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# The Designs of Miramon

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Illustration by Bernard Westmacott

*A story in which the author pleasantly, and with a display of marvels, discloses the secret of contented marriage.*



THEY of Poictesme narrate that in the old days Manuel tended the miller's pigs. They tell also how a mild-mannered stranger allured this young swineherd into the direst perils anybody ever dreamed of.

"For I wonder at you," said the mild-mannered stranger, "that you should sit here sleeping in the sunlight among your pigs when there is such a fine adventure awaiting you, and when the Norns are foretelling such high things about you as they spin the thread of your living."

"Now, glory be to God, friend," Manuel said, "but what is this adventure?"

"The adventure is that the Count of Arnaye's daughter yonder has been carried off by a wizard, and that the count offers much wealth and broad lands, and his daughter's hand in marriage, too, to the lad that will fetch back this lovely girl."

"I have heard talk of this in the kitchen of Arnaye, where I sometimes sell them a pig. But what are such matters to a swineherd?"

"Aha, my lad, you are to-day a swineherd drowsing in the sun, as yesterday you were a baby squalling in the cradle; but to-morrow you will be neither of these if there be any truth whatever in the talking of the Norns as they gossip at the foot of their ash-tree."

"Well, then, if I am decreed to be the champion that is to rescue the Count of Arnaye's daughter, it is ill arguing with the Norns. Come, tell me now, how do you call this doomed wizard, and how does one get to him to sever his wicked head from his foul body?"

"Men speak of him as Miramon Lluagor. He lives in mythic splendor

at the top of the gray mountain called Vraidex, where he contrives all manner of illusions, and in particular designs the dreams for Sleep."

"Yes, in the kitchen of Arnaye, also, such was the report concerning this Miramon; and nobody in the kitchen denied that he is an ugly customer."

"He is the most subtle of wizards. None can withstand him, and none may pass the terrible serpentine designs which Miramon has set to guard the gray scarps of Vraidex unless one carries the more terrible sword called Flamberge, which I have here in its blue scabbard."

"Why, then, it is you who must rescue the count's daughter."

"No, that would not do at all; for there is in the life of a champion too much of turmoil and of buffetings and murderings to suit me, who am a peace-loving person. Besides, to the champion who rescues the Lady Gisèle will be given her hand in marriage; and as I have a wife, I know that to have two wives would lead to twice too much dissension to suit me, who am a peace-loving person. So I think it is you who had better be achieving this fine adventure."

"Well," Manuel said, "much wealth, broad lands, and a lovely wife are better things to ward than a parcel of pigs."

So he girded on the charmed sword, and Manuel cried farewell and thanks to the mild-mannered, snub-nosed stranger. To the pigs, too, Manuel cried farewell. "For I shall never return to you, my pigs, because, at worst, to die valorously is better than to sleep out one's youth in the sun."

Then Manuel filled a knapsack with simple and nutritious food, and he went to the gray mountain called Vraidex,

upon the remote and cloud-wrapped summit of which dread Miramon Lluagor dwelt in a doubtful palace wherein the wizard contrived illusions and designed the dreams for Sleep. As Manuel was beginning the ascent he found a flat-faced, dark-haired boy going up before him.

"Hail, friend," said Manuel; "and why are you in this perilous place?"

"Why, I am going," the dark-haired boy replied, "to find out how the Lady Gisèle d'Arnaye is faring on the tall top of this mountain."

"Oho, then we will undertake this adventure together, for that is my errand, too. And when the adventure is fulfilled, we will fight together, and the survivor will have the wealth and broad lands and the count's daughter to sit on his knee. What do they call you?"

"I am called Niafer. But I believe that the Lady Gisèle is already married, to Miramon Lluagor."

"I sincerely hope she is married to this foul wizard, for otherwise it would not be respectable for her to be living with him at the top of this gray mountain. However, there is no law against a widow's remarrying forthwith, and widows are quickly made by any champion about whom the wise Norns are already talking. But I must not tell you about that, because I do not wish to appear boastful. So I must simply say that I am called Manuel, and have no other title, being not yet even a baron."

