

there could have been no dispute whatsoever, the right being so clearly on my side, if you had pleased to bear witness according to the dictates of truth."

"Maister Mordaunt," said the jagger, "I must own there was, as it were, a coloring or shadow of justice on your side; but then, the justice that I meddle with, is only justice in the way of trade, to have an ellwand of due length, if it be not something worn out with leaning on it in my lang and painful journeys, and to buy and sell by just weight and measure, twenty-four merks to the lispund; but I have nothing to do, to do justice betwixt man and man, like a Fowd or a Lawright-man, at a lawing lang syne."

"No one asked you to do so, but only to give evidence according to your conscience," replied Mordaunt, not greatly pleased either with the part the jagger had acted during the dispute, or the construction which he seemed to put on his own motives for yielding up the point.

But Bryce Snallsfoot wanted not his answer: "My conscience," he said, "Maister Mordaunt, is as tender as ony man's in my degree; but she is something of a timorsome nature, cannot abide angry folk, and can never speak above her breath, when there is aught of a fray going forward. Indeed, she hath at all times a small and low voice."

"Which you are not much in the habit of listening to," said Mordaunt.

"There is that on your ain breast that proves the contrary," said Bryce, resolutely.

"In my breast?" said Mordaunt somewhat angrily,— "what know I of you?"

"I said on your breast, Maister Mordaunt, and not *in* it. I am sure nae eye that looks on that waistcoat upon your own gallant brisket, but will say, that the merchant who sold such a piece for four dollars had justice and conscience, and a kind heart to a customer to the boot of a' that; sae ye shouldna be sae thrwart wi' me for having spared the breath of my mouth in a fool's quarrel."

"I thrwart!" said Mordaunt; "pooh, you silly man! I have no quarrel with you."

"I am glad of it," said the travelling merchant; "I will quarrel with no man, with my will—least of all with an old customer; and if you will walk by my advice, you will quarrel nane with Captain Cleveland. He is like one of yon cutters and slashers that have come into Kirkwall, that think as little of slic'ng a man, as we do of flinching a whale—it's their trade to fight, and they live by it; and they have the advantage of the like of you, that only take it up at your own hand, and in the way of pastime, when you hae nothing better to do."

The company had now almost all dispersed; and Mordaunt, laughing at the jagger's caution, made him good-night, and went to his own place of repose, which had been assigned to him by Eric Scambester (who acted the part of chamberlain, as well as butler), in a small room or rather closet, in one of the out-houses, furnished for the occasion with the hammock of a sailor.

## CHAPTER XIX.

I pass like night from land to land,  
I have strange power of speech;  
So soon as'er his fat, I see,  
I know the man that's ust hear me,  
To him my tale I teach.

COLERIDGE'S *Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*

THE daughters of Magnus Troil shared the same bed, in a chamber which had been that of their parents before the death of their mother. Magnus, who suffered grievously under that dispensation of Providence, had become disgusted with the apartment. The nuptial chamber was abandoned to the pledges of his bereaved affection, of whom the eldest was at that period only four years old, or thereabouts; and having been their nursery in infancy, continued, though now tricked and adorned according to the best fashion of the islands, and the taste of the lovely sisters themselves, to be their sleeping-room, or, in the old Norse dialect, their bower.

It had been for many years the scene of the most intimate confidence, if that could be called confidence, where, in truth, there was nothing to be confided; where neither sister had a secret; and where every thought that had birth in the bosom of the one, was, without either hesitation or doubt, confided to the other as spontaneously as it had arisen. But, since Cleveland abode in the mansion of Burgh-Westra, each of the lovely sisters had entertained thoughts which are not lightly or easily communicated, unless she who listens to them has previously assured herself that the confidence will be kindly received. Minna had noticed, what other and less interested observers had been unable to perceive, that Cleveland, namely, held a lower rank in Brenda's opinion than in her own; and Brenda, on her side, thought that Minna had hastily and unjustly joined in the prejudices which had been excited against Mordaunt Mertoun in the mind of their father. Each was sensible that she was no longer the same to her sister; and this conviction was a painful addition to other painful apprehensions which they supposed they had to struggle with. Their manner toward each other was, in outward appearances, and in all the little cares by which affection can be expressed, even more assiduously kind than before, as if both, conscious that their internal reserve was a breach of their sisterly union, strove to atone for it by double assiduity in those external marks of affection, which, at other times, when there was nothing to hide, might be omitted without inferring any consequences.

On the night referred to in particular, the sisters felt more especially the decay of the confidence which used to exist betwixt them. The proposed voyage to Kirkwall, and that at the time of the fair, when persons of every degree in these islands repair thither, either for business or amusement, was likely to be an important incident in lives usually so simple and uniform as theirs; and a few months ago, Minna and Brenda

would have been awake half the night, anticipating in their talk with each other, all that was likely to happen on so momentous an occasion. But now the subject was just mentioned, and suffered to drop, as if the topic was likely to produce a difference betwixt them, or to call forth a more open display of their several opinions than either was willing to make to the other.

