

velous beauty—beauty now heightened by the effect of the changeful colors that played around her. The very boat in which she sat glittered with a bronze-like, metallic brightness as it heaved gently to and fro on the silvery green water; the midnight sunshine bathed the fallen glory of her long hair, till each thick tress, each clustering curl, appeared to emit an amber spark of light. The strange, weird effect of the sky seemed to have stolen into her eyes, making them shine with witch-like brilliancy—the varied radiance flashing about her brought into strong relief the pureness of her profile, drawing as with a fine pencil the outlines of her noble forehead, sweet mouth, and rounded chin. It touched the scarlet of her bodice, and brightened the quaint old silver clasps she wore at her waist and throat, till she seemed no longer an earthly being, but more like some fair wandering sprite from the legendary Norse kingdom of *Alfheim*, the “abode of the Luminous Genii.”

She was gazing upward—heavenward—and her expression was one of rapt and almost devotional intensity. Thus she remained for some moments, motionless as the picture of an expectant angel painted by Raphael or Correggio; then reluctantly and with a deep sigh she turned her eyes toward earth again. In so doing she met the fixed and too visibly admiring gaze of her companion. She started, and a wave of vivid color flushed her cheeks. Quickly recovering her serenity, however, she saluted him slightly, and, moving her oars in unison, was on the point of departure.

Stirred by an impulse he could not resist, he laid one hand detainingly on the rim of her boat.

“Are you going now?” he asked.

She raised her eyebrows in some little surprise and smiled.

“Going?” she repeated. “Why, yes. I shall be late in getting home as it is.”

“Stop a moment,” he said, eagerly, feeling that he could not let this beautiful creature leave him as utterly as a midsummer night’s dream without some clew as to her origin and destination. “Will you not tell me your name?”

She drew herself erect with a look of indignation.

“Sir, I do not know you. The maidens of Norway do not give their names to strangers.”

“Pardon me,” he replied, somewhat abashed. “I mean no offense. We have watched the midnight sun together, and—and—I thought—”

He paused, feeling very foolish, and unable to conclude his sentence.

She looked at him demurely from under her long, curling lashes.

“You will often find a peasant girl on the shores of the Alten Fjord watching the midnight sun at the same time as yourself,”

she said, and there was a suspicion of laughter in her voice. “It is not unusual. It is not even necessary that you should remember so little a thing.”

“Necessary or not, I shall never forget it,” he said, with sudden impetuosity. “You are no peasant! Come; if I give you my name will you still deny me yours?”

Her delicate brows drew together in a frown of haughty and decided refusal. “No names please my ears save those that are familiar,” she said, with intense coldness. “We shall not meet again. Farewell!”

And without further word or look, she leaned gracefully to the oars, and pulling with a long, steady, resolute stroke, the little boat darted away as lightly and swiftly as a skimming swallow out on the shimmering water. He stood gazing after it till it became a distant speck sparkling like a diamond in the light of sky and wave, and when he could no more watch it with unassisted eyes, he took up his field-glass and followed its course attentively. He saw it cutting along as straightly as an arrow, then suddenly it dipped round to the westward, apparently making straight for some shelving rocks that projected far into fjord. It reached them; it grew less and less—it disappeared. At the same time the luster of the heavens gave way to a pale, pearl-like uniform gray tint, that stretched far and wide, folding up as in a mantle all the regal luxury of the sun-king’s palace. The subtle odor and delicate chill of the coming dawn stole freshly across the water. A light haze rose and obscured the opposite islands. Something of the tender melancholy of autumn, though it was late June, toned down the aspect of the before brilliant landscape. A lark rose swiftly from its nest in an adjacent meadow, and, soaring higher and higher, poured from its tiny throat a cascade of delicious melody. The midnight sun no longer shone at midnight; his face smiled with a sobered serenity through the faint early mists of approaching morning.

CHAPTER II.

Viens donc—je te chanterai des chansons que les esprits des crimetières m’ont apprises!—MATURIN.

“BAFFLED!” he exclaimed, with a slight vexed laugh, as the boat vanished from his sight. “By a woman, too! Who would have thought it?”