"Come, now," said Niafer, "but you are rather sure of yourself for a boy!"

"Why, of what may I be sure in this shifting world if not of myself?"

"Our elders, Manuel, declare that such self-conceit is a fault, and our elders, they say, are wiser than we."

"Our elders, Niafer, have long had the management of this world's affairs, and you can see for yourself what they have made of these affairs. What sort of a world is it, I ask you, in which time peculates the gold from hair and the crimson from all lips, and the north wind carries away the glow and glory and contentment of October, and a driveling old wizard steals a lovely girl? Why, such maraudings are out of reason, and show plainly that our elders have no notion how to manage things."

Niafer agreed that the deduction seemed logical, and these two pledged constant fealty until they should have rescued Madame Gisèle.

"Then we will fight for her," said Manuel, again.

"First, Manuel, let me see her face, and then let me see her state of mind, and afterward I will see about fighting you. Meanwhile, this is a very tall mountain, and climbing it will require all the breath which we are wasting."

So the two began the ascent of Vraidex. Now came to destroy them the Serpent of the East, a very dreadful design with which Miramon afflicts the sleep of Lithuanians and Tatars. The snake rode on a black horse, a black falcon perched on his head, and a black hound followed him. The horse stumbled, the falcon clamored, the hound howled. Then cried the snake:

"My steed, why do you stumble? My hound, why do you howl? And, my falcon, why do you clamor? For these three doings foresay some ill to me."

"Oh, a great ill!" replied Manuel, with his charmed sword out, and his heart thumping.

But Niafer cried:

"An endless ill is foresaid by these doings. For I have been to the Island of the Oaks, and under the twelfth oak was a copper casket, and in the casket was a purple duck, and in the duck was an egg, and in the egg, O Norka, was and is your death."

"It is true that my death is in such an egg," said the Serpent of the East, "but nobody will ever find that egg, and therefore I am resistless and immortal."

"To the contrary, the egg, as you can perceive, is in my hand; and when I break this egg, you will die, and it is smaller worms than you that will be thanking me for their supper this night."

The serpent looked at the poised egg, and he trembled and writhed so that his black scales scattered scintillations of reflected light everywhither. He cried:

"Give me the egg, and I will permit you two to pass unmolested to a more terrible destruction."

Niafer was not eager to do this, but at last Niafer consented to the bargain for the sake of the serpent's children.



Then the two lads went upward, while the serpent bandaged the eyes of his horse and of his hound, and hooded his falcon, and crept gingerly away to hide the egg in an unmentionable place.

"But how, pray," said Manuel, "did you come by that invaluable egg?"

"It is a quite ordinary duck's egg, Manuel, but the Serpent of the East has no way of discovering that until he breaks the egg; and that is the one thing the Serpent will never do, because he thinks it is the magic egg which contains his death."

"Come, Niafer, you are not handsome to look at, but you are far cleverer than I thought you."

Now, as Manuel clapped Niafer on the shoulder; the forest beside the roadway was agitated, and the underbrush crackled, and the tall beech-trees crashed and snapped and tumbled helter-skelter. The crust of the earth was thus broken through by the Serpent of the North. Only the head and throat of this design of Miramon's was lifted from the jumbled trees, for it was requisite of course that the serpent's lower coils should never lose their grip upon the foundations of Norrway. All of the design that showed was overgrown with seaweed and barnacles.

"It is the will of Miramon Lluagor that I forthwith demolish you both," says this serpent, yawning.

Once more Manuel had drawn his charmed sword Flamberge, but it was Niafer who spoke.

"No, for before you can destroy me," said Niafer, "I shall have cast this bridle over your head."

"What sort of bridle is that?" inquired the great snake, scornfully.

"And are those goggling, flaming eyes not big enough and bright enough to see that this is the soft bridle called Gleipnir, which is made of the breath of fish and of the spittle of birds and of the footfall of a cat?" asked Niafer, with sternness.

"Now, although certainly such a bridle was foretold," the snake conceded a little uneasily, "how can I make sure that you speak the truth when you say this particular bridle is Gleipnir?"