Yet such was their natural openness and gentleness of disposition, that each sister imputed to herself the fault that there was aught like estrangement existing between them; and when, having finished their devotions and betaken themselves to their common couch, they folded each other in their arms, and exchanged a sisterly kiss, and a sisterly good-night, they seemed mutually to ask pardon, and to exchange forgiveness, although neither said a word of offence, either offered or received; and both were soon plunged in that light and yet profound repose, which is only enjoyed when sleep sinks down on the eyes of youth and innocence.

On the night to which the story relates, both sisters were visited by dreams, which, though varied by the moods and habits of the sleepers, bore yet a strange general resemblance to each other.

Minna dreamed that she was in one of the most lonely recesses of the beach, called Swartaster, where the incessant operation of the waves, indenting a calcareous rock, has formed a deep *halter*, which, in the language of the island, means a subterranean cavern, into which the tide ebbs and flows. Many of these run to an extraordinary and unascertained depth under ground, and are the secure retreat of cormorants and seals, which it is neither easy nor safe to pursue to their extreme recesses. Amongst these, this halter of Swartaster was accounted peculiarly inaccessible, and shunned both by fowlers and by seamen, on account of sharp angles and turnings in the cave itself, as well as the sunken rocks which rendered it very dangerous for skiffs or boats to advance far into it, especially if there was the usual swell of an island tide. From the dark-browed mouth of this cavern, it seemed to Minna in her dream, that she beheld a mermaid issue, not in the classical dress of a Nereid, as in Claud Halero's mask of the preceding evening, but with comb and glass in hand, according to popular belief, and lashing the waves with that long scaly train, which, in the traditions of the country, forms so frightful a contrast with the fair face, long tresses, and displayed bosom, of a human and earthly female, of surpassing beauty. She seemed to beckon to Minna, while her wild notes rang sadly in her ear, and denounced, in prophetic sounds, calamity and woe.

The vision of Brenda was of a different description, yet equally melancholy. She sat, as she thought, in her favorite bower, surrounded by her father and a party of his most beloved friends, amongst whom Mordaunt Mertoun was not forgotten. She was required to sing; and she strove

to entertain them with a lively ditty, in which she was accounted eminently successful, and which she sung with such simple, yet natural humor, as seldom failed to produce shouts of laughter and applause, while all who could, or who could not sing, were irresistibly compelled to lend their voices to the chorus. But, on this occasion, it seemed as if her own voice refused all its usual duty, and as if, while she felt herself unable to express the words of the well-known air, it assumed, in her own despite, the deep tones and wild and melancholy notes of Norma of Fitful-head, for the purpose of chanting some wild Tunic rhyme, resembling those sung by the heathen priests of old, when the victim (too often human) was bound to the fatal altar of Odin or of Thor.

At length the two sisters at once started from sleep, and, uttering a low scream of fear, clasped themselves in each other's arms. For their fancy had not altogether played them false; the sounds, which had suggested their dreams, were real, and sung within their apartment. They knew the voice well, indeed, and yet, knowing to whom it belonged, their surprise and fear were scarce the less, when they saw the well-known Norma of Fitful-head, seated by the chimney of the apartment, which, during the summer season, contained an iron lamp well trimmed, and, in winter, a fire of wood or of turf.

She was wrapped in her long and ample garment of wadmaal, and moved her body slowly to and fro over the pale flame of the lamp, as she sung lines to the following purport, in a slow, sad, and almost an unearthly accent:—

"For leagues along the watery way,  
Through gulf and stream my course has been;  
The billows know my Runie lay,  
And smooth their crests to silent green.

"The billows know my Runie lay,—  
The gulf grows smooth, the stream is still;  
But human hearts, more wild than they,  
Know but the rule of wayward will.

"One hour is mine, in all the year,  
To tell my woes,—and one alone;  
When gleams this magic lamp, 'tis here,—  
When dies the mystic light, 'tis gone.

"Daughters of northern Magnus, hail!  
The lamp is lit, the flame is clear,—  
To you, I come to tell my tale,  
Awake, arise, my tale to hear!"

Norma was well known to the daughters of Troil, but it was not without emotion, although varied by their respective dispositions, that they beheld her so unexpectedly, and at such an hour. Their opinions with respect to the supernatural attributes to which she pretended, were extremely different.

Minna, with an unusual intensity of imagination, although superior in talent to her sister, was more apt to listen to, and delight in, every tale of wonder, and was at all times more willing to admit impressions which gave her fancy scope and exercise, without minutely examining their reality. Brenda, on the other hand, had, in her







the Dwarfie Stone to aid me in attaining knowledge inaccessible to mere mortals."

