UNE drew unto its end, the hot bright days
Now gat from men as much of blame as praise,
As rainless still they passed, without a cloud;
And growing grey at last, the barley bowed
Before the south-east wind. On such a day
These folk amid the trellised roses lay,
And careless for a little while at least,
Crowned with the mingled blossoms held their feast:
Nor did the garden lack for younger folk,
Who cared no more for burning summer's yoke
Than the sweet breezes of the April-tide;
But through the thick trees wandered far and wide
From sun to shade, and shade to sun again,
Until they deemed the elders would be faint
To hear the tale, and shadows longer grew:
Then round about the grave old men they drew,
Both youths and maidens; and beneath their feet
The grass seemed greener, and the flowers more sweet
Unto the elders, as they stood around.
SO through the calm air soon arose the sound
Of one old voice as now a Wanderer spoke.
O friends, and ye, fair loving gentle folk,
Would I could better tell a tale to-day;
But hark to this, which while our good ship lay
Within the Weser, such a while agone,
A Fleming told me, as we sat alone
One Sunday evening in the Rose-Garland,
And all the other folk were gone a-land
After their pleasure, like seafaring men.
Surely I deem it no great wonder then
That I remember everything he said,
Since from that Sunday eve strange fortune led
That keel and me on such a weary way;
Well, at the least it serveth you to-day.

The Lady of the Land:
The Medieval Tale for June

Narrative:
In "The Lady of the Land," a mariner explores an island, where he meets a beautiful young woman in a deserted palace. She informs him that her father, a thaumaturgist and domestic tyrant, dedicated her at birth to the virgin-goddess Diana (compare the fathers of Danaë and Psyche), and she violated this 'vow' as an adult by taking a lover.

In retaliation, the angry goddess murdered her companion as they embraced, and transformed her into a loathsome dragon for all but one day each year. She can now be released from this spell only by someone willing to kiss her head in its repellent dragon-form, which she now pleads with him to do.

Eager to oblige but overconfident, the mariner returns the next day and is overcome by terror and revulsion. He strikes wildly at the hideous visage, and flees in remorse. The dragon weeps, gashes a stone, and returns in misery to the sea, and her failed liberator dies raving in delirium.

Source:
Morris adds to this episode from Mandeville's Travels (chapter 16) a lengthy description of the castle's decayed luxury, and he also deepens the mariner's emotions and hopes. Mandeville's lady makes the status-conscious demand that her wooer become a knight before she revisits her in her dragon-state, but Morris's Lady is not so foolish, and her urgent need for rescue gives substance to the mariner's task.

Morris also emphasizes the mariner's pathetic final end, in

2Weser: A river in northwest Germany, the Weser flows into the North Sea near present-day Bremen.
THE LADY OF THE LAND.

The Argument.
A CERTAIN MAN HAVING LANDED ON AN ISLAND IN THE GREEK SEA, FOUND THERE A BEAUTIFUL DAMSEL, WHOM HE WOULD FAIN HAVE DELIVERED FROM A STRANGE AND DREADFUL DOOM, BUT FAILING HEREIN, HE DIED SOON AFTERWARDS.

It happened once, some men of Italy
Midst the Greek Islands went a sea-roving,
And much good fortune had they on the sea:
Of many a man they had the ransoming,
And many a chain they gat, and goodly thing;
And midst their voyage to an isle they came,
Whereof my story keepeth not the name.¹
Now though but little was there left to gain,
Because the richer folk had gone away,
Yet since by this of water they were fain
They came to anchor in a land-locked bay,
Whence in a while some went ashore to play,
Going but lightly armed in twos or threes,
For midst that folk they feared no enemies.
And of these fellows that thus went ashore,
One was there who left all his friends behind;
Who going inland ever more and more,
And being left quite alone, at last did find
A lonely valley sheltered from the wind,
Wherein, amidst an ancient cypress wood,
A long-deserted ruined castle stood.
The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,

With gardens overlooked by terraces,
And marble-paved pools for pleasure made,
Was tangled now, and choked with fallen trees;
And he who went there, but with little ease
Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet
For tender women's dainty wandering feet.

The raven's croak, the low wind choked and drear,
The baffled stream, the grey wolf's doleful cry,
Were all the sounds that mariner could hear,
As through the wood he wandered painfully;
But as unto the house he drew anigh,
The pillars of a ruined shrine he saw,
The once fair temple of a fallen law.

