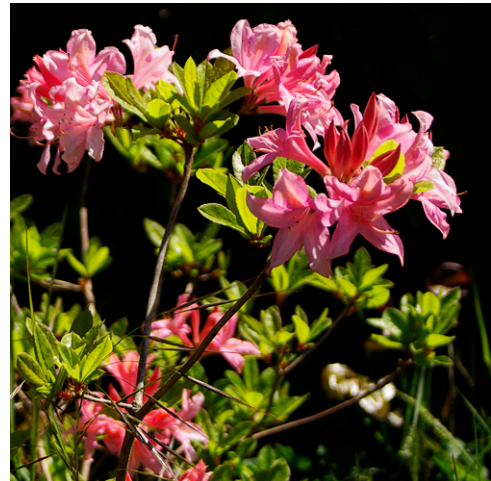
Great joy was made in Rome as word of Melior's betrothal spread. Everyone was happy that Melior should have made such a marriage, to the heir of the Emperor of Greece! And every man told another, quickly, joyfully, until almost the only man not to know was William, for he was busy playing board games.

When the news finally reached him, William stole away from the company he was in as quietly as he could, so that no one would know how he felt. So upset was he at the news that he hated his own life. When he reached his lodgings, he was so overcome with grief that he went straight to his bed and stayed there; and he was so ill, to tell the truth, that everybody who knew about it thought he was going to die. The emperor was told, and he went straight to William to see how he was, accompanied by half a dozen knights, and asked anxiously how he felt.

‘I have felt better!’ replied William, not wishing to see another dawn. ‘But God grant you his love, for the kindness that you have shown to me in the past.’

When the emperor heard this, and saw how bad William looked, he could hardly bear it and had to leave. He went to see his daughter and told her. She comforted her father as well as she could, but she could hardly bear the pain herself. Alexandra, who was her closest confidant, told her to go to see William at once. Melior called her maidens, and made her way quickly to William’s lodgings, on the pretext of legitimate concern. But when she arrived at his room, she asked her maids to wait outside. She and Alexandra went in and sat beside William’s bed. Melior said: ‘My sweet lover, I have come alone but for Alexandra, to understand why you are so ill, and what it is that grieves you. My peerless knight, my lover, my joy, tell me the truth or I shall die!’

‘Sweetheart, welcome, my darling,’ replied William. ‘Beautiful creature, for Christ’s love, why have you abandoned me? I, who have loved you so faithfully, and thought your love for me was equally strong! Why have you wronged me, that I should die for your sake? But darling, my sweetheart, thank you for coming, for the sight of you has lengthened my life a little.’



When Melior heard this, she sighed and wept, and said: ‘My lover, believe me, all the men on Earth could not save my life if you were to die. And my love, you have not lost me, for although my father has foolishly made commitments on my behalf, do you think I shall honour them?’

‘Believe me,’ said Melior, ‘I will never break my word to you.’

William was greatly relieved, and they kissed, hugged, and cuddled one another; and when the time came for Melior to leave, she took her maids with her and William remained at his lodgings, healed of all his pains.

Every street in Rome was strewn with flowers and decked out with flags and colourful bunting. Musicians played and there was singing and masked dancing. The Greeks were splendidly received and given their own temporary accommodation; and those

who saw it said that the tents and pavilions rivalled the city of Rome itself! The Emperor of Greece and all his people were told that everything was theirs for the asking. But I shall leave this sumptuous arrival and speak of William and Melior.

When things had quietened down a little and people were resting, William went alone to Melior's room in a very depressed state. 'You feed me with lies,' he accused her, 'when I should have died many days ago and wish that I had!'

'What is wrong?' asked Melior. 'All that I have promised I shall keep to, as God is my witness. But we must think carefully and you must muster all of your wits. This is no time for foolish theatricals nor for self-pity. Which is the best way of fleeing the country?'



When William heard this, he cheered immediately.

'Sweetheart!' he exclaimed. 'Your words comfort and heal me!' and they thought long and hard to try to determine how best to flee the land without being discovered and apprehended. But it was to no avail. They could think of nothing at all that had any hope of success. So they called Alexandra, to see if she could offer any ideas.

'I cannot think how you might escape without danger, or without being caught,' Alexandra cautioned. 'For be in no doubt that if you run away, people will be on the lookout everywhere for you, with trusted men enough to guard bridges and roads and paths. Even in disguise, it would be of no use, for you would be spotted. Since none of these will serve, but, nonetheless, you must go, I can be no more devious than to suggest that in the kitchen are many skinners who spend their days flaying wild beasts, bucks, hinds and other wild animals. And the strongest animal, the most formidable, is the bear. If we were able to steal two bearskins and put you both inside them, there is no one alive who would challenge you on the highway! I can think of no better plan than that you disguise yourselves as bears; for they, of all animals, are most like people.'

Quickly, without any more words, she found some boys' clothes in a cupboard, selected some, dressed herself in them and ran boisterously to the kitchen where men were busy in the butchery department. She moved convincingly about, lending a hand here and there until she saw her moment. There were two large white bear skins hanging up, ideal for wrapping her two friends in. She took them down, stole away unseen and raced to her lady and William.

'See how I have fared!' she exclaimed. And Alexandra began to dress Melior first, fastened her in the skin with strong cords, all about her proper clothes, so that, in all hon-

esty, no man would think anything other than that she was a bear, so exactly did each piece join with another. Melior was delighted and said: 'Dearest Alexandra, how do you like me now? Am I not a handsome bear?'

'Yes Madam,' said Alexandra. 'By Mary, Queen of Heaven, you look like a frightening ghost in that skin! I would give you a wide berth if I saw you on the highway!'

Alexandra then wrapped William in the other bearskin. And when he was properly sewn in, William said happily to Melior: 'Tell me, my sweetheart, how do you like me now?'

'By Mary the mild Queen of Heaven, so strong and fierce a bear you seem to be that I am terrified to look you in the face!'

'Then we should go without any further delay.'

When Alexandra saw them preparing to set off, she could hold back her emotions no longer and wept for sorrow; but nonetheless, she took them to a postern gate that led to the garden where William and Melior had first kissed.

And then they were gone.

Alexandra went to her room and mourned for the loss of her two friends.

William and Melior made their way quickly through the garden, fiercely on their four feet, as bears do, and happened to encounter one of the new arrivals from Greece, looking at the plants. Terrified out of his wits, he raced out of the garden as fast as feet can run, for he firmly believed that they were pursuing him and would eat him. His friends were happy to see him in such a state, thinking it a good joke, and so I shall leave them and speak of the bears.

They raced quickly away from the garden towards the forest that lay nearby. At first they went on all fours, as wild animals do, but when they grew tired, they went upright. And they walked through that wilderness all night, until dawn broke. Then they found a secluded hollow beneath an upturned oak. It was far from any habitation and so well concealed that nobody could see them. They were exhausted and thanked God for providing such a secret hiding place.

'But, darling, I fear we shall die of hunger,' said William.

'We shall live by our love,' replied Melior, 'and through the grace of God, find blackberries or something to live on. Hazelnuts, or rose hips – all the fruits of the forest. Honestly, we can. This life will be alright.'

'No darling,' replied William. 'You have never had to live like this, and to do so now will be hard indeed. I mean to do better than to see you living on blackberries. I will find a path and wait for someone to come along carrying bread or milk or something like that to market, then I can snatch it from them and come straight back to you. I can think of no other way of staying alive.'