"And the evil spirit heard your summons?" said Minna, her blood curdling as she listened.

"Hush," said Norna, lowering her voice, "vex him not with reproach—he is with us—he hears us even now."

Brenda started from her seat.—"I will to Euphane Fea's chamber," she said, "and leave you, Minna and Norna, to finish your stories of hobgoblins and of dwarfs at your own leisure; I care not for them at any time, but I will not endure them at midnight, and by this pale lamplight."

She was accordingly in the act of leaving the room, when her sister detained her.

"Is this the courage," she said, "of her, that disbelieves whatever the history of our fathers tells us of supernatural prodigy? What Norna has to tell concerns the fate, perhaps, of our father and his house;—if I can listen to it, trusting that God and my innocence will protect me from all that is malignant, you, Brenda, who believe not in such influence, have surely no cause to tremble. Credit me, that for the guiltless there is no fear."

"There may be no danger," said Brenda, unable to suppress her natural turn for humor, "but as the old jest-book says, there is much fear. However, Minna, I will stay with you;—the rather," she added, in a whisper, "that I am loath to leave you alone with this frightful woman, and that I have a dark staircase and long passage betwixt Euphane Fea, else I would have her here ere I were five minutes older."

"Call no one hither, maiden, upon peril of thy life," said Norna, "and interrupt not my tale again; for it cannot and must not be told after that charmed light has ceased to burn."

"And I thank Heaven," said Brenda to herself, "that the oil burns low in the cruise! I am sorely tempted to lend it a puff, but then Norna would be alone with us in the dark, and that would be worse."

So saying, she submitted to her fate, and sat down, determined to listen with all the equanimity which she could command to the remaining part of Norna's tale, which went on as follows:

"It happened on a hot summer day, and just about the hour of noon," continued Norna, "as I sat by the Dwarfie Stone, with my eyes fixed on the Ward-hill, whence the mysterious and ever-burning carbuncle shed its rays more brightly than usual, and repined in my heart at the restricted bounds of human knowledge, that at length I could not help exclaiming, in the words of an ancient Saga—

Dwellers of the mountain, rise,  
Troll'd the powerful, Halms the wise!  
Ye who taught weak woman's tongue  
Words that sway the wise and strong,  
Ye who taught weak woman's hand  
How to wield the magic wand,  
And wake the gales on Foulah's steep,  
Or lull wild Samburgh's waves to sleep!—  
Still are ye yet!—Not yours the power

Ye knew in Odin's mightier hour,  
What are ye now but empty names,  
Powerful Troll, sagacious Halms,  
That, lightly spoken, lightly heard,  
Float on the air like thistle's beard!

"I had scarce uttered these words," proceeded Norna, "ere the sky, which had been till then unusually clear, grew so suddenly dark around me, that it seemed more like midnight than noon. A single flash of lightning showed me, at once the desolate landscape of heath, morass, mountain, and precipice, which lay around; a single clap of thunder awakened all the echoes of the Ward-hill, which continued so long to repeat the sound, that it seemed some rock, rent by the thunderbolt from the summit, was rolling over cliff and precipice into the valley. Immediately after, fell a burst of rain so violent, that I was fain to shun its pelting, by creeping into the interior of the mysterious stone.

"I seated myself on the larger stone couch, which is cut at the farther end of the cavity, and, with my eyes fixed on the smaller bed, wearied myself with conjectures respecting the origin and purpose of my singular place of refuge. Had it been really the work of that powerful Troll, to whom the poetry of the Scalds referred it? Or was it the tomb of some Scandinavian chief, interred with his arms and his wealth, perhaps also with his immolated wife, that what he loved best in life might not in death be divided from him? Or was it the abode of penance, chosen by some devoted anchorite of later days? Or the idle work of some wandering mechanic, whom chance, and whim, and leisure, had thrust upon such an undertaking? I tell you the thoughts that then floated through my brain, that ye may know that what ensued was not the vision of a prejudiced or prepossessed imagination, but an apparition, as certain as it was awful.

"Sleep had gradually crept on me, amidst my lucubrations, when I was startled from my slumbers by a second clap of thunder; and, when I awoke, I saw, through the dim light which the upper aperture admitted, the unshapely and indistinct form of Troll'd the dwarf, seated opposite to me on the lesser couch, which his square and misshapen bulk seemed absolutely to fill up. I was startled, but not affrighted; for the blood of the ancient race of Lochlin was warm in my veins. He spoke; and his words were of Norse, so old, that few, save my father, or I myself, could have comprehended their import.—such language as was spoken in these islands ere Olave planted the cross on the ruins of heathenism. His meaning was dark also and obscure, like that which the Pagan priests were wont to deliver, in the name of their idols, to the tribes that assembled at the *Helgafels*.\* This was the import,—

'A thousand winters dark have flown,  
Since o'er the threshold of my Stone

\* Or, consecrated mountain, used by the Scandinavians priests for the purposes of their idol-worship.