Who would have thought it, indeed! Sir Philip Bruce-Errington, baronet, the wealthy and desirable *parti* for whom many match-making mothers had stood knee-deep in the chilly though sparkling waters of society, ardently plying rod and line with patient persistence, vainly hoping to secure him as a husband for one of their

highly proper and passionless daughters—he, the admired, long-sought-after “eligible,” was suddenly rebuffed, flouted—by whom? A stray princess, or a peasant? He vaguely wondered, as he lighted a cigar and strolled up and down on the shore, meditating, with a puzzled, almost annoyed expression on his handsome features. He was not accustomed to slights of any kind, however trifling, his position being commanding and enviable enough to attract flattery and friendship from most people. He was the only son of a baronet as renowned for eccentricity as for wealth. He had been the spoiled darling of his mother; and now, both his parents being dead, he was alone in the world, heir to his father's revenues and entire master of his own actions. And as part of the penalty he had to pay for being rich and good-looking to boot, he was so much run after by women that he found it hard to understand the haughty indifference with which he had just been treated, by one of the most fair, if not the fairest of her sex. He was piqued, and his *amour propre* was wounded.

“I'm sure my question was harmless enough,” he mused, half crossly. “She might have answered it.”

He glanced out impatiently over the fjord. There was no sign of his returning yacht as yet.

“What a time those fellows are!” he said to himself. “If the pilot were not on board, I should begin to think they had run the ‘Eulalie’ aground.”

He finished his cigar and threw the end of it into the water; then he stood moodily watching the ripples as they rolled softly up and caressed the shining brown shore at his feet, thinking all the while of that strange girl, so wonderfully lovely in face and form, so graceful and proud of bearing, with her great blue eyes and masses of dusky gold hair.

His meeting with her was a sort of adventure in its way—the first of the kind he had had for some time. He was subject to fits of weariness or caprice, and it was in one of these that he had suddenly left London in the height of the season, and had started for Norway on a yachting cruise with three chosen companions, one of whom, George Lorimer, once an Oxford fellow-student, was now his “Chum”—the Pythias to his Damon, the *fidus Achates* of his closest confidence. Through the unexpected wakening up of energy in the latter young gentleman, who was usually of a most sleepy and indolent disposition, he happened to be quite alone on this particular occasion, though as a general rule, he was accompanied in his rambles by one if not all three of his friends. Utter solitude was with him a rare occurrence, and his present experience of it had chanced in this wise. Lorimer the languid, Lorimer the lazy, Lorimer who had remained blandly unmoved and drowsy through all the magnificent panorama of the Norwegian coast, including the Sogne Fjord and the toppling peaks of the Justedal

glaciers; Lorimer who had slept peacefully in a hammock on deck, even while the yacht was passing under the looming splendors of Melsnipa; Lorimer, now that he had arrived at the Alten Fjord, then at its loveliest in the full glory of the continuous sunshine, developed a new turn of mind, and began to show sudden and abnormal interest in the scenery. In this humor he expressed his desire to “Take a sight” of the midnight sun from the Island of Seiland, and also declared his resolve to try the nearly impossible ascent of the great Jedke glacier.

Errington laughed at the idea. “Don't tell me,” he said, “that you are going in for climbing. And do you suppose I believe that you are interested—you of all people—in the heavenly bodies?”

“Why not?” asked Lorimer, with a candid smile, “I'm not in the least interested in earthly bodies, except my own. The sun's a jolly fellow. I sympathize with him in his present condition. He's in his cups—that's what's the matter—and he can't be persuaded to go to bed. I know his feelings perfectly; and I want to survey his gloriously inebriated face from another point of view. Don't laugh, Phil; I'm in earnest! And I really have quite a curiosity to try my skill in amateur mountaineering. Jedke's the very place for a first effort. It offers difficulties, and”—this with a slight yawn—“I like to surmount difficulties; it's rather amusing.”

His mind was so evidently set upon the excursion that Sir Philip made no attempt to dissuade him from it, but excused himself from accompanying the party on the plea that he wanted to finish a sketch he had recently begun. So that when the “Eulalie” got up her steam, weighed anchor, and swept gracefully away toward the coast of the adjacent islands, her owner was left, at his desire, to the seclusion of a quiet nook on the shore of the Alten Fjord, where he succeeded in making a bold and vivid picture of the scene before him. The colors of the sky had, however, defied his palette, and after one or two futile attempts to transfer to his canvas a few of the gorgeous tints that illumined the landscape, he gave up the task in despair, and resigned himself to the *dolce far niente* of absolute enjoyment. From his half-pleasing, half-melancholy reverie the voice of the unknown maiden had startled him, and now—now she had left him to resume it if he chose—left him, in chill displeasure, with a cold yet brilliant flash of something like scorn in her wonderful eyes.

Since her departure the scenery, in some unaccountable way, seemed less attractive to him, the songs of the birds, who were all awake, fell on inattentive ears; he was haunted by her face and voice, and he was, moreover, a little out of humor with himself for having been such a blunderer as to give her offense, and thus leave an unfavorable impression on her mind.