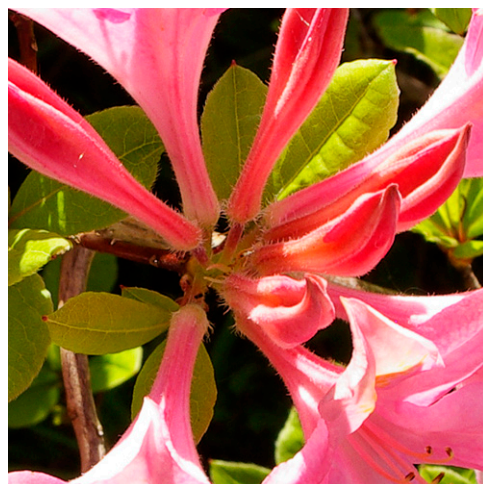
‘No, you must not do that!’ exclaimed Melior. ‘Whoever loses the food will run shouting and screaming towards the city and that will be the end of us. It is better to keep ourselves hidden and live on fruit.’

But we must leave them now and turn for a while to the werewolf; the werewolf who, all those years ago, looked after William, until the cowherd’s dog found him.

The werewolf had followed them all that night, quickly and silently, though they did not know that he was there. And when he saw them in the hollow beneath the oak and heard them talking about food, he made his way to a road through the forest. And it happened that a country yokel came ambling down the road with some bread and boiled beef in his pouch. The werewolf leapt out into the road with a roar, threatened to attack the man, then did so, knocking him flat. The poor fellow fully expected to die, got up and ran for his life, leaving his bag of food behind. The werewolf went straight back to where William was resting, and laid the bag beside them both. Then he ran off.

William saw this and wondered greatly why a wild beast should leave a bag so close to them. He reached for it, quickly opened it, and found the bread and beef inside.

The morning after William and Melior’s flight from the secluded garden, the wedding was to take place. Nobody suspected otherwise. The emperors arose; and everyone dressed in their most expensive outfits, as lavish and costly as their wealth would allow. The weather was good, the sun shined, and the Emperor of Greece and all his knights made for their horses as quickly as they could. To describe the robes that the groom was wearing, for whom all this expense had been incurred, and who imagined that he was soon to be married, would take far too long.



The Pope was at the church of Saint Peter, with his prelates and bishops and abbots and cardinals, all in their finest regalia, waiting to conduct the ceremony. The Greeks light-heartedly loitered, waiting for the bride to make her appearance. The Emperor of Rome waited also, with all his barons and the boldest of his realm, and as time passed, he began to wonder why his daughter was taking so long. Everybody was assembled. And at last he had a nobleman go to her chamber to call her to the church. The nobleman expedited his errand with all speed and found her chambers to be empty. No explanation could be sought since he could find nobody there at all. He went quickly back to the emperor to tell him that his daughter’s chambers were deserted. When the emperor understood this, he stormed off in a rage to Melior’s outer rooms and burst in through the door: ‘Why the devil are you taking so long!’ he shouted, and cursed. ‘Melior! Where are you?’

When Alexandra heard this she began to fear for her life. She left her room, went quickly

to the emperor and courteously greeted him. Then she asked him what was the matter.

‘I want to know where my daughter is,’ he answered.

‘Sir, my lady is asleep, honestly, I swear.’

‘Then go quickly and wake her!’ said the emperor. ‘Tell her to get up immediately!’

‘I dare not,’ replied Alexandra, ‘for she is angry with me, though I have not deserved it.’

‘Why is that?’ asked the emperor. ‘Tell me at once!’

‘Sir, I cannot help but tell you the truth! My lady made me stay up late with her last night, just the two of us alone, and she told me something she had learned from someone who knew the customs of Greece. She said she would rather be wedded to a commoner than live her life with a Greek! And also, Sir, she told me something else that troubled me a lot, and this was the reason she was angry with me before we went to bed. She said that she had fallen in love with someone else, one of the bravest knights who has ever galloped a horse, and one of the most handsome. I asked his name, disapprovingly, and she told me that it was William.’

When the emperor heard this, he was almost mad with anger and grief, and strode into Melior’s inner chamber and up to her bed. But it was empty; there was nothing behind the curtains except bedclothes. Like a deranged man he asked Alexandra – he pleaded with her: ‘Damsel, quickly, tell me where she is!’

‘Sir, I haven’t seen her since midnight,’ replied Alexandra, sorrowfully. ‘Send somebody to search for her at William’s lodgings, and if William is there, she must still be in the city. But if William has gone, then my lady will have gone with him, in life or in death.’

The emperor raged in frustration like a tyrant. ‘Ah! Has that traitor betrayed me, after I gave him wealth and looked after him since he was a foundling! Through his actions today I am ruined! My word has become worthless! By the great God that made me, if that traitor can be found, nobody will stop me from pulling his living body from the gallows and tearing him apart with horses.’ The emperor called sixty of his knights and told them to go at once to William’s lodgings, and if they found him there, to hold him by whatever means it took, and bring him in chains, as quickly as they could.

The knights had no choice, and with heavy hearts they went to arrest the man they all loved. And in all honesty, when they found his lodgings to be deserted they were very happy and relieved, and returned to the emperor with the news.

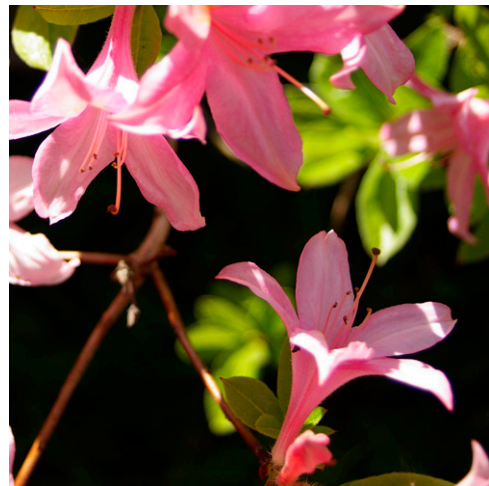
So, weary and upset, the Emperor of Rome made all haste to speak with the Emperor of Greece. Everyone was sorry that the wedding had to be cancelled, and the Emperor of Greece was particularly aggrieved. ‘Let the cry go out,’ he demanded of Melior’s father, ‘throughout your empire, that every able-bodied man and woman should search widely, through wood and forest, heath and wasteland, and all secluded paths, and find that

knight who has betrayed you.'

Up spoke one of the Greeks, so God give him grief!

'Sirs,' he said. 'I saw a curious thing yesterday evening as it was getting dark,' and he went on to tell them about the two white bears he had seen running from the secluded garden.

So the cry went out for everybody to hunt for two white bears. Everyone joined in the search, on horseback and on foot, scouring the forests with bloodhounds until a group came to within a bowshot of where William and Melior lay together. The werewolf placed himself in danger by running near to the hounds and trying to draw them away. When the hounds caught his scent, they abandoned their searching and ran in pursuit, over hills and through marshland, for many miles. Through God's grace, the werewolf led them a merry chase, leaving the white bears asleep, oblivious to all that was going on around them. And at last the people who were following the dogs realised that the trail had gone cold.



When the Emperor of Greece learned that there had been no sightings of the two bears, all the Greeks returned to their own country, vexed and unhappy.