A votress pass'd, my power to own.

Visitor hold  
Of the mansion of Troll'd,  
Maiden haughty of heart,  
Who hast hither presumed,—  
Ungifted, undoom'd,  
Thou shalt not depart;  
The power thou dost covet  
O'er tempest and wave,  
Shall be thine, thou proud maiden,  
By beach and by cave,—

By stack\* and by skerry,† and by noup‡ and by voe,  
By air§ and by wick,¶ and by helyer\*\* and gio,††  
And by every wild shore which the northern winds know,  
And the northern tides lave.  
But though this shall be given thee, thou desperately brave,  
I doom thee that never the gift thou shalt have,  
Till thou reave thy life's giver  
Of the gift which he gave.

"I answered him in nearly the same strain; for the spirit of the ancient Scalds of our race was upon me, and, far from fearing the phantom, with whom I sat cooped within so narrow a space, I felt the impulse of that high courage which thrust the ancient Champions and Druidesses upon contests with the invisible world, when they thought that the earth no longer contained enemies worthy to be subdued by them. Therefore did I answer him thus:—

'Dark are thy words, and severe,  
Thou dweller in the stone;  
But trembling and fear  
To her are unknown,  
Who hath sought thee here,  
In thy dwelling lone.  
Come what comes soever,  
The worst I can endure;  
Life is but a short fever,  
And Death is the cure.'

"The Demon scowled at me, as if at once incensed and overawed; and then, colling himself up in a thick and sulphureous vapor, he disappeared from his place. I did not, till that moment, feel the influence of fright, but then it seized me. I rushed into the open air, where the tempest had passed away, and all was pure and serene. After a moment's breathless pause, I hastened home, musing by the way on the words of the phantom, which I could not, as often happens, recall so distinctly to memory at the time, as I have been since able to do.

"It may seem strange that such an apparition should, in time, have glided from my mind, like a vision of the night—but so it was. I brought myself to believe it the work of fancy—I thought I had lived too much in solitude, and had given way too much to the feelings inspired by my favorite studies. I abandoned them for a time, and

\* *Stack*. A precipitous rock rising out of the sea.

† *Skerry*. A flat insulated rock, not subject to the overflow of the sea.

‡ *Noup*. A round-headed eminence.

§ *Voe*. A creek, or inlet of the sea.

¶ *Air*. An open sea-beach.

‡ *Wick*. An open bay.

\*\* *Helyer*. A cavern into which the tide flows.

†† *Gio*. A deep ravine which admits the sea.

I mixed with the youth of my age. I was upon a visit at Kirkwall when I learned to know your father, whom business had brought thither. He easily found access to the relation with whom I lived, who was anxious to compose, if possible, the feud which divided our families. Your father, maidens, has been rather hardened than changed by years—he had the same manly form, the same old Norse frankness of manner and of heart, the same upright courage and honesty of disposition, with more of the gentle ingenuousness of youth, an eager desire to please, a willingness to be pleased, and a vivacity of spirits which survives not our early years. But though he was thus worthy of love, and though Erland wrote to me, authorizing his attachment, there was another—a stranger, Minna, a fatal stranger—full of arts unknown to us, and graces which to the plain manners of your father were unknown. Yes, he walked, indeed, among us like a being of another and of a superior race.—Ye look on me as if it were strange that I should have had attractions for such a lover; but I present nothing that can remind you that Norna of the Fitful-head was once admired and loved as Ulla Troil—the change betwixt the animated body and the corpse after decease, is scarce more awful and absolute than I have sustained, while I yet linger on earth. Look on me, maidens—look on me by this glimmering light—Can ye believe that these haggard and weather-wasted features—these eyes, which have been almost converted to stone, by looking upon sights of terror—these locks, that, mingled with gray, now stream out, the shattered pennons of a sinking vessel—that these, and she to whom they belong, could once be the objects of fond affection?—But the waning lamp sinks fast, and let it sink while I tell my infamy.—We loved in secret, we met in secret, till I gave the last proof of fatal and of guilty passion!—And now beam out, thou magic glimmer—shine out a little space, thou flame so powerful even in thy feebleness—bid him who hovers near us, keep his dark pinions aloof from the circle thou dost illuminate—live but a little till the worst be told, and then sink when thou wilt into darkness, as black as my guilt and sorrow!"

While she spoke thus, she drew together the remaining nutriment of the lamp, and trimmed its decaying flame; then again, with a hollow voice, and in broken sentences, pursued her narrative.