No image was there left behind to tell
Before whose face the knees of men had bowed;
An altar of black stone, of old wrought well,
Alone beneath a ruined roof now showed
The goal whereto the folk were wont to crowd,
Seeking for things forgotten long ago,
Praying for heads long ages laid a-low.

Close to the temple was the castle-gate,
Doorless and crumbling, there our fellow turned,
Trembling indeed at what might chance to wait
The prey entrapped, yet with a heart that burned
To know the most of what might there be learned,
And hoping somewhat too, amid his fear,
To light on such things as all men hold dear.

Noble the house was, nor seemed built for war,
But rather like the work of other days,
When men, in better peace than now they are,
Had leisure on the world around to gaze,
And noted well the past times' changing ways;
And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,
By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought.

¹whereof... keepeth not the name: According to Mandeville, the island of Lango, now called Cos (or Kos), in Greece.
Now as he looked about on all these things,
And strove to read the mouldering histories,
Above the door an image with wide wings,
Whose unclad limbs a serpent seemed to seize,
He dimly saw, although the western breeze,
And years of biting frost and washing rain,
Had made the carver’s labour well-nigh vain.

But this, though perished sore, and worn away,
He noted well, because it seemed to be,
After the fashion of another day,
Some great man’s badge of war, or armoury;
And round it a carved wreath he seemed to see:
But taking note of these things, at the last
The mariner beneath the gateway passed.

And there a lovely cloistered court he found,
A fountain in the midst o’erthrown and dry,
And in the cloister4 briers twining round
The slender shafts; the wondrous imagery
Outworn by more than many years gone by;
Because the country people, in their fear
Of wizardry, had wrought destruction here.

And piteously these fair things had been maimed;
There stood great Jove, lacking his head of might,
Here was the archer, swift Apollo,5 lamed;
The shapely limbs of Venus hid from sight
By weeds and shards; Diana’s ankles light
Bound with the cable of some coasting ship;
And rusty nails through Helen’s maddening lip.6

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4cloister: arcade or covered walk.
5Apollo: the sun god, who strikes down blasphemers from time to time with invisible arrows.
6Diana: Roman name of the Greek goddess Artemis, Virgin patroness of hunting and wild animals.
7Helen’s maddening lip: Helen of Troy, allegedly the most beautiful woman of her time.
He moved not for awhile, but looking round,
He wondered much to see the place so fair,
Because, unlike the castle above ground,
No pillager or wreccher had been there;
It seemed that time had passed on otherwhere,
Nor laid a finger on this hidden place,
Rich with the wealth of some forgotten race.

With hangings, fresh as when they left the loom,
The walls were hung a space above the head,
Silm ivory chairs were set about the room,
And in one corner was a dainty bed,
That seemed for some fair queen apparell’d;
And marble was the worst stone of the floor,
That with rich Indian webs was covered o’er.

The wanderer trembled when he saw all this,
Because he deemed by magic it was wrought;
Yet in his heart a longing for some bliss,
Whereof the hard and changing world knows nought,
Arose and urged him on, and dimmed the thought
That there perchance some devil lurked to slay
The heedless wanderer from the light of day.

Over against him was another door
Set in the wall, so, casting fear aside,
With hurried steps he crossed the varied floor,
And there again the silver latch he tried
And with no pain the door he opened wide,
And entering the new chamber cautiously
The glory of great heaps of gold could see.

Upon the floor uncounted medals lay,
Like things of little value; here and there
Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh
The biggest midst an emperor’s copper-ware,
And golden cups were set on tables fair,

Themelves of gold; and in all hollow things
Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.

The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,
And precious raiment from the wall hung down;
The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,
Or gained some longing conqueror great renown,
Or built again some god-destroyed old town;
What wonder, if this plunderer of the sea
Stood gazing at it long and dizzyly?

But at the last his troubled eyes and dazed
He lifted from the glory of that gold,
And then the image, that well-nigh erased
Over the castle-gate he did behold,
Above a door well wrought in coloured gold
Again he saw; a naked girl with wings
Enfolded in a serpent’s scaly rings.

And even as his eyes were fixed on it
A woman’s voice came from the other side,
And through his heart strange hopes began to flit
That in some wondrous land he might abide
Not dying, master of a deathless bride,
So o’er the gold which now he scarce could see
He went, and passed this last door eagerly.