But the guards on all roads and crossings remained in place and the search went on for the bears; but because of the help the wolf was giving them, no one could discover where they were. He fed them when they needed food and guided them along the paths and trackways at night. And by day he led them to where they would find a suitable den to hide in. And while they slept, he stood guard against any danger. Thus the werewolf made possible their escape, and oversaw their progress southwards into the border country with Apulia.

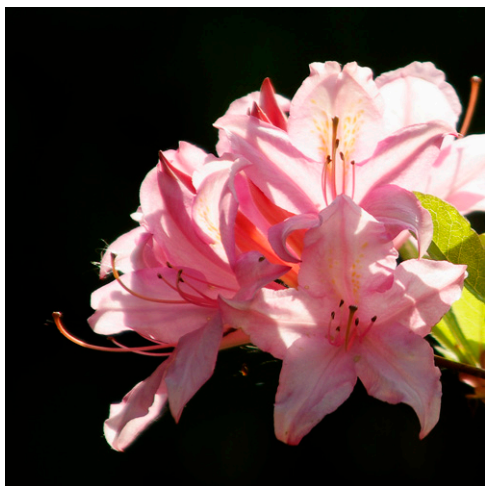
Travelling one night, they came upon a region where the forests and woods gave way to a treeless plain. And as the light brightened towards dawn, they saw a noble city with fine walls and battlements, known even now as Benevento. When William saw it, he grew uneasy and said to Melior: 'Sweetheart, we are now in God's hands, for I have no idea where we can hide. Christ help us, for we are as good as dead, otherwise!'

As they stood, they noticed a quarry at the foot of a hill and made their way quickly towards it. Within the quarry, which seemed to have been quite freshly excavated, there was a rocky recess, a cave, and they crept inside, exhausted.

The werewolf kept watch under a crag. But they had not been asleep for very long when some workmen arrived with heavy tools, and when they came within sight of the cave and made ready to start work, one of them saw the bears lying together in each other's arms.

‘Christ!’ he exclaimed, running back to his fellows. ‘You know that reward the emperor has offered for finding those two white bears? Well, you’ll never guess what I’ve just seen over there. We could soon be rich!’

His workmates were delighted at the news, and told him to run as fast as he could to the provost, while they kept watch. So the quarryman sped off. The provost quickly let the news spread throughout the city, along with a command that everybody should assemble on horseback or on foot, and surround the quarry.



Melior woke from a nightmare. Waking William she said: ‘Darling, I am so frightened. I dreamed that our cave was visited by wild bears, apes and bulls, and there was a little lion, the leader’s cub, who was seized by our werewolf. I am frightened of what the dream might mean.’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said William. ‘Dreams are nothing but phantoms. We shall rest here, safely, until night-fall.’

But shortly they heard a huge commotion of horses coming from all directions around the quarry, as though all hell had been let loose! William went to see what was going on and saw mounted knights, fully armed, proudly displaying their horsemanship and boasting to a handsome little boy who had been brought up to see the bears captured. When William became aware how close they were to catastrophe, he turned to Melior.

‘Darling, do as I tell you: take off your bearskin and stand in your clothes, and as soon as you are seen you will be recognised. Then your life will be spared, for the love of your father.’

Weeping uncontrollably, Melior replied: ‘What! Do you believe, darling, that I would leave you in order to save myself? No, by He who bought us on the cross with his blood! This bear’s pelt shall never leave my back, be certain of that!’

By this time the provost had given orders for the bears to be captured. But as God willed, the werewolf knew of their danger and quickly, like a mad animal, ran at the provost’s small son, catching him up in his jaws. He ran on through the crowd, making a dreadful noise and acting for all the world as though he meant to eat the boy.

‘Help! Everybody after him!’ screamed the provost. They pursued the wolf with such a noise of shouting and of horns, and were all so wholly absorbed in the chase, that nobody remained in the quarry at all. And whenever the werewolf had gained half a mile or so on his pursuers, he would pause and rest in order to allow those following to think that they had a chance of catching up with him and rescuing the child. Then he would set off again. And this carried on all day, and no one was able to overtake him, and nobody dared to try to use an arrow or a spear, for fear of hitting the child.

When the white bears in the quarry saw that it was now deserted, and how the wolf had put his life in danger for their sake, they prayed that God might save him from harm; for without his aid, and without God's, they would now be dead for sure, they knew. They emerged from the cave.

'I think there is less chance of us being recognised now if we take off these bearskins,' said William.

'I agree,' said Melior. They quickly shed the skins, carefully wrapped them up and were overjoyed to see one another again; for truly, it had been a fortnight since each had set eyes upon the other. They hugged and kissed, despite their anxiety, then William cautiously ventured further into the quarry outside the cave, and when he was confident that nobody was around, he took Melior by the hand. Clothed in their clothes, carrying the bear pelts under their arms – for they were loth to part with them or to leave them behind – they set off once more.



So long did the chase after the provost's little son continue that when night approached, the werewolf knew that there was little need to carry the boy any further. So he put the child down without a mark on him, not even a bruise, and as soon as he had done this, he raced swiftly away as though he had gone no more than half a mile all day.

When the provost saw that the wolf had at last dropped his little son, he spurred ahead of all his people and gathered the child up in his arms, kissing and hugging the little boy and anxiously inspecting him for signs of injury. And when he saw that he was unhurt, he forgot all his troubles. And it was a very happy crowd indeed that made its way to find lodgings for the night, before riding back home in the morning.

William and Melior made their way quickly over hills and across valleys without resting, keeping to the narrowest and loneliest of paths, and each step was fraught with the danger of meeting someone who might recognise them. And at last they came to a thick forest. Melior was so tired by now that she could go no further, so in a dense part of the woodland, away from all paths, they thanked God and fell asleep. And as for the werewolf, he made his way to William and Melior the next morning, using the senses that only dogs possess, and acquiring on the way some food and wine for them. He laid these at William's feet and scampered away.

William was surprised, and Melior also, that the beast went away and never stayed with them, though he helped them enormously.

'Certainly,' said William, 'this wolf must have a human mind. See what sorrow he suffers to keep the two of us alive. He never fails to bring whatever we need straight to where

we are. May Christ keep him from all harm!’

‘Amen,’ said Melior, as they happily tucked into the food that the werewolf had brought, for they were very hungry. And they rested all that day, and to tell the truth, all the following night as well, for Melior was so weary she could not walk a step further.

Early the following day, before the sun was up, some colliers approached, laden with charcoal, arguing with each other about whether they should tell the provost and claim the huge reward if they came across two white bears. When they had moved off, William said to Melior: ‘Darling, we cannot use these bearskins any more, if we can find any alternative at all.’

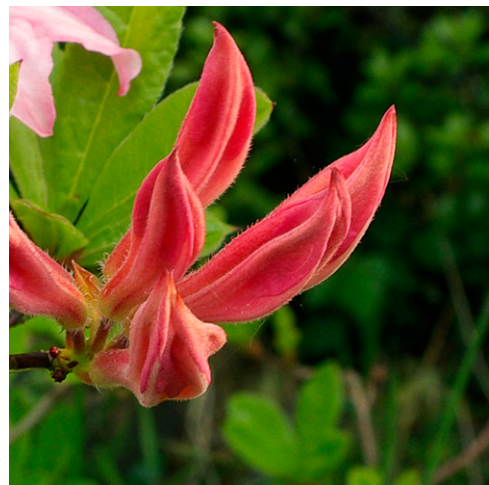
‘I agree,’ said Melior. ‘If we go about in them, we shall be recognised the moment someone sees us. But I cannot see any alternative.’