"I must waste little time in words. My love was discovered, but not my guilt. Erland came to Pomona in anger, and transported me to our solitary dwelling in Hoy. He commanded me to see my lover no more, and to receive Magnus, in whom he was willing to forgive the offences of his father, as my future husband. Alas! I no longer deserved his attachment—my only wish was to escape from my father's dwelling, to conceal my shame in my lover's arms. Let me do him justice—he was faithful—too, too faithful—his perfidy would have bereft me of my senses; but



the fatal consequences of his fidelity have done me a tenfold injury."

She paused, and then resumed, with the wild tone of insanity, "It has made me the powerful and the despairing Sovereign of the Seas and Winds!"

She paused a second time after this wild exclamation, and resumed her narrative in a more composed manner.

"My lover came in secret to Hoy, to concert measures for my flight, and I agreed to meet him, that we might fix the time when his vessel should come into the Sound. I left the house at midnight."

Here she appeared to gasp with agony, and went on with her tale by broken and interrupted sentences. "I left the house at midnight—I had to pass my father's door, and I perceived it was open—I thought he watched us, and, that the sound of my steps might not break his slumbers, I closed the fatal door—a light and trivial action—but, God in heaven! what were the consequences!—At morn, the room was full of suffocating vapor—my father was dead—dead through my act—dead through my disobedience—dead through my infamy! All that follows is mist and darkness—a choking, suffocating, stifling mist envelopes all that I said and did, all that was said and done, until I became assured that my doom was accomplished, and walked forth the calm and terrible being you now behold me—the Queen of the Elements—the sharer in the power of those beings to whom man and his passions give such sport as the tortures of the dog-fish afford the fisherman, when he pierces his eyes with thorns, and turns him once more into his native element, to traverse the waves in blindness and agony.\* No, maidens, she whom you see before you is impassive to the follies of which your minds are the sport. I am she that have made the offering—I am she that bereaved the giver of the gift of life which he gave me—the dark saying has been interpreted by my deed, and I am taken from humanity, to be something pre-eminently powerful, pre-eminently wretched!"

As she spoke thus, the light, which had been long quivering, leaped high for an instant, and seemed about to expire, when Norma, interrupting herself, said hastily, "No more now—he comes—he comes—Enough that ye know me, and the right I have to advise and command you.—Approach now, proud Spirit! if thou wilt."

So saying, she extinguished the lamp, and passed out of the apartment with her usual loftiness of step, as Minna could observe from its measured cadence.

\* This cruelty is practised by some fishers, out of a vindictive hatred to these ravenous fishes.

## CHAPTER XX.

Is all the counsel that we two have shared—  
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,  
When we have chid the hasty-footed time  
For parting us—O, and is all forgot!

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

The attention of Minna was powerfully arrested by this tale of terror, which accorded with and explained many broken hints respecting Norma, which she had heard from her father and other near relations, and she was for a time so lost in surprise, not unmingled with horror, that she did not even attempt to speak to her sister Brenda. When, at length, she called her by her name, she received no answer, and, on touching her hand, she found it cold as ice. Alarmed to the uttermost, she threw open the lattice and the window-shutters, and admitted at once the free air and the pale glimmer of the hyperborean summer night. She then became sensible that her sister was in a swoon. All thoughts concerning Norma, her frightful tale, and her mysterious connexion with the invisible world, at once vanished from Minna's thoughts, and she hastily ran to the apartment of the old housekeeper, to summon her aid, without reflecting for a moment what sights she might encounter in the long dark passages which she had to traverse.

The old woman hastened to Brenda's assistance, and instantly applied such remedies as her experience suggested; but the poor girl's nervous system had been so much agitated by the horrible tale she had just heard, that, when recovered from her swoon, her utmost endeavors to compose her mind could not prevent her falling into a hysterical fit of some duration. This also was subdued by the experience of old Euphane Fea, who was well versed in all the simple pharmacy used by the natives of Zetland, and who, after administering a composing draught, distilled from simples and wild flowers, at length saw her patient resigned to sleep. Minna stretched herself beside her sister, kissed her cheek, and courted slumber in her turn; but the more she invoked it, the farther it seemed to fly from her eyelids; and if at times she was disposed to sink into repose, the voice of the involuntary parricide seemed again to sound in her ears, and startled her into consciousness.

The early morning hour at which they were accustomed to rise, found the state of the sisters different from what might have been expected. A sound sleep had restored the spirit of Brenda's lightsome eye, and the rose on her laughing cheek; the transient indisposition of the preceding night having left as little trouble on her look, as the fantastic terrors of Norma's tale had been able to impress on her imagination. The looks of Minna, on the contrary, were melancholy, downcast, and apparently exhausted by watching and anxiety. They said at first little to each other, as if afraid of touching a subject so fraught with emotion as the scene of the preceding night

It was not until they had performed together their devotions, as usual, that Brenda, while lacing Minna's boddiece (for they rendered the services of the toilet to each other reciprocally), became aware of the paleness of her sister's looks; and having ascertained, by a glance at the mirror, that her own did not wear the same dejection, she kissed Minna's cheek, and said affectionately, "Claud Halcro was right, my dearest sister, when his poetical folly gave us these names of Night and Day."