"Why, in this way: I will cast the bridle over your head, and then you will

see for yourself that the old prophecy will be fulfilled, and that all power and all life will go out of you, and that the Northmen will dream no more."

"No, do you keep that thing away from me, you little fool! No, no; we will not test your truthfulness in that way. Instead, do you two go your way to a more terrible destruction, and to face barbaric dooms coming from the west. And do you give me the bridle to demolish in place of you. And then, if I live forever, I will know that this is indeed Gleipnir and that you have spoken the truth."

So Niafer consented to this test of his veracity rather than permit this snake to die, and the foundations of Norrway (in which country, Niafer confessed, he had an aunt then living), thus to be dissolved by the loosening of the dying serpent's grip upon Middlegarth. The bridle was yielded, and Niafer and Manuel went upward.

Manuel asked:

"Was that in truth the bridle called Gleipnir?"

"No, Manuel, it is an ordinary bridle. But the Serpent of the North has no way of discovering this except by fitting the bridle over his head, and this one thing the serpent will never do, because he knows that then, if my bridle proved to be Gleipnir, all power and all life would go out of him."

"O subtle, ugly little one!" said Manuel, and again he patted Niafer on the shoulder.

Then it was evening, and the two sought shelter in a queer windmill by the roadside, finding there a small, wrinkled old man in a patched coat. He gave them lodgings for the night and honest bread and cheese, but for his own supper he took frogs out of his bosom and roasted these in the coals.

The next morning Manuel and Niafer paid the droll price which their host required. They left him cobbling shoes, and presently came to a bridge whereon were eight spears, and the bridge was guarded by the Serpent of the West. This snake was striped with blue and gold, and wore on his head a great cap of humming-birds' feathers.

Manuel half drew his sword to attack this serpentine design, with which Mir-

amon Lluagor makes sleeping terrible for the red tribes that hunt and fish behind the Hesperides. But Manuel looked at Niafer.

And Niafer displayed a drolly marked small turtle, saying, "Maskanako, do you not recognize Tulapin, the turtle that never lies?"

The serpent howled as though a thousand dogs had been kicked simultaneously, and the serpent fled.

"Why, pray, did he do that?" asked Manuel, smiling, as for the third time he found that his charmed sword Flamberge was unneeded.

"Truly, Manuel, nobody knows why this serpent dreads the turtle, but our concern is less with the cause than the effect. Meanwhile, those eight spears are not to be touched on any account."

"Is what you have a quite ordinary turtle?" asked Manuel, meekly.

Niafer said:

"Of course it is. Where would I be getting extraordinary turtles?"

"I had not previously considered that problem," replied Manuel; "but the question is certainly unanswerable."

They then sat down to lunch, and found the bread and cheese they had purchased from the little old man that morning was turned to lumps of silver and virgin gold in Manuel's knapsack.

"This is very disgusting," said Manuel, "and I do not wonder my back was near breaking." He flung away the treasure, and they lunched frugally on blackberries.

From among the entangled blackberry bushes came the glowing Serpent of the South, who is the smallest and most poisonous of Miramon's designs. With this snake Niafer dealt curiously. Niafer employed three articles in the transaction: two of these things are not to be talked about, but the third was a little figure carved in hazel-wood.

"Certainly you are very clever," said Manuel when they had passed this serpent. "Still, your employment of those first two articles was rather shocking, and your disposal of the little carved figure embarrassed me."

"Before such danger as confronted us, Manuel, it does not pay to be squeamish," replied Niafer, dryly, "and my exorcism was good Dirgham."

And many other adventures and perils they encountered, such as, if all were told, would make a long and most improbable history. But they won through each pinch by one or another fraud which Niafer evolved the instant that gullery was needed; and Manuel marveled more and more at the surprising cleverness of this flat-faced, dark lad, and loved Niafer more and more, and began to think more and more uneasily of the time when Niafer and Manuel would have to fight for the Count of Arnaye's daughter until one of them had killed the other. Meanwhile the sword Flamberge stayed in its curious blue scabbard.