‘Nor I,’ said William.

While this was going on, the werewolf had been hunting a huge deer, a hart, and brought it down right beside their den. Then he went off and found a hind, and served it in the same manner, bringing it down, too, beside their den. And then he went away without a sound. William knew immediately what the wolf had in mind.

‘Do you see what the werewolf has done?’ he said. ‘May Christ keep him from sorrow! Let’s take the skins off these animals and dress ourselves in them before going any further.’

William took the hart and Melior the hind and they skinned them as quickly as they could; then each playfully dressed the other so that the skins were firm and tight, each sewn together so skilfully that the hide looked exactly as it had done upon the beast on which it had grown. They seemed more convincing as deer even than they had been before, as bears, the skins fitted so perfectly!



When they were dressed in their skins, they stayed in the den until the sun had set. But when night descended, they were eager to continue their journey, and the werewolf followed, then led, showing the paths they should use, taking the least inhabited route towards Sicily.

Led by the werewolf, William and Melior travelled over moors and plains, but everywhere they came to they found the land damaged, destroyed, towns and villages burnt, though the walls were still guarded. And all this was William’s land, it has to be said, he who was a deer; and here is the reason why war and suffering had visited the region: You have already seen how William’s father, the King of Apulia, Sicily and

Calabria, had tried to rescue his young son from the jaws of a wolf. Well, the king had died, leaving his wife, William's mother, to look after their beautiful daughter. She was younger than William by three years, with the most attractive figure that any young nobleman could wish to hold on the dance floor, and she had attracted the attentions of the son of the King of Spain. But William's mother was against the marriage and supported her daughter in rejecting the suit, and it was for this reason that the King of Spain was making war upon the land. Towns had been burnt, people killed, and the queen herself had been forced to flee to her principal city of Palermo. And now the King of Spain besieged this city relentlessly; his son made many serious attempts to storm it, though its brave defenders had managed to see off the attacks, with great loss of life on both sides. But now the people were in dire straits and had come to the queen begging her to accede to the King of Spain's demands. For they could no longer resist the siege; the King of Spain could call upon fresh troops whenever he wished, whereas they were all tired and hungry.

'Lords,' said the queen, 'you are my liege men and have served me well in arms, and I know the situation, I know that you are each of you near to the limit of your resources; but I have hope that things will improve, for I have sent for my father, the Emperor of Greece, and I know that he will send help. However, Greece is far away, as you all know, and it may take him a short while to arrive. Therefore I beseech you, my bold warriors,



for the love of He who made you, maintain your hardiness and defend our city until God sees fit to send us some relief!'

She instructed two knights to go quickly out of the city to the enemy camp, to ask for a fortnight's truce. And if at the end of this time no help had arrived, she resolved to offer the King of Spain anything he wanted, short of her daughter's hand in marriage. But the messengers returned without a truce, and when she learnt this, she went anxiously to her room and prayed all night for help.

But now we must leave the siege of Palermo, the harsh assaults and the determined defence, and return to the two animals who journey ever onwards, guided by their werewolf.

Listen to what happened, all you gentlefolk! The two deer travelled for a long while, along secluded paths, over hills and along valleys, until they came to a magnificent city on the coast. The beasts spent all day hidden in a den, in a cliff near to the harbour, until evening darkened into night. Then they made their way quickly to where a great many ships were tied up. The wolf looked carefully for a vessel that seemed ready to sail, and found one fully laden with amphorae of wine. The crew were asleep, having been given free time until the moon rose, for the ship could do nothing until then. And when

the wolf perceived this, he went back to the hart and the hind and, by signs and gestures, he communicated the situation to them and they followed him on board. The werewolf found them a place where they could hide amongst the cargo. When the moon arose and the tide neared its flood, the ship set sail and left port.



When they were nearly across the strait, the werewolf addressed his mind to how he could help the deer to get off the boat without coming to any harm. And as the ship was approaching the land, he leaped overboard in full view of the crew. The sailors saw him and grabbed oars and spars, anything that came to hand, and threw them at him. One man in particular had a good aim and hit the werewolf as he entered the water, causing him to sink beneath the waves; he nearly drowned, but through sheer strength the werewolf recovered his senses and swam swiftly away, in full view of them all. And they, intent upon killing the animal, sailed after him and dropped anchor. The werewolf was clever and loitered on the beach, giving the crew every hope of catching him, and they all piled into the tender and rowed ashore, leaving only a little lad in short trousers to look after the ship.

When the boat with all the sailors in it had set off for the beach, the hart and the hind emerged onto the deck. When the boy saw them, he was terrified. Imagining that he had to protect himself from these creatures, he aimed a blow at the hind's neck which sent her sprawling head over heels across the hatches. The hart went over to where she lay, picked up the hind and leapt into the sea with her!

The hart swam to a safe distance from the ship, then looked to see how badly injured the hind was. He was relieved to see that she was a bit shocked, that was all.

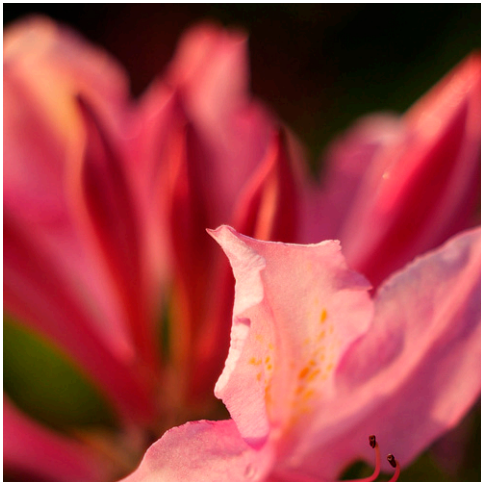
'Oh, darling! Why do you have to endure so much that by rights should be mine to receive? I would kill that boy if he was here now!'

'No, my darling,' replied Melior. 'It doesn't matter. Let's just thank God that we have escaped.'

The sailors soon returned and the boy told them about the deer, how strange it had all been, and how he didn't know what had happened to them after they'd jumped off the ship. Now hear of the animals and of the wilderness they travelled through.

When the deer had leaped overboard and the werewolf had well and truly given the shipmen the slip, he went as quickly as he could to the hart and hind, and when they saw their beast, they were delighted that he had escaped without any injury. They went onwards together, happy to be alive, although everything around them was burnt, destroyed and utterly wasted. But wherever the werewolf led them, they followed, and he guided them to a distant town, a very handsome town, the fairest that any man might

look upon; it was without equal and its name was Palermo. In the shadow of the royal palace were some gardens in which lay a menagerie, though as a result of the conflict it now looked derelict. The deer headed for these gardens, led by the werewolf who was ever their guide, and found a well-concealed hideaway in a crag very near to the queen's chamber. All day they hid there, and on into the night. The werewolf went off to find food and drink, and when he returned they made themselves as merry as they could. But now we shall fall silent about the beasts for a moment and speak of the queen, who languishes in the castle with much anxiety.