“I suppose I *was* rude,” he considered after awhile. “She

seemed to think so, at any rate. By Jove! what a crushing look she gave me! A peasant? Not she! If she had said she was an empress I shouldn't have been much surprised. But a common peasant, with that regal figure and those white hands! I don't believe it. Perhaps our pilot, Valdemar, knows who she is; I must ask him."

All at once he bethought himself of the cave whence she had emerged. It was close at hand—a natural grotto, arched and apparently lofty. He resolved to explore it. Glancing at his watch he saw it was not yet one o'clock in the morning, yet the voice of the cuckoo called shrilly from the neighboring hills, and a circling group of swallows flitted around him, their lovely wings glistening like jewels in the warm light of the ever-wakeful sun. Going to the entrance of the cave, he looked in. It was formed of rough rock, hewn out by the silent work of the water, and its floor was strewn thick with loose pebbles and polished stones. Entering it, he was able to walk upright for some few paces, then suddenly it seemed to shrink in size and to become darker. The light from the opening gradually narrowed into a slender stream too small for him to see clearly where he was going, thereupon he struck a fusee. At first he could observe no sign of human habitation, not even a rope or chain, or hook, to intimate that it was a customary shelter for a boat. The fusee went out quickly, and he lighted another. Looking more carefully and closely about him, he perceived on a projecting shelf of rock, a small antique lamp, Etruscan in shape, made of iron and wrought with curious letters. There was oil in it, and a half-burned wick; it had evidently been recently used. He availed himself at once of this useful adjunct to his explorations, and lighting it, was able by the clear and steady flame it emitted, to see everything very distinctly. Right before him was an uneven flight of steps leading down to a closed door.

He paused and listened attentively. There was no sound but the slow lapping of the water near the entrance; within, the thickness of the cavern walls shut out the gay caroling of the birds, and all the cheerful noises of awakening nature. Silence, chillness and partial obscurity are depressing influences, and the warm blood flowing through his veins ran a trifle more slowly and coldly as he felt the sort of uncomfortable eerie sensation which is experienced by the jolliest and most careless traveler when he first goes down to the catacombs in Rome. A sort of damp, earthy shudder creeps through the system, and a dreary feeling of general hopelessness benumbs the faculties; a morbid state of body and mind which is only to be remedied by a speedy return to the warm sunlight, and a draught of generous wine.

Sir Philip, however, held the antique lamp aloft, and descended the clumsy steps cautiously, counting twenty steps in all, at the bottom of which he found himself face to face with the closed

door. It was made of hard wood, so hard as to be almost like iron. It was black with age, and covered with quaint carvings and inscriptions, but in the middle, standing out in bold relief among the numberless Runic figures and devices, was written in large well-cut letters the word—

THELMA.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I have it! The girl's name, of course! This is some private retreat of hers, I suppose—a kind of boudoir like my Lady Winsleigh's, only with rather a difference."

And he laughed aloud, thinking of the dainty gold-satin hangings of a certain room in a certain great mansion in Park Lane, where an aristocratic and handsome lady-leader of fashion had as nearly made love to him as it was possible for her to do without losing her social dignity.

His laugh was echoed back with a weird and hollow sound, as though a hidden demon of the cave were mocking him, a demon whose merriment was intense but also horrible. He heard the unpleasantly jeering repetition with a kind of careless admiration.

"That echo would make a fortune in 'Faust,' if it could be persuaded to back up Mephistopheles with that truly fiendish '*Ha ha!*'" he said, resuming his examination of the name on the door. Then an odd fancy seized him, and he called loudly:

"Thelma!"

"Thelma!" shouted the echo.

"Is that her name?"

"Her name!" replied the echo.

"I thought so." And Philip laughed again, while the echo laughed wildly in answer. "Just the sort of name to suit a Norwegian nymph or goddess. *Thelma* is quaint and appropriate, and as far as I can remember there's no rhyme to it in the English language. *Thelma!*" And he lingered on the pronunciation of the strange word with a curious sensation of pleasure. "There is something mysteriously suggestive about the sound of it; like a chord of music played softly in the distance. Now, can I get through this door, I wonder?"

He pushed it gently. It yielded very slightly, and he tried again and yet again. Finally he put down the lamp and set his shoulder against the wooden barrier with all his force. A dull creaking sound rewarded his efforts, and inch by inch the huge door opened into what at first appeared immeasurable darkness. Holding up the light he looked in, and uttered a smothered exclamation. A sudden gust of wind rushed from the sea through the passage and extinguished the lamp, leaving him in profound gloom. Nothing daunted, he sought his fusee case: there was just one left in it. This he hastily struck, and shielding the glow carefully with one

hand, relighted his lamp, and stepped boldly into the mysterious grotto.