"And wherefore should you say so now?" said Minna.

"Because we each are bravest in the season that we take our name from; I was frightened well-nigh to death, by hearing those things last night, which you endured with courageous firmness; and now, when it is broad light, I can think of them with composure, while you look as pale as a spirit who is surprised by sunrise."

"You are lucky, Brenda," said her sister, gravely, "who can so soon forget such a tale of wonder and horror."

"The horror," said Brenda, "is never to be forgotten, unless one could hope that the unfortunate woman's excited imagination, which shows itself so active in conjuring up apparitions, may have fixed on her an imaginary crime."

"You believe nothing, then," said Minna, "of her interview at the Dwarfie Stone, that wondrous place, of which so many tales are told, and which, for so many centuries, has been revered as the work of a demon, and as his abode?"

"I believe," said Brenda, "that our unhappy relative is no impostor, and therefore I believe that she was at the Dwarfie Stone during a thunder-storm, that she sought shelter in it, and that, during a swoon, or during sleep perhaps, some dream visited her, concerned with the popular traditions with which she was so conversant; but I cannot easily believe more."

"And yet the event," said Minna, "corresponded to the dark intimations of the vision."

"Pardon me," said Brenda, "I rather think the dream would never have been put into shape, or perhaps remembered at all, but for the event. She told us herself she had nearly forgot the vision, till after her father's dreadful death,—and who shall warrant how much of what she then supposed herself to remember was not the creation of her own fancy, disordered as it naturally was, by the horrid accident? Had she really seen and conversed with a necromantic dwarf, she was likely to remember the conversation long enough—at least, I am sure I should."

"Brenda," replied Minna, "you have heard the good minister of the Cross-Kirk say, that human wisdom was worse than folly, when it was applied to mysteries beyond its comprehension; and that, if we believed no more than we could understand, we should resist the evidence of our senses, which presented us, at every turn, circumstances as certain as they were unintelligible."

"You are too learned yourself, sister," answered Brenda, "to need the assistance of the good minister of Cross-Kirk; but I think his doctrine only related to the mysteries of our religion, which it is our duty to receive without investigation or doubt—but in things occurring in common life, as God has bestowed reason upon us, we cannot act wrong in employing it. But you, my dear Minna, have a warmer fancy than mine, and are willing to receive all those wonderful stories for truth, because you love to think of sorcerers, and dwarfs, and water-spirits, and would like much to have a little trow, or fairy, as the Scotch call them, with a green coat, and a pair of wings as brilliant as the hues of the starling's neck, specially to attend on you."

"It would spare you at least the trouble of lacing my boddiece," said Minna, "and of lacing it wrong, too; for in the heat of your argument you have missed two eyelet-holes."

"That error shall be presently mended," said Brenda; "and then, as one of our friends might say, I will haul tight and belay—but you draw your breath so deeply, that it will be a difficult matter."

"I only sighed," said Minna, in some confusion, "to think how soon you can trifle with and ridicule the misfortunes of this extraordinary woman."

"I do not ridicule them, God knows!" replied Brenda somewhat angrily; "it is you, Minna, who turn all I say in truth and kindness, to something harsh or wicked. I look on Norma as a woman of very extraordinary abilities, which are very often reconciled with a strong cast of insanity; and I consider her as better skilled in the signs of the weather than any woman in Zetland. But that she has any power over the elements, I no more believe, than I do in the nursery stories of King Erick, who could make the wind blow from the point he set his cap to."

Minna, somewhat nettled with the obstinate incredulity of her sister, replied sharply, "And yet, Brenda, this woman—half-mad woman, and the veriest impostor—is the person by whom you choose to be advised in the matter next your own heart at this moment!"

"I do not know what you mean," said Brenda, coloring deeply, and shifting to get away from her sister. But as she was now undergoing the ceremony of being laced in her turn, her sister had the means of holding her fast by the silken string with which she was fastening the boddiece, and tapping her on the neck, which expressed, by its sudden writhe, and sudden change to a scarlet hue, as much pettish confusion as she had desire to provoke, she added more mildly, "Is it not strange, Brenda, that, used as we have been by the stranger Mordaunt Merton, whose assurance has brought him uninvited to a house where his presence is so unacceptable, you should still look on or think of him with favor? Surely that you do so should be a proof to you, that there are such things as spells in the country, and that you



yourself labor under them. It is not for nought that Mordaunt wears a chain of elfin gold—look to it, Brenda, and be wise in time."