The queen lifted up a window of her chamber that looked over the part of the gardens where the deer were resting and, looking out over the ruins of the menagerie, she saw beneath a lovely laurel tree a hart and a hind embracing one another. They were talking together, but the queen could not hear what they were saying. So amazed was she at this sight that she stayed at the window for a long while, watching the deer as they lay in the seclusion of a shrubbery, thinking themselves unobserved. And only when it became so dark that she could scarcely see them at

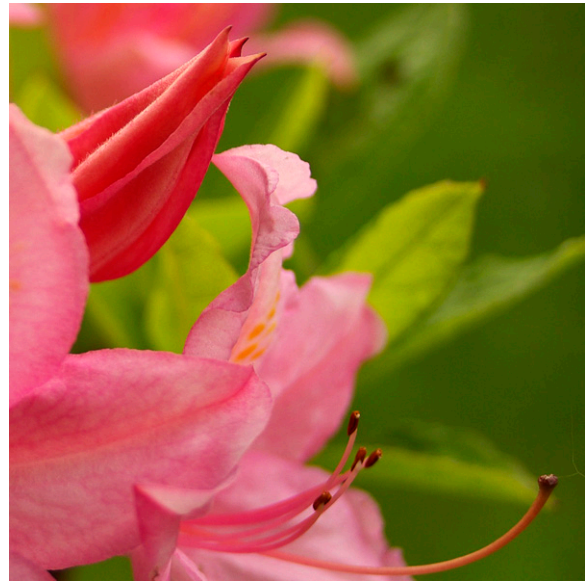
all did the queen dress herself and go into her hall, to raise as much cheer as she could muster. And when supper was over and everybody had washed, she was told by her knights how hopeless the situation had become, how her walls were all broken and her ramparts burned, and that the siege could no longer be withstood.

Then the queen said courteously: 'Lords, you are all my liege men and have sworn to uphold my rights, and no finer men than you exist; therefore, for God's love and for your own honour, you must protect me from these wicked men who would have me killed. Truly, if I escape this peril, you will all be rewarded handsomely and your fortitude shall not have been wasted.' And her knights and noblemen agreed that they would stand by her and do her bidding. The queen thanked them, and everybody went to bed.

The next morning the queen arose, prayed nervously to her beads and then hurried to her chapel to ask her priest to sing a Mass. And when the Mass was finished she went to her private rooms and waited at the window where she had been watching the deer the day before; and she saw that they were still there. They were embracing, and the hot sun had so dried their skins that their fine clothes were visible beneath. The queen was intrigued. She called her priest to her room and showed him the sight, and as soon as he saw the deer, he said: 'For the love of Mary, be dismayed no longer! That dream of yours that I interpreted for you the other day is coming true! You know how the daughter of the Emperor of Rome was recently given away in marriage to the son of the Emperor of Greece? She could not be made to honour her commitment and ran away with the man she loves, one of the bravest knights in her father's empire. They were dressed in the skins of two white bears, now they've changed these for the skins of two deer, how

I don't know, but I can safely say that they are here! It is them! Think how best to gain the confidence of these animals, so that the knight and the lovely damsel will come to your room.'

And the queen thought it best if she were sewn into a huge deerskin, as the knight and the damsel were, and to go out into the garden and lie under a bush, and see if she could get them to speak to her. The priest obtained a suitable hide and then, as it was getting late, they retired to their beds for the night. But the breaking dawn found the queen magnificently dressed in the deerskin. She made her way via a postern gate into the garden, where she lay down beneath a bush close to where the deer were concealed; and nobody knew she was there except for the priest and one of her handmaidens, the one she loved the most. They waited for her by the small doorway in the wall; and when the sun rose above the horizon, the hart and the hind woke up and began to speak:



'Darling,' said William, 'it has been such a long time since I saw your face. I long to see it again, if such a thing were possible.'

'And I yours,' said Melior. 'But we should not creep out of these deerskins until our werewolf gives us permission. Only he knows what is in his mind.'

As they embraced, they caught sight of a huge deer lying beneath a bush.

'By Mary!' exclaimed Melior. 'I think that deer is asleep. Honestly, it cannot be afraid of us.'

'Why should it be?' asked William. 'There is no reason for it to think anything but that we are deer like itself, we are so subtly sewn into these skins. If it knew the truth, I bet it would be off like a shot!'

'Oh no I wouldn't,' said the deer. 'Christ knows, I have no desire to run from the pair of you at all. I know who you are, where you are from and why you are running.'

The queen took William and Melior by the hands and guided them through the postern gate and into her castle. The maid was still there, and when she saw the three animals, so beast-like in their hides, just like deer, she was terrified and began to run away. But the queen called to her: 'Why are you frightened? You know that I was dressed in this skin when I left you.'

'Yes, Madam,' said the maid, 'but, by mild Mary of Heaven, I fear these other creatures

that follow you!’

The queen led the two deer to a room beneath the highest tower. Beds were made up, and two baths prepared. Then the queen took a knife and swiftly unlaced William and Melior and threw the hideous hides into a corner. And then they were given fine garments to wear. The queen hugged and kissed Melior, then she bathed them both and dressed them in the fine new clothes, and led them to a table where was laid the most magnificent meal. There is no need to describe it, for there was nothing missing at all. Everything was at hand.

William was delighted to discover that his hostess was the Queen of Apulia and quickly said: ‘Madam, by the Lord who made us all, if you will look after my lady while I attend to the desperate situation you appear to be in, you shall have all the help I can give you. I shall not fail you, for as long as my life lasts.’

As dawn broke the next morning, the Spanish began another attack upon the city, with three thousand men. At once, the men of the city closed the gates and manned the walls. But because there were so few defenders, none dared ride out to engage the enemy. Piteous cries erupted within the city, for many deemed that this would be the last dawn they would see. The news quickly reached the palace. William rose at once and the queen saw to it that he was armed as he wished; and then he made his way to the stables. As soon as he arrived, a horse kicked up a huge commotion, then knelt down upon his front legs and looked as happy as any horse may; and all the knights who had followed William were amazed, for it was the horse that had belonged to the late king, and he had not allowed anybody near him since his master’s death, but had had to be chained in his stable to keep him under control. The steed stood again, and with great gravity, moved not a muscle while William put a saddle onto his back. Then William mounted the horse, gathered the straps of his shield over his shoulder and took up a magnificent sword, and a lance. The horse seemed so comfortable with the weight that he carried, and looked so magnificent, that all the knights marvelled who this man might be, who now sat upon his back. His arms glistened and shone like no knight’s they had ever seen. The queen, her daughter and Melior stood at a window, anxious to be seen together, and the queen declared William to be without equal. ‘Lucky is the woman who wins this man to be her husband!’ she exclaimed. And Melior became worried that they meant to deceive her, and to take William from her, and she said softly to herself: ‘Lord, if it had pleased you, I would rather have remained in the forest than stay here in wealth and comfort only to lose William to another.’ Such doubts had Melior suddenly.

William rode off on his horse, and everybody marvelled at his courage and demeanour. He went quickly towards the assembly of knights and they were all delighted to see him. William rode up and said: ‘Dear noblemen, for God’s love, listen to me! Why do you let the enemy keep you imprisoned within these walls? Why do you cower like cowards while the Spanish do what they please to your city? The only course is to meet them, to sally out and engage them in combat; have faith in the rightness of your cause, and their injustice will be their downfall. If you meet them valiantly, you will prevail, though they

be five times your number! All you who want to win glory in this conflict, follow me, for I shall be the first to strike a blow in reply to their arrogance!’ And the gates opened, and William rode out.