Then in a room he stood wherein there was
A marble bath, whose brimming water yet
Was scarcely still; a vessel of green glass
Half full of odorous ointment was there set
Upon the topmost step that still was wet,

*Enfolded in a serpent’s scaly rings: Snakes are associated with Aesculapius, the Greek god of healing, perhaps an appropriate symbol for a family headed by a physician. A female figure entwined with a serpent suggests the curse which turns the castle’s inhabitant into a dragon, and a roughly comparable figure served the Mithraic religion as an emblem for “Unending Time.”*
And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear
Lay cast upon the varied pavement near.

In one quick glance these things his eyes did see,
But speedily they turned round to behold
Another sight, for throned on ivory
There sat a woman, whose wet tresses rolled
On to the floor in waves of gleaming gold,
Cast back from such a form as, erewhile shown
To one poor shepherd, lighted up Troy town.

Naked she was, the kisses of her feet
Upon the floor a dying path had made
From the full bath unto her ivory seat;
In her right hand, upon her bosom laid,
She held a golden comb, a mirror weighed
Her left hand down, aback her fair head lay
Dreaming awake of some long vanished day.

Her eyes were shut, but she seemed not to sleep,
Her lips were murmuring things unheard and low,
Or sometimes twitched as though she needs must weep
Though from her eyes the tears refused to flow,
And oft with heavenly red her cheek did glow,
As if remembrance of some half-sweet shame
Across the web of many memories came. 4

There stood the man, scarce daring to draw breath
For fear the lovely sight should fade away;
Forgetting heaven, forgetting life and death,
Trembling for fear lest something he should say
Unwitting, lest some sob should yet betray

*There sat a woman . . . Mandeville describes the woman only as "[combing] kyr head and look[ing] in a mirrou and she had much treasure aboute kyr" (22). He seems to have considered her less awe-inspiring than Morris's Lady: she is "a common woman that dwelled ther to kepe men" (22).
Lady, he said, in Florence is my home,
And in my city noble is my name;
Neither on peddling voyage am I come,
But, like my fathers, bent to gather fame;
And though thy face has set my heart a-flame
Yet of thy story nothing do I know,
But here have wandered heedlessly now.

But since the sight of thee mine eyes did bless,
What can I be but thine? what wouldst thou have?
From those thy words, I deem from some distress
By deeds of mine thy dear life I might save;
O then, delay not! if one ever gave
His life to any, mine I give to thee;
Come, tell me what the price of love must be?

Swift death, to be with thee a day and night
And with the earliest dawning to be slain?
Or better, a long year of great delight,
And many years of misery and pain?
Or worse, and this poor hour for all my gain?
A sorry merchant am I on this day,
E'en as thou willest so must I obey.

She said: What brave words! nought divine am I,
But an unhappy and unheard-of maid
Compelled by evil fate and destiny
To live, who long ago should have been laid
Under the earth within the cypress shade.
Hearken awhile, and quickly shalt thou know
What deed I pray thee to accomplish now.

God grant indeed thy words are not for nought!
Then shalt thou save me, since for many a day
To such a dreadful life I have been brought:
Nor will I spare with all my heart to pay
What man soever takes my grief away;
Ah! I will love thee, if thou lovest me
But well enough my saviour now to be.

My father lived a many years ago
Lord of this land, master of all cunning,
Who ruddy gold could draw from out grey stone
And gather wealth from many an uncouth thing;
He made the wilderness rejoice and sing,
And such a leech he was that none could say
Without his word what soul should pass away.

Unto Diana such a gift he gave;¹¹
Goddess above, below, and on the earth;¹²
That I should be her virgin and her slave
From the first hour of my most wretched birth;
Therefore my life had known but little mirth
When I had come unto my twentieth year
And the last time of hallowing drew nigh.

So in her temple had I lived and died
And all would long ago have passed away,
But ere that time came, did strange things betide,
Whereby I am alive unto this day;

¹¹leech: a physician. Mandeville calls the Lady the daughter of "Epocras"—the Greek healer Hippocrates, born in fact on Cos (21).
¹²Unto Diana such a gift he gave: This explanation of the Lady's enchantment is Morris's invention. Mandeville says only that she was "changed from a damoselle to a dragon through a goddess that men call Diana" (21), probably another one of the virgin goddess's punishments for sexual adventure.
¹³Goddess . . . earth: Diana was also known as Triformis because she was identified with Luna/Selene in the heavens, and Hecate or Persephone in the underworld.
Alas, the bitter words that I must say!
Ah! can I bring my wretched tongue to tell
How I was brought unto this fearful hell.