So Manuel and Niafer came unhurt to the top of the gray mountain called Vraidex and to the doubtful palace of Miramon Lluagor. They entered unchallenged through gates of horn and ivory, and came into a red corridor in which five gray beasts, like large hairless cats, were casting dice; and these animals licked their lips and grinned as the boys passed deeper into the doubtful palace.

In the center of the palace Miramon had set like a tower one of the tusks of Behemoth; the tusk was hollowed out into five large rooms, and in the inmost room, under a canopy with green tassels, they found the wizard.

"Come forth, and die now, Miramon Lluagor!" shouted Manuel, brandishing his sword, for which at last employment was promised here.

And the wizard drew closer about him his old threadbare dressing-gown, and desisted from his enchantments, and put aside a small unfinished design, which scuttled into the fireplace, whimpering. And Manuel perceived that this wizard had the appearance of the mild-mannered stranger who had given Manuel the charmed sword.

"Ah, yes, it was good of you to come so soon," says Miramon, blinking mild, weak eyes, "and your young friend, too, is welcome. But you boys must be quite worn out after toiling up this mountain, so do you sit down and have a cup of wine before I surrender my dear wife."

Said Manuel, sternly:

"But what is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning and the upshot, clear-





"Madame Gisèle then looked at Manuel. 'So, you are the champion that has come to rescue me!' she said"

ly," replied the wizard, "is that, since you have the charmed sword *Flamberge*, and since the wearer of *Flamberge* is irresistible, it would be nonsense for me to oppose you."

"But, Miramon, it was you who gave me the sword!"

Miramon rubbed his droll little nose for a while before speaking.

"Well, and how else was I to get conquered? For, I must tell you, Manuel, it is a law of the *Léshy* that a wizard cannot surrender his prey unless the wizard be conquered. I must tell you, too, that when I carried off *Gisèle* I acted, as I by and by discovered, rather injudiciously."

"Now, by holy Paul and Pollux! I do not understand this at all, Miramon."

"Why, Manuel, you must know she was a very charming girl, and in appearance just the type that I had always fancied for a wife. But she has a strong will in her white bosom and a tireless tongue in her glittering head, and I do not equally admire all four of these possessions; and, moreover, she takes an active interest in my work, and that does not do in an artist's wife. Oh, dear me, no, not for a moment!" said Miramon, forlornly.

"But how can that be?" Niafer asked.

"As all men know, I design the dreams for Sleep. Now, *Gisèle* asserts that people have enough trouble in real life without having to go to dreams to look for it—"

"Certainly that is true," said Niafer.

"So she permits me only to design bright optimistic dreams and edifying dreams and glad dreams. She says you must give tired persons what they most need, and is all for introducing a wholesome uplift into sleeping. I have not been permitted to design a fine nightmare or a really creditable delusion—no sea-serpents or krakens or hippogriffs, or anything that gives me a really free hand—for months and months; and my art suffers. Then, too, *Gisèle* is always doing and telling me things for my own good. In fine, my lads, my wife takes such a flattering interest in all my concerns that the one way out for any human wizard was to contrive her rescue from my clutches," said Miramon, fretfully. "It is difficult

to explain to you, Manuel, just now, but after you have been married to *Gisèle* for a while you will comprehend without any explaining."

"Now, Miramon, I marvel to see a great wizard controlled by a woman who is in his power, and who can, after all, do nothing but talk."

Miramon blinked at Manuel helplessly.

"Unmarried men do always wonder about that," said Miramon. "Well, I will summon her, and you can explain how you have conquered me, and then you can take her away and marry her yourself, and Heaven help you!"

"But shall I explain that it was you who gave me the resistless sword?"

"No, Manuel, you should be candid within more rational limits. For you are now a famous champion, that has crowned with victory a righteous cause for which many stalwart knights and gallant gentlemen have made the supreme sacrifice, because they knew that in the end the right must conquer: your success thus represents the working out of a great moral principle, and to explain the practical minutiae of these august processes is not always quite respectable. Besides, if *Gisèle* thought I wanted to get rid of her, she would most certainly resort to comments of which I prefer not to think."