When the knights heard this, and saw William ride off, they were inspired by his courage and organised themselves into battle formation. And the first of the Spanish knights to ride to meet them was a hardened warrior, the king’s steward, leading his contingent; he rode fiercely and courageously in fine armour. William saw him and, grasping his lance, he galloped towards the approaching knight. Their spears shattered as they met, but William’s held up the better and pierced the other through the body. The knight fell dead from his horse.

The Spanish knights saw this and, mad with grief, took up the body and carried it to their tents so that it would not be ridden over by their horses. And quickly, the Spanish made to avenge their steward’s death. So the battle began. Many a lance shattered into pieces, many a bright shield was broken, and many a helmet was cleaved in two through the heavy strokes that were wielded. And to tell the truth, William and his knights fought so well that they brought their enemy to the ground. None could withstand their strokes, for William’s example had uplifted them all.

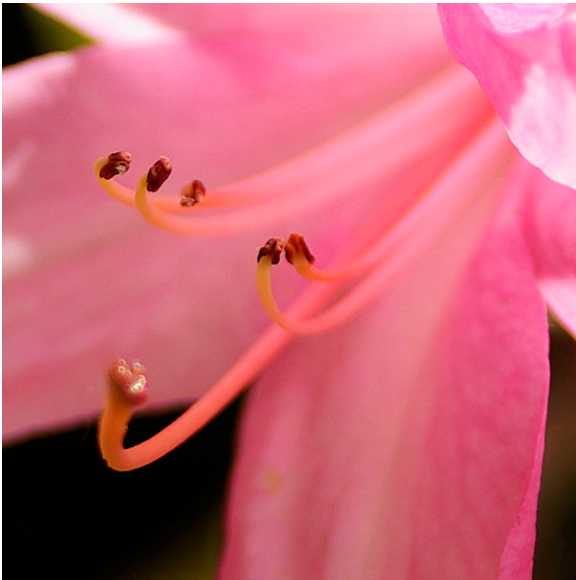
Soon the Spanish had no thoughts but to flee. They all galloped away to escape death. William and his forces pursued the defeated knights and all acclaimed William as their saviour; they bowed before William and found the greatest pleasure when riding by his side. The queen and her daughter, and Melior, with many maidens, welcomed William when his forces returned, with hugs and kisses. The queen led him to her chamber, disarmed him and gave to William the costliest clothes to put on. Then they all sat at the window where the queen had first seen the two deer. And as they sat and talked, the werewolf appeared: he looked up at the ladies and at William, and then was gone.

The next morning, with all his knights fully armed and ready, William set his forces and organised his battalions. The Spanish king’s son wasted no time but spurred ahead with his lance lowered. When William became aware of this, he spurred off at a gallop and hit the son of the King of Spain in the middle of his shield, throwing both man and horse to the ground and nearly breaking the knight’s back. William drew his sword, but the Spanish knights were racing up to help their prince. William’s knights responded appropriately, and never before was seen such a battle! Soon, many knights had been brought to the ground, with shields shattered and helmets broken. Horses stepped riderless everywhere in pools of blood. But William was so valiant that no man he hit could deliver a blow in return, and he prevented any rescue of the king’s son. And at last, William managed to haul him onto a horse and carry him away, to where he could gather enough stern knights to escort his prisoner to safety.

William and his knights have captured the son of the King of Spain! The queen greets William, with her daughter and with Melior; they receive William with worship, with hugs and kisses. William presents to her the King of Spain’s son, to put into prison or to

do with as she likes.

Graciously, the queen knelt and thanked William for his gift, for this prisoner was the man she most hated on Earth. He had brought great harm down upon her, for the sake of her daughter. They went into the hall, and the queen led William to her chamber, where she removed his arms. And they sat once more at the window, talking together; and as they sat, the queen looked at William and marvelled how like her late husband this young knight was. And such a sadness overtook her, for her lost son, that she began to cry.



When William saw her weeping he exclaimed angrily: 'For the love of Saint Mary! Why are you sad? You should be happy, to give heart to your men. They are weary and some are wounded, and you should give gifts for their valour and their courage and give encouragement to them, to spur them to even greater effort. You now hold your greatest enemy captive, and the means to win this war!'

'Truly, Sir,' replied the queen, 'you are right. I know that by weeping I do not behave as I should, but I cannot help it, for sadness has entered by heart. I once had a lovely son. His

name was William, as is yours. When he was four years old, I was with my husband and many others in the very gardens we see below us when a wolf, just like the one we saw yesterday, grabbed him in its mouth in front of his father and all the knights, and ran off with him. My husband chased after the animal for many miles until the wolf came to the sea and jumped into the water with my son in its mouth. You remind me so much of my husband.'

William remembered how he had been found as a little child in the forest in a wolf's den, so he had been told, dressed like a king's son. But the queen had said that her son had been drowned in the sea. 'Madam,' he said, 'give no further thought to it, for what good can it do to weep over your husband and your son, who are both dead?'

The queen wept still, but they let the matter rest and soon turned to lighter subjects. And out in the garden, as the story tells us, they saw the wolf again; he came below the window, looked up as though he had something on his mind, then scampered away.

The next morning, the Spanish gathered. They rode out to the field where the previous days' fighting had taken place and there they found the bodies of five hundred of their friends and compatriots. The King of Spain gave the order that all the bodies should be gathered up and taken to the tents to await burial. This was done with all speed. Then the king organised his forces into three battalions, as quickly and as mag-

nificantly as he could; two thousand to a battalion, and each stood waiting for its commands, with armour glistening in the sun. But now we must turn to William.

William and his knights were armed shortly after dawn and issued out of the city. Quickly, they formed up into battle order and trumpets sounded to put strength into their hearts. Then both armies moved forwards, greeting each other grimly with sharp weapons. Many a bold warrior was toppled from his horse, and many a steed was killed. Soon, no man might count the dead that lay on the field, on both sides.

The King of Spain let out a shrill cry: 'Beware of the knight who bears the emblem of a wolf on his shield. He has murdered my men and wrought us great harm!'

When William became aware at last that the king was in retreat, he left the main pursuit and galloped after the royal banner. William shouted at the king: 'Sir, yield yourself to me quickly, or you will die! Be assured that you will make amends for all the harm you have done.'

When the king saw that he must yield or be killed, he got down from his horse and offered up his sword to William and craved for mercy. And William, as a courteous and chivalrous knight, immediately accepted his capitulation and instructed the king to go and kneel before the queen, and to offer himself as her prisoner. So, escorted between two knights, the King of Spain was forced into surrender and captivity.

William rode into the city with his bold knights, leading the King of Spain amidst cheering and celebration, and they made their way to the palace. The queen would have knelt before William, delighted that the war was ended, and would have thanked William a thousand times, but he raised her from the floor at once and rebuked her: 'Madam,' he said, 'do not do this! You are the daughter of an emperor and a queen yourself, and I am but a simple soldier. You do yourself a dishonour.'