A queen I was, what gods I knew I loved,
And nothing evil was there in my thought,
And yet by love my wretched heart was moved
Until to utter ruin I was brought!
Alas! thou sayest our gods were vain and nought;
Wait, wait till thou hast heard this tale of mine,
Then shalt thou think them devilish or divine.

Hearken! in spite of father and of vow
I loved a man; but for that sin I think
Men had forgiven me; yea, yea, even thou;
But from the gods the full cup must I drink,
And into misery unheard of sink,
Tormented, when their own names are forgot,
And men must doubt e'er if they lived or not.

Glorious my lover was unto my sight,
Most beautiful; of love we grew so fain
That we at last agreed, that on a night
We should be happy, but that he were slain
Or shut in hold; and neither joy nor pain
Should else forbid that hoped-for time to be;
So came the night that made a wretch of me.

Ah! well do I remember all that night,
When through the window shone the orb of June,
And by the bed flickered the taper's light,
Whereby I trembled, gazing at the moon:
Ah me! the meeting that we had, when soon
Into his strong, well-trusted arms I fell,
And many a sorrow we began to tell.

Ah me! what parting on that night we had!
I think the story of my great despair

A little while might merry folk make sad;
For, as he swept away my yellow hair
To make my shoulder and my bosom bare,
I raised mine eyes, and shuddering could behold
A shadow cast upon the bed of gold:

Then suddenly was quenched my hot desire
And he untwined his arms; the moon so pale
A while ago, seemed changed to blood and fire,
And yet my limbs beneath me did not fail,
And neither had I strength to cry or wail,
But stood there helpless, bare, and shivering,
With staring eyes still fixed upon the thing.

Because the shade that on the bed of gold
The changed and dreadful moon was throwing down
Was of Diana, whom I did behold,
With knotted hair, and shining girt-up gown,
And on the high white brow, a deadly frown
Bent upon us, who stood scarce drawing breath,
Striving to meet the horrible sure death.

No word at all the dreadful goddess said,
But soon across my feet my lover lay,
And well indeed I knew that he was dead;
And would that I had died on that same day!
For in a while the image turned away,
And without words my doom I understood,
And felt a horror change my human blood.

And there I fell, and on the floor I lay
By the dead man, till daylight came on me,
And not a word thenceforward could I say
For three years; till of grief and misery,
The lingering pest, the cruel enemy,
My father and his folk were dead and gone,
And in this castle I was left alone:
And then the doom foreseen upon me fell,
For Queen Diana did my body change
Into a fork-tongued dragon flesh and fell,1
And through the island nightly do I range,
Or in the green sea mate with monsters strange,
When in the middle of the moonlit night
The sleepy mariner I do affright.

But all day long upon this gold I lie
Within this place, where never mason’s hand
Smote trowel on the marble noisily;
Drowsy I lie, no folk at my command,
Who once was called the Lady of the Land;
Who might have bought a kingdom with a kiss,
Yea, half the world with such a sight as this.

And therewithal, with rosy fingers light,
Backward her heavy-hanging hair she threw,
To give her naked beauty more to sight;
But when, forgetting all the things he knew,
Maddened with love unto the prize he drew,
She cried: Nay, wait! for wherefore wilt thou die,
Why should we not be happy, thou and I?

Wilt thou not save me? once in every year4
This rightful form of mine that thou dost see
By favour of the goddess have I here
From sunrise unto sunset given me,
That some brave man may end my misery.
And thou, art thou not brave? can thy heart fail,
Whose eyes e’en now are weeping at my tale?

Then listen! when this day is overpast,
A fearful monster shall I be again,

"fell: (here), the skin or hide of an animal.
"once in every year: In Mandeville, the Lady gains human form "thrice in the year" (21).
Then weighing still the gem within his hand,
He stumbled backward through the cypress wood,
Thinking the while of some strange lovely land,
Where all his life should be most fair and good;
Till on the valley's wall of hills he stood,
And slowly thence passed down unto the bay
Red with the death of that bewildering day.

He next day came, and he, who all the night
Had ceaselessly been turning in his bed,
Arose and clad himself in armour bright,
And many a danger he remembered;
Storming of towns, lone sieges full of dread,
That with renown his heart had borne him through,
And this thing seemed a little thing to do.

So on he went, and on the way he thought
Of all the glorious things of yesterday,
Nought of the price whereat they must be bought,
But ever to himself did softly say:
No roaming now, my wars are passed away;
No long dull days devoid of happiness,
When such a love my yearning heart shall bless.