The murmur of the wind and waves, like spirit-voices in unison, followed him as he entered. He found himself in a spacious winding corridor, that had evidently been hollowed out in the rocks and fashioned by human hands. Its construction was after the ancient Gothic method, but the wonder of the place consisted in the walls, which were entirely covered with shells—shells of every shape and hue—some delicate as rose-leaves, some rough and prickly, others polished as ivory, some gleaming with a thousand iridescent colors, others pure white as the foam on high billows. Many of them were turned artistically in such a position as to show their inner sides glistening with soft tints like the shades of fine silk or satin—others glittered with the opaline sheen of mother-o'-pearl. All were arranged in exquisite patterns, evidently copied from fixed mathematical designs—there were stars, crescents, roses, sunflowers, hearts, crossed daggers, ships and implements of war, all faithfully depicted with extraordinary neatness and care, as though each particular emblem had served some special purpose.

Sir Philip walked along very slowly, delighted with his discovery, and—pausing to examine each panel as he passed—amused himself with speculations as to the meaning of this beautiful cavern, so fancifully yet skillfully decorated.

"Some old place of worship, I suppose," he thought. "There must be many such hidden in different parts of Norway. It has nothing to do with the Christian faith, for among all these devices I don't perceive a single cross."

He was right. There were no crosses; but there were many designs of the sun—the sun rising, the sun setting, the sun in full glory, with all his rays embroidered round him in tiny shells, some of them no bigger than a pin's head.

"What a waste of time and labor," he mused. "Who would undertake such a thing nowadays? Fancy the patience and delicacy of finger required to fit all these shells in their places! and they are embedded in strong mortar, too, as if the work were meant to be indestructible."

Full of pleased interest, he pursued his way, winding in and out through different arches, all more or less richly ornamented, till he came to a tall, round column, which seemingly supported the whole gallery, for all the arches converged toward it. It was garlanded from top to bottom with roses and their leaves, all worked in pink and lilac shells, interspersed with small pieces of shining amber and polished malachite. The flicker of the lamp he carried made it glisten like a mass of jewel-work, and absorbed in his close examination of this unique specimen of ancient art, Sir Philip did not at once perceive that another light beside his own glimmered from out the furthest archway a little beyond him—an opening that

led into some recess he had not as yet explored. A peculiar luster sparkling on one side of the shell-work, however, at last attracted his attention, and glancing up quickly, he saw, to his surprise, the reflection of a strange radiance, rosily tinted and brilliant.

Turning in its direction, he paused, irresolute. Could there be some one living in that furthest chamber to which the long passage he had followed evidently led? some one who would perhaps resent his intrusion as an impertinence? some eccentric artist or hermit who had made the cave his home? Or was it perhaps a refuge for smugglers? He listened anxiously. There was no sound. He waited a minute or two, then boldly advanced, determined to solve the mystery.

This last archway was lower than any of those he had passed through, and he was forced to take off his hat and stoop as he went under it. When he raised his head he remained uncovered, for he saw at a glance that the place was sacred. He was in the presence, not of Life, but Death. The chamber in which he stood was square in form, and more richly ornamented with shell designs than any other portion of the grotto he had seen, and facing the east was an altar hewn out of the solid rock, and studded thickly with amber, malachite and mother-o'-pearl. It was covered with the incomprehensible emblems of a by-gone creed worked in most exquisite shell patterns, but on it—as though in solemn protest against the past—stood a crucifix of ebony and carved ivory before which burned steadily a red lamp.

The meaning of the mysterious light was thus explained, but what chiefly interested Errington was the central object of the place—a coffin—or rather a plain granite sarcophagus which was placed on the floor lying from north to south. Upon it—in strange contrast to the somber coldness of the stone—reposed a large wreath of poppies freshly gathered. The vivid scarlet of the flowers, the gleam of the shining shells on the walls, the mournful figure of the ivory Christ stretched on the cross among all those pagan emblems—the intense silence broken only by the slow drip, drip of water trickling somewhere behind the cavern—and more than these outward things—his own impressive conviction that he was with the imperial Dead—imperial because past the sway of empire—all made a powerful impression on his mind. Overcoming by degrees his first sensations of awe, he approached the sarcophagus and examined it. It was solidly closed and mortared all round, so that it might have been one compact coffin-shaped block of stone so far as its outward appearance testified. Stooping more closely, however, to look at the brilliant poppy wreath, he started back with a slight exclamation. Cut deeply in the hard granite he read for the second time that odd name—

THELMA.