But now into the room came the wizard's wife, *Gisèle*. She was the finest and loveliest creature that Manuel had ever seen. Beholding her unequalled beauty, Manuel straightway knew that here were all the dreams of yesterday fulfilled; and he recollected, too, his songs of yesterday, which he had been used to sing to his pigs, about his love for a far princess who was "white as a lily, more red than roses, and resplendent as rubies of the Orient," for here he found his old songs to be applicable, if rather inadequate. And by the shabby wizard's failure to appreciate such unequalled beauty Manuel was amazed.

"What is this," said the shining lady, to Miramon Lluagor, "that I hear about your having been conquered?"

"Alas! my love, it is perfectly true. This champion has, in some inexplicable way, come by the magic weapon *Flamberge*, which is the one weapon where-



with I can be conquered. So I have yielded to him, and he is about, I think, to sever my head from my body."

The beautiful girl was indignant, because she had recognized that, wizard or no, there is small difference in husbands after the first month or two, and with Miramon tolerably well trained, she had no intention of changing him for another husband. Therefore Gisèle inquired "And what about me?" in a tone that foreboded turmoil.

The wizard rubbed his hands, uncomfortably.

"My dear, I am of course quite powerless before Flamberge. And inasmuch as your rescue appears to have been effected in accordance with every rule in these matters, and the victorious champion is resolute to requite my evil-doing and to restore you to your grieving parents, I am afraid there is nothing I can well do about it."

"Do you look me in the eye, Miramon Lluagor!" says the Lady Gisèle. The wizard obeyed, with a placating smile. "Yes, you have been up to something," she said, "and Heaven only knows what, though of course it does not really matter." Madame Gisèle then looked at Manuel. "So you are the champion that has come to rescue me!" she said unhastily, as her big sapphire eyes appraised him over her great fan of gaily colored feathers, and as Manuel somehow began to fidget, unhappily. Gisèle looked last of all at Niafer. "You have been long enough in coming," she said.

"It took me two days, Madame, to find and catch a turtle," Niafer replied, "and that delayed me."

"Well, it is better late than never. Come, Niafer, and do you know anything about this gawky, yellow-haired young champion?"

"Oh, yes, Madame; he formerly lived in attendance upon the miller's pigs, and I have seen him hanging about the kitchen at Arnaye."

Gisèle turned toward the wizard, with her thin gold chains and the brilliancies of her jewels flashing no more brightly than flashed the sapphire of her eyes.

"There!" she said terribly. "And you were going to surrender me to a swineherd!"

"My dearest, swineherd or not, he

holds the magic sword Flamberge before which all my powers are nothing."

"But that is easily settled. Have men no sense whatever! Boy, do you give me that sword before you hurt yourself fiddling with it, and let us have an end of this nonsense."

"Madame Gisèle," replied Manuel, "gawky and poorly clad and young as I may be, so long as I retain this sword I am master of you all and of the future, too. Yielding it, I yield everything my elders have taught me to prize, for my grave elders have taught me that much wealth and broad lands and a lovely wife are better things to ward than a parcel of pigs. So, if I yield at all, I get my price for yielding."

He turned now from Gisèle to Niafer.

"Dear lad," said Manuel, "you, too, must have your say in my bargaining, because from the first it has been your cleverness that has saved us, and has brought us two so high. For, see, at last I have drawn Flamberge, and I stand at last at the doubtful summit of Vraidex, and I am master of the hour and of the future of all of us. I have but to sever the wicked head of this doomed wizard from his foul body, and that will be the end of him—"

"No, no," says Miramon, soothingly. "I shall merely be turned into something else, which perhaps we had better not discuss. But it will not inconvenience me in the least, so do you not hold back on my account, but instead do you smite and take your well-earned reward."

"Either way," submitted Manuel, "I have but to strike, and I acquire much wealth and sleek farming lands and a lovely wife, and the swineherd becomes a great nobleman. But it is you, Niafer, who have won all these things for me with your cleverness, and to me it seems that these wonderful rewards are less wonderful than my dear comrade."