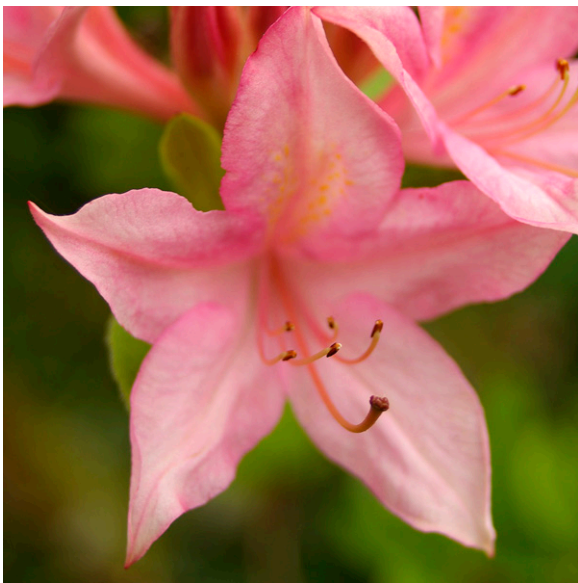
'No Sir!' exclaimed the queen. 'So Christ help me, you are no soldier but a sovereign lord, for I give you control of all this kingdom! And blessed be the woman who bore you, for had you not done as you have done, I would be bereft of all joy. My kingdom would have been lost.'

The queen then consulted her advisors and as they sat discussing the detail of the Spanish surrender, into the hall came the werewolf. Ignoring all the knights and noblemen, he made straight for the King of Spain and fell to the ground at his feet. Then he lowered his head to the queen, to William, to Melior and finally to the queen's daughter, and then sped as fast as he could out of the hall again. Some men that were there grabbed weapons – axes, spears and swords – intent upon pursuing and killing the wolf. But when William saw this, he rose angrily and swore that if anyone made so bold as to bring any grief whatsoever upon this wolf, be he knight or clergyman, boy or warrior, he would kill him without hesitation, and allow no other punishment. And there was nobody in that hall after this who dared to follow the beast, so in awe were they of William.

Seeing the king deep in thought, William asked: 'King! In Christ's name, and by all the

courtesies that belong to kingship, tell me – do you have any idea why the wolf bowed to you before any other man in this hall? I can see your mind in deep reflection as though you know. If you do not tell me, by Christ, I shall make sure that you never leave prison.’

The king sighed and said: ‘Sir, there is no need to make threats. A beautiful lady, a very good lady, the daughter of a king, died while giving birth to our first child. I fostered my son and he grew into a healthy little boy. His godparents called him Alphonse. I married again, to a lovely lady, well-educated and good-mannered and from a noble family. And through God’s grace we soon had a son, a healthy youngster and well-loved, who has grown to be the man you see sitting beside me now. But then, as I was told by some, my wife began to reflect jealously about how my eldest son was likely to inherit Spain upon my death, and she began to make plans to kill Alphonse, so that her own son



would inherit the kingdom instead. And I was told that by enchantments and by spells, she changed my son into a wild wolf. All his human features altered into those of a wolf, although his wits remained as well as before, but truly all other likeness that belongs to a man’s nature was lost. When I confronted her with this accusation, she insisted that it was all nonsense and levelled at her out of malice, and she swore by all God’s works that my lovely son had been drowned in the sea whilst playing one day. And I believed her, out of loyalty. But now I am certain that this wolf is my son.’

‘Sir,’ replied William, ‘by Mary in heaven, you may well be right! I know that he has more intelligence than the two of us put together, and he has served me magnificently, in time of great need. I would not see him harmed for all the world, and I shall love him like a brother and Sir, you should be overjoyed that he is here. By God, I would give the world’s wealth to bring him into the shape of a man again! And if, as you say, your wife is so well versed in witchcraft, then perhaps she can change him back again into a man. Send for your wife, and urge her to make all haste and let nothing delay her. And until she uses her witchcraft to help the werewolf, no man on Earth shall deliver you from your prison.’

The king chose fifty noblemen, instilled into them the gravity of their mission and instructed them in what they should say to the queen: ‘And tell her,’ the king said, ‘that if she does not cooperate, she will never again have any joy of her husband or her son, because we will both be languishing in prison. Tell her this, and tell her that my son is found, the one who sank beneath the salt waves, as she led me to believe, and now he walks the Earth as a wolf; and tell her how he came to see me.’

The next day, the envoys set off, clothed for a long journey, well-horsed and fully provi-

sioned. And with all haste, they journeyed to Spain.

William's mother welcomed the envoys home, when they arrived back with the Queen of Spain. William courteously helped the queen from her horse, and his noble mother kissed her. The Queen of Spain was very upset to see that her husband and son were prisoners. The King of Spain was greatly relieved that she had come, and so were all his noblemen, for they now had some hope of being released. William and his mother led the Queen of Spain and brought her into the hall, and soon the King of Spain and his wife sat together, with their son beside them, talking and making as much merriment as they could muster under the circumstances. The Queen of Apulia and Sicily, her daughter, that noble damsel, and Melior, sat together and talked freely. The hall soon filled with barons and knights; on the one side those of Sicily and Apulia, on the other side, those of Spain; and they were all served with spices, and the wine that each of them most enjoyed.

As they talked and dined, the werewolf perceived that his stepmother, his greatest enemy, was close to him and made his way quietly into the hall, to kill her if he could. The wolf entered the hall, passed the ranks of noblemen seated at the lower tables, and stopped before the high table. Here he stared at his stepmother as she laughed and joked with her husband. This only fuelled his rage and the hairs on his back began to stand on end. He let out a howl and ran forwards, intending to seize the Queen of Spain by the throat! She screamed and panicked: 'Save me!' she cried. 'Protect me or I shall die. This animal is trying to kill me! Although I deserve death, help me, for the love of Christ, and have mercy.' The King of Spain rose and tried to fend off the wolf, as did his son. William grabbed the werewolf in his arms, restrained it by its neck and said: 'My sweet beast, trust me as you would a brother, or as a father would a son, and for your own sake calm down! I have brought your stepmother here for your own benefit, believe me. She will transform you back into human shape, and so she brings you a chance of recovery; and if she cannot undo her spell, be sure that her ashes will blow about in the wind before nightfall. Therefore, my dear friend, for my love, leave things to me and you shall have no need to harm her yourself.'

The werewolf understood William and fell down at his feet in submission. His anger was quelled. When the Queen of Spain saw that she was now in no immediate danger, she thanked God, then knelt before the werewolf and begged for mercy.

'Sweet Alphonse,' she said, 'my lord, I have brought with me the means to transform you back into the shape you were before. Soon everybody will see your lovely face as it should be. I am greatly to blame, I admit before God, for trying to deny you your rights; I turned you into a wolf so that my own son might gain your inheritance, in the hope that you would die. But God did not wish you to die. For my guilt, therefore, I beg for mercy. Let me live, Alphonse, I implore you! I will do exactly as you wish, so please forgive me.'

Everybody in the hall felt sorry for the queen then, as she lay flat on the ground before the wolf. There was much weeping and dismay. Without delay, she made her way to a room, accompanied only by the werewolf. She produced a ring, set with jewels, and the stone in it was of such virtue that no man who wore it could be poisoned or killed by any venom or remain under the influence of any witchcraft. The queen tied the ring about the wolf's neck with a red thread. Then, from a casket, she produced a book of spells and read from it for a while; and when she had finished, the wolf had turned into a handsome man. He was almost as handsome as William! When the wolf became aware that he was now in the shape of a man, he was overjoyed and thought to blame nobody. Then he realised that he was naked, and was ashamed. When the queen saw this she said: 'Ah, Alphonse! Dear lord, do not be embarrassed. There is nobody here but the two of us, and you have nothing that a man should not have. Now go quickly to the bath. It is already prepared for you.'



Alphonse followed her instructions, climbed into the bath without any complaint and found it comfortable enough. The Queen attended to him, and gave him reassurances. And she said: 'Sweet Sir, tell me, who would you like to give you clothes? For you have not yet had knighthood conferred upon you.'