It belonged to some one dead, then—not to the lovely living

woman who had so lately confronted him in the burning glow of the midnight sun? He felt dismayed at his unthinking precipitation—he had, in his fancy, actually associated *her*, so full of radiant health and beauty, with what was probably a mouldering corpse in that hermetically sealed tenement of stone. This idea was unpleasant, and jarred upon his feelings. Surely she, that golden-haired nymph of the fjord, had nothing to do with death. He had evidently found his way into some ancient tomb. “Thelma” might be the name or title of some long-departed queen or princess of Norway, yet, if so, how came the crucifix there—the red lamp, the flowers?

He lingered, looking curiously about him, as if he fancied the shell-embroidered walls might whisper some answer to his thoughts. The silence offered no suggestions. The plaintive figure of the tortured Christ suspended on the cross maintained an immovable watch over all things, and there was a subtle, faint odor floating about as of crushed spices or herbs. While he still stood there absorbed in perplexed conjectures, he became oppressed by want of air. The red hue of the poppy wreath mingled with the softer glow of the lamp on the altar—the moist glitter of the shells and polished pebbles seemed to dazzle and confuse his eyes. He felt dizzy and faint—and hastily made his way out of that close death-chamber into the passage, where he leaned for a few minutes against the great central column to recover himself. A brisk breath of wind from the fjord came careering through the gallery, and blew coldly upon his forehead. Refreshed by it, he rapidly overcame the sensation of giddiness, and began to retrace his steps through the winding arches, thinking with some satisfaction as he went, what a romantic incident he would have to relate to Lorimer and his other friends, when a sudden glare of light illumined the passage, and he was brought to an abrupt stand-still by the sound of a wild “Halloo!” The light vanished; it reappeared. It vanished again, and again appeared, flinging a strong flare upon the shell-worked walls as it approached. Again the fierce “Halloo!” resounded through the hollow cavities of the subterranean temple, and he remained motionless, waiting for an explanation of this unlooked-for turn to the events of the morning.

He had plenty of physical courage, and the idea of any addition to his adventure rather pleased him than otherwise. Still, with all his bravery, he recoiled a little when he first caught sight of the extraordinary being that emerged from the darkness—a wild, distorted figure that ran toward him with its head downward, bearing aloft in one skinny hand a smoking pine-torch from which the sparks flew like so many fire-flies. This uncanny personage, wearing the semblance of man, came within two paces of Errington before perceiving him, then, stopping short in his headlong career, the creature flourished his torch and uttered a defiant yell.

Philip surveyed him coolly and without alarm, though so weird an object might well have aroused a pardonable distrust, and even timidity. He saw a misshapen dwarf, not quite four feet high, with large, ungainly limbs out of all proportion to his head, which was small and compact. His features were of almost feminine fineness, and from under his shaggy brows gleamed a restless pair of large, full, wild blue eyes. His thick, rough, flaxen hair was long and curly, and hung in disordered profusion over his deformed shoulders. His dress was of reindeer skin, very fancifully cut, and ornamented with beads of different colors—and twisted about him as though in an effort to be artistic, was a long strip of bright scarlet woolen material, which showed up the extreme pallor and ill-health of the meager countenance, and the brilliancy of the eyes that now sparkled with rage as they met those of Errington. He, from his superior height, glanced down with pity on the unfortunate creature, whom he at once took to be the actual owner of the cave he had explored. Uncertain what to do, whether to speak, or to remain silent, he moved slightly as though to pass on, but the shock-headed dwarf leaped lightly in his way, and, planting himself firmly before him, shrieked some unintelligible threat, of which Errington could only make out the last words, “Nifleheim” and “Nastrond.”

“I believe he is commending me to the old Norwegian *inferno*,” thought the young baronet, with a smile, amused at the little man’s evident excitement. “Very polite of him, I’m sure. But, after all, I had no business here. I’d better apologize.” And forthwith he began to speak in the simplest English words he could choose, taking care to pronounce them very slowly and distinctly.

“I cannot understand you, my good sir, but I see you are angry. I came here by accident. I am going away now at once.”

His explanation had a strange effect. The dwarf drew nearer, twirled himself rapidly round three times as though waltzing, then, holding his torch a little to one side, turned up his thin, pale countenance, and, fixing his gaze on Sir Philip, studied every feature of his face with absorbing interest. Then he burst into a violent fit of laughter.

“At last—at last!” he cried, in fluent English. “Going now? Going, you say? Never! never! You will never go away any more. No, not without something stolen. The dead have summoned you here. Their white bony fingers have dragged you across the deep. Did you not