"I have nothing to do with Mordaunt Mertoun," answered Brenda, hastily, "nor do I know or care what he or any other young man wears about his neck. I could see all the gold chains of all the bailies of Edinburgh, that Lady Glowrowrum speaks so much of, without falling in fancy with one of the wearers." And, having thus complied with the female rule of pleading not guilty in general to such an indictment, she immediately resumed in a different tone, "But to say the truth, Minna, I think you, and all of you, have judged far too hastily about this young friend of ours, who has been so long our most intimate companion. Mind, Mordaunt Mertoun is no more to me than he is to you—who best know how little difference he made betwixt us; and that, chain or no chain, he lived with us like a brother with two sisters; and yet you can turn him off at once, because a wandering seaman, of whom we know nothing, and a peddling jagger, whom we well know to be a thief, a cheat, and a liar, speak words and carry tales in his disfavor, I do not believe he ever said he could have his choice of either of us, and only waited to see which was to have Burgh-Westra and Bredness Voe—I do not believe he ever spoke such a word, or harbored such a thought, as that of making a choice between us."

"Perhaps," said Minna coldly, "you may have had reason to know that his choice was already determined."

"I will not endure this," said Brenda, giving way to her natural vivacity, and springing from between her sister's hands; then turning round and facing her, while her glowing cheek was rivalled in the deepness of its crimson, by as much of her neck and bosom as the upper part of the half-laced bodice permitted to be visible,—  
"Even from you, Minna," she said, "I will not endure this! You know that all my life I have spoken the truth, and that I love the truth; and I tell you that Mordaunt Mertoun never in his life made distinction betwixt you and me until—"

Here some feeling of consciousness stopped her short, and her sister replied, with a smile, "Until *when*, Brenda? Methinks your love of truth seems choked with the sentence you were bringing out."

"Until you ceased to do him the justice he deserves," said Brenda, firmly, "since I must speak out. I have little doubt that he will not long throw away his friendship on you, who hold it so lightly."

"Be it so," said Minna; "you are secure from my rivalry, either in his love or friendship. But bethink you better, Brenda—this is no scandal of Cleveland's—Cleveland is incapable of slander—no falsehood of Bryce Snailsfoot—not one of our friends or acquaintance but says it has been the common talk of the island, that the daughters of Magnus Troil were patiently awaiting the choice

of the nameless and birthless stranger, Mordaunt Mertoun.—Is it fitting that this should be said of us, the descendants of a Norwegian Jarl, and the daughters of the first Udaller in Zeland? or, would it be modest or maidenly to submit to it unresented, were we the meanest asses that ever lifted a milk-pail?"

"The tongues of fools are no reproach," replied Brenda, warmly; "I will never quit my own thoughts of an innocent friend for the gossip of the island, which can put the worst meaning on the most innocent actions."

"Hear but what our friends say," repeated Minna; "hear but the Lady Glowrowrum; hear but Maddie and Clara Groatsettar."

"If I were to hear Lady Glowrowrum," said Brenda, steadily, "I should listen to the worst tongue in Zeland; and as for Maddie and Clara Groatsettar, they were both blithe enough to get Mordaunt to sit betwixt them at dinner the day before yest'fday, as you might have observed yourself, but that your ear was better engaged."

"Your eyes, at least, have been but indifferently engaged, Brenda," retorted the elder sister, "since they were fixed on a young man, whom all the world but yourself believes to have talked of us with the most insolent presumption; and even if he be innocently charged, Lady Glowrowrum says it is unmaidenly and bold of you even to look in the direction where he sits, knowing it must confirm such reports."

"I will look which way I please," said Brenda, growing still warmer; "Lady Glowrowrum shall neither rule my thoughts, nor my words, nor my eyes. I hold Mordaunt Mertoun to be innocent,—I will look at him as such,—I will speak of him as such; and if I did not speak to him also, and behave to him as usual, it is in obedience to my father, and not for what Lady Glowrowrum, and all her nieces, had she twenty instead of two, could think, wick, nod, or tattle, about the matter that concerns them not."

"Alas! Brenda," answered Minna, with calmness, "this vivacity is more than is required for the defence of the character of a mere friend!—Beware!—He who ruined Norma's peace for ever, was a stranger, admitted to her affections against the will of her family."

"He was a stranger," replied Brenda, with emphasis, "not only in birth, but in manners. She had not been bred up with him from her youth,—she had not known the gentleness, the frankness, of his disposition, by an intimacy of many years. He was indeed a stranger in character, temper, birth, manners, and morals,—some wandering adventurer, perhaps, whom chance or tempest had thrown upon the islands, and who knew how to mask a false heart with a frank brow. My good sister, take home your own warning. There are other strangers at Burgh Westra besides this poor Mordaunt Mertoun."

Minna seemed for a moment overwhelmed with the rapidity with which her sister retorted her suspicion and her caution. But her natural lofti-

ness of disposition enabled her to reply with assumed composure.