Thus to the castle did he come at last,
But when unto the gateway he drew near,
And underneath its ruined archway passed
Into the court, a strange noise did he hear,
And through his heart there shot a pang of fear;
Trembling, he gat his sword into his hand,
And midmost of the cloisters took his stand.

But for a while that unknown noise increased,
A rattling, that with strident roars did blend,
And whining moans; but suddenly it ceased,
A fearful thing stood at the cloister's end,
And eyed him for a while, then 'gan to wend
Adown the cloisters, and began again
That rattling, and the moan like fiends in pain.

And as it came on towards him, with its teeth
The body of a slain goat did it tear,
The blood whereof in its hot jaws did seethe,
And on its tongue he saw the smoking hair;\(^2\)
Then his heart sank, and standing trembling there,
Throughout his mind wild thoughts and fearful ran:
Some fiend she was, he said, the bane of man.

Yet he abode her still, although his blood
Curdled within him: the thing dropped the goat,
And creeping on, came close to where he stood,
And raised its head to him, and wrinkled throat;
Then he cried out and wildly at her smote,
Shutting his eyes, and turned and from the place
Ran swiftly, with a white and ghastly face.

But little things rough stones and tree-trunks seemed,
And if he fell, he rose and ran on still;
No more he felt his hurts than if he dreamed;
He made no stay for valley or steep hill,
Needless he dashed through many a foaming rill,
Until he came unto the ship at last,
And with no word into the deep hold passed.

Meanwhile the dragon, seeing him clean gone,
Followed him not, but crying horribly,\(^3\)
Caught up within her jaws a block of stone
And ground it into powder, then turned she,
With cries that folk could hear far out at sea,
And reached the treasure set apart of old,
To brood above the hidden heaps of gold.

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\(^2\) *And as it came on . . . . .* Mandeville does not describe the dragon.

\(^3\) *crying horribly.* Mandeville’s dragon weeps, but only in Morris’s tale does she/it crush the stone.

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The Lady of the Land

Yet was she seen again on many a day
By some half-waking mariner, or herd,
Playing amid the ripples of the bay,
Or on the hills making all things afraid,
Or in the wood, that did that castle gird,\(^2\)
But never any man again durst go
To seek her woman’s form, and end her woe.

As for the man, who knows what things he bore?
What mournful faces peopled the sad night,
What wailings vexed him with reproaches sore,
What images of that nigh-gained delight!
What dreamed caresses from soft hands and white,
Turning to horrors ere they reached the best:
What struggles vain, what shame, what huge unrest?

No man he knew, three days he lay and raved,
And cried for death, until a lethargy
Fell on him, and his fellows thought him saved;
But on the third night\(^3\) he awoke to die;
And at Byzantium doth his body lie
Between two blossoming pomegranate trees,
Within the churchyard of the Genoese.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) *gird.* to brace or prepare (oneself) for action.

\(^3\) *third night.* Mandeville’s knight died “sone after” in an unspecified place, but he adds optimistically that “when a knight cometh that is so hardy to kisse hir, he shall not dye, but he shall tourne that domosel into hir right shape, and shall be lorde of the country aforesayde” (23).

\(^4\) *the Genoese.* According to Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, Ch. 63), the Genoese and the Venetians had the largest trading establishments in the Byzantium of the later Middle Ages (A. P. M. W.).
MOMENT'S silence as his tale had end,
And then the wind of that June night did blend
Their varied voices, as of that and this
They fell to talk of those fair islands' bliss
They knew in other days, of hope they had
To live there long an easy life and glad,

With nought to vex them; and the younger men
Began to nourish strange dreams even then
Of sailing east, as these had once sailed west;
Because the story of that luckless quest
With hope, not fear, had filled their joyous hearts,
And made them dream of new and noble parts
That they might act; of raising up the name
Their fathers bore, and winning boundless fame.

THESE too with little patience seemed to hear
That story end with shame and grief and fear;
A little thing the man had had to do,
They said, if longing burned within him so.
But at their words the older men must bow
Their heads, and, smiling, somewhat thoughtful grow,
Remembering well how fear in days gone by
Had dealt with them, and poisoned wretchedly
Good days, good deeds, and longings for all good:
Yet on the evil times they would not brood,
But sighing, strove to raise the weight of years,
And no more memory of their hopes and fears
They nourished, but such gentle thoughts as fed
The pensiveness which that sweet season bred.

End of Vol. III.

Printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press,
and finished on the 24th day of August, 1896.

the later Middle Ages (A. P. M. W.).