"But you, too, are very wonderful," said Niafer, loyally.

Said Manuel, smiling sadly:

"I am not so wonderful but that in the hour of my triumph I am frightened by my own littleness. Look you, Niafer, I had thought I would be changed when I became a famous champion; but for all that I stand posturing here with this long sword and am master of the hour



and of the future, I remain the boy that last Tuesday was tending pigs. I was not afraid of the terrors which beset me on my way to rescue the count's daughter, but of the count's daughter herself I am horribly afraid. Not for worlds would I be left alone with her. No, such fine ladies are not for swineherds, and it is another sort of wife that I desire."

"Whom, then, do you desire for a wife," said Niafer, "if not the loveliest and the wealthiest lady in all Poictesme?"

"Why, I desire the cleverest and dearest and most wonderful creature in all the world," said Manuel, "whom I have seen in the kitchen of Arnaye."

"Ah! ah! it might be managed, then. But who is this marvelous woman?"

Manuel said:

"You are that woman, Niafer."

Niafer replied nothing, but Niafer smiled. Niafer raised one shoulder a little, rubbing it against Manuel's broad chest, but Niafer still kept silence. So the two young people regarded each other for a while, not speaking, and not thinking of Miramon Lluagor and his encompassing enchantments or of anything save each other. All things were changed for Manuel, and for the rest of time he lived in a world wherein Niafer differed from all other persons.

"But, certainly," said the Lady Gisèle, "Niafer is my suitably disguised waiting-woman, to whom my husband sent a dream some while ago, with instructions to join me here, so that I might have somebody to look after my things. So, Niafer, since you were fetched to wait on me, do you stop pawing at that young pig-tender, and tell me what is this I hear about your remarkable cleverness."

Instead, it was Manuel who proudly told of the shrewd devices through which Niafer had passed the serpents and the other terrors of sleep. And the while that Manuel was boasting, Miramon Lluagor smiled, and Gisèle looked very hard at Niafer; for Miramon and his wife both knew that the cleverness of Niafer was as far to seek as her good looks, and that the dream which Miramon had sent had carefully instructed Niafer as to these devices.

"Therefore, Madame Gisèle," said Manuel in conclusion, "I will give you Flamberge and Miramon and Vraidex

and all the rest of earth to boot in exchange for the most wonderful and clever woman in the world." And with a flourish Manuel handed over the charmed sword Flamberge to the count's lovely daughter, and he took the hand of the swart, flat-faced servant-girl.

"It is very fine of me," Manuel was reflecting, "thus to be renouncing so much wealth and power for the sake of my wonderful dear Niafer; but she is well worth the sacrifice, and, besides, she is witnessing all this magnanimity and cannot well fail to be impressed."

Niafer was reflecting:

"This is very foolish and dear of him, and I shall be compelled, in mere decency, to pretend to corresponding lunacies for the first month or so. After that, I hope, we will settle down to some more reasonable way of living."

But Gisèle and Miramon were looking at each other, and wondering:

"What can the long-legged boy see in this stupid and plain-featured girl? Or she in the young swaggering fool? And how much wiser and happier is our marriage than the average marriage!"

And Miramon was so deeply moved that he patted his wife's hand.

"Love has conquered my designs," he said oracularly, "and the secret of a contented marriage is to pay particular attention to the wives of everybody else."

Gisèle exhorted him not to be a fool, but she spoke without acerbity, and, speaking, she squeezed his hand.

Whereafter Miramon wiped the heavenly bodies from the firmament, and set a miraculous rainbow there, and under its arch was enacted for the swineherd and the waiting-woman such a wedding masque of fantasies and illusions as gave full scope to the art of Miramon, and delighted everybody, but delighted Miramon in particular. Then they feasted, with unearthly servitors to attend them, and did all else appropriate to a wedding of deities. And when these were over, Manuel said that he must be getting back to his pigs, and he descended from Vraidex with plain-featured Niafer quite contentedly.

Such was the thing which happened in Poictesme in the old days, but clerks report that Manuel has had, since and elsewhere, his emulators.