"Were I to treat you, Brenda, with the want of confidence you show towards me, I might reply, that Cleveland is no more to me than Mordaunt was; or than young Swaraster, or Lawrence Ericson, or any other favorite guest of my father's, now is. But I scorn to deceive you, or to disguise my thoughts.—I love Clement Cleveland."

"Do not say so, my dearest sister," said Brenda, abandoning at once the air of acrimony with which the conversation had been latterly conducted, and throwing her arms round her sister's neck, with looks and with a tone of the most earnest affection,—  
"do not say so, I implore you! I will renounce Mordaunt Mertoun,—I will swear never to speak to him again; but do not repeat that you love this Cleveland!"

"And why should I not repeat," said Minna, disengaging herself gently from her sister's grasp, "a sentiment in which I glory? The boldness, the strength and energy, of his character, to which command is natural, and fear unknown,—these very properties, which alarm you for my happiness, are the qualities which ensure it. Remember, Brenda, that when your foot loved the calm smooth sea-beach of the summer sea, mine ever delighted in the summit of the precipice, when the waves were in fury."

"And it is even that which I dread," said Brenda; "it is even that adventurous disposition which now is urging you to the brink of a precipice more dangerous than ever was washed by a spring-tide. This man,—do not frown, I will say no slander of him,—but is he not, even in your own partial judgment, stern and overbearing? accustomed, as you say, to command; but, for that very reason, commanding where he has no right to do so, and leading whom it would most become him to follow? rushing on danger, rather for its own sake, than for any other object? And can you think of being yoked with a spirit so unsettled and stormy, whose life has hitherto been led in scenes of death and peril, and who, even while sitting by your side, cannot disguise his impatience again to engage in them? A lover, methinks, should love his mistress better than his own life; but yours, my dear Minna, loves her less than the pleasure of inflicting death on others."

"And it is even for that I love him," said Minna. "I am a daughter of the old dames of Norway, who could send their lovers to battle with a smile, and slay them with their own hands, if they returned with dishonor. My lover must scorn the mockeries by which our degraded race strive for distinction, or must practise them only in sport, and in earnest of noble dangers. No whale-striking, bird-nesting favorite for me; my lover must be a Sea-king, or what else modern times may give that draws near to that lofty character."

"Alas, my sister!" said Brenda, "it is now that I must in earnest begin to believe the force of spells and of charms. You remember the

Spanish story which you took from me long since, because I said, in your admiration of the chivalry of the olden times of Scandinavia, you rivalled the extravagance of the hero. Ah, Minna! your color shows that your conscience checks you, and reminds you of the book I mean;—is it more wise, think you, to mistake a windmill for a giant, or the commander of a paltry corsair for a Kiempe, or a Vi-king?"

Minnie did indeed color with anger at this insinuation, of which, perhaps, she felt in some degree the truth.

"You have a right," she said, "to insult me because you are possessed of my secret."

Brenda's soft heart could not resist this charge of unkindness; she adjured her sister to pardon her, and the natural gentleness of Minna's feelings could not resist her entreaties.

"We are unhappy," she said, as she dried her sister's tears, "that we cannot see with the same eyes—let us not make each other more so by mutual insult and unkindness. You have my secret—It will not, perhaps, long be one, for my father shall have the confidence to which he is entitled, so soon as certain circumstances will permit me to offer it. Meantime, I repeat, you have my secret, and I more than suspect that I have yours in exchange, though you refuse to own it."

"How, Minna!" said Brenda; "would you have me acknowledge for any one such feelings as you allude to, ere he has said the least word that could justify such a confession!"

"Surely not; but a hidden fire may be distinguished by heat as well as flame."

"You understand these signs, Minna," said Brenda, hanging down her head, and in vain endeavoring to suppress the temptation to repartee which her sister's remark offered; "but I can only say, that, if ever I love at all, it shall not be until I have been asked to do so once or twice at least, which has not yet chanced to me. But do not let us renew our quarrel, and rather let us think why Norma should have told us that horrible tale, and to what she expects it should lead."

"It must have been as a caution," replied Minna—"a caution which our situation, and, I will not deny it, which mine in particular, might seem to her to call for,—but I am alike strong in my own innocence, and in the honor of Cleveland."

Brenda would fain have replied, that she did not confide so absolutely in the latter security as in the first;—but she was prudent, and, forbearing to awaken the former painful discussion, only replied, "It is strange that Norma should have said nothing more of her lover. Surely he could not desert her in the extremity of misery to which he had reduced her?"

"There may be agonies of distress," said Minna, after a pause, "in which the mind is so much jarred, that it ceases to be responsive even to the feelings which have most engrossed it;—her sorrow for her lover may have been swallowed up in horror and despair."