'Madam,' replied Alphonse. 'By Mary in heaven! I will accept my clothes, and the noble order of knighthood, from the worthiest knight who now wields life.'

The queen then went into the hall, pulled at William's sleeve and whispered into his ear: 'Sir, if it pleases you, your werewolf desires that you come to dress him. He will accept no one else.'

The queen then went into the hall, pulled at William's sleeve and whispered into his ear: 'Sir, if it pleases you, your werewolf desires that you come to dress him. He will accept no one else.'

The Queen of Spain led William and Melior and William's younger sister Florence to the room where the werewolf had been transformed into a worthy knight. They saw the bath and a bed beside it, and in the bed was lying the most handsome man they had ever seen. William greeted him as a true friend and Alphonse answered: 'Christ save you, Sir knight! I have come into your country for a second time and have received little harm for my trouble!'

When they had spent a great deal of time together, Alphonse asked if he might have clothes so that he could speak with his father. And without any further delay, William dressed him in the most costly clothes that befit a knight.

When all the lords and ladies saw William and Alphonse enter the hall, many of the knights leapt to their feet. There was great joy at this meeting, be sure of that! The King

of Spain went to his son and greeted him exuberantly, thanking God for his safe return. The Queen of Sicily and Apulia thanked Christ that things had turned out so well, remembering the dire straits that she had been in only a short while before. A silence descended as the King of Spain prepared to speak to his son.

‘Alphonse,’ he said, ‘I have longed to see your face again, a sight that I thought I had lost. For this noble queen, through this knight’s deeds, has us all at her mercy. Sweet son, it has long been made clear that our freedom can be gained by you alone. Only you can help us, and no one else. Therefore, may Heaven’s King be praised, who has given you life for the deliverance of us all!’

‘Sweet sir,’ replied Alphonse, ‘so that Christ may help you, tell me truly now, what is the cause of all this?’

‘By God,’ said the king, ‘to tell the truth, all this war and this woe is our own fault. I desired this damsel to be the wife of my son who sits next to you, but her mother refused to agree to the match. So I brought war upon her, wasted her lands and brought her to such distress that she begged only that she might go safely into exile with her daughter to stop the bloodshed, she asked for nothing else. But I refused these terms.

‘But then came this marvellous knight, and through his strength and valour he has defeated us all and put us in prison, and holds our fate in his hands. That is why we all travelled from Spain with such great ambition.’

‘Fair father, by my faith,’ replied Alphonse, ‘it was folly for you to try to force a marriage that was not welcome to the bride. You can see the truth of this now, and deserve all that you have suffered. But I hope, by Christ, that all this sorrow can now be ended.’

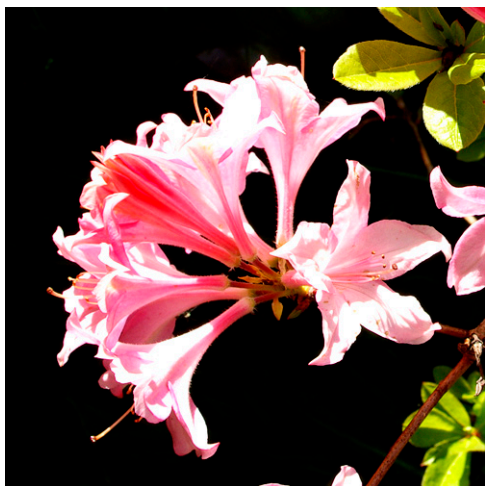
Alphonse turned to the Queen of Apulia. ‘Ah, honourable lady, let everybody be silent while I speak. Ladies and gentlemen,’ he said, ‘You all know that this land would have been lost if the siege had continued for a moment longer than it did. But God sent you such grace, through His great might, that this valiant knight has brought you unexpected victory over your enemies. Yet none of you know where he has come from, nor who he is, though soon you shall know. If this man conducted himself well, this should come as no surprise to you, for it is no more than any man would do for his mother, to come to her aid, if he loves Christ.’

‘What are you saying?’ asked the queen, hurriedly.

‘This knight is your son,’ said Alphonse, ‘by Christ who made me! You bore him, and the king, your late husband, was his father. The lordship of this land is rightfully his.’

When the queen heard this and understood that William was her son, her happiness cannot be described. The Queen, her daughter and William were joyful beyond words, and with hugs and kisses they celebrated this revelation. Such merriment was made that no tongue might tell the tenth part of it!

Without any further ado, William summoned messengers, the noblest lords of his land



and those most accomplished in the art of speaking, and he instructed them to go to Rome, to convey letters to the emperor, asking him, if he desired it, to travel to Palermo as soon as possible, to give his daughter Melior away in marriage. And if Alexandra was there, she should come also.

William welcomed them with many hundreds of knights when they arrived, and much joy was shared when they met. Alphonse greeted the Emperor of Rome, and his father, the King of Spain, went to welcome the emperor as well, and these two exchanged hugs, for they were great friends. Then they all made their way to the palace, where the queen greeted the emperor. There was much hugging and kissing!

To tell the truth, when the moment arrived for the brides to make their way to the church, I haven't the skill to describe their attire. William was to be married to Melior, William's sister to Alphonse, and Alexandra to the King of Spain's other son. It was beautiful. I shall say no more. The cardinals came out and welcomed William, gave him a crucifix to kiss, then led him into the church. And when the service was completed, they all returned to the palace amidst music and singing. The banquet was truly magnificent. When the boards and trestles were removed, and everyone had washed, presents were given to the musicians – horses, robes, gold and jewels. The celebrations lasted for a month, and every day, gifts were distributed to all those present, both rich and poor. And at the month's end, all the lords took their leave.

The Emperor of Rome left with his entourage. And while he was being escorted by his daughter for the first few miles of his journey, he said to her: 'Now, dear daughter, I urge you, do as I advise. Do not be overbearing to anybody, and be loyal to your husband, and to his mother, and hold the nobility of this land in respect. And do not pile taxes upon the poor, but attend to their needs, and see that the laws of this country are upheld. Then everybody will pray that you have a long life, and William also. See that you look after the interests of Holy Church, to maintain its dignity and its wealth. Be free with your gifts, and be merciful to all who fall into difficulty. In this way you will win honour. Do all this and you will earn a place in heaven, be certain of that.'

As fortune decreed, the Emperor of Rome soon died. And all the lords of that land urged William to make the journey to Rome, with Melior, to receive the lordship due to him through his marriage to the late emperor's only daughter. They urged him to come to Rome quickly and to make the city his home, and to become emperor.

And as William traversed the country and came near to Rome, a welcoming party came to meet him, kings and dukes, the noblest gathering that has ever been seen. They greet-

ed William as their lord and rode into Rome with him, in royal procession. The entire city was decked out with flags and banners and all the bells rang. And the next morning, William was declared Emperor of Rome.

And now William's work is finished, drawing this tale from the French as well as his wits have allowed him to. And fair friends, for God's love, offer a prayer for the lord who commissioned this work, the noble Earl of Hereford, Humphrey de Bohun, whose dear mother was the late King Edward's daughter. He wants this tale to be accessible to all those who speak little French and whose language is English. Pray thus to God, and to his mother Mary, the fountain of mercy: "Give Humphrey a good life while he resides on Earth, and the joy of heaven everlasting." And may God bless all those who offer this prayer, and may they have an equal share in Paradise.

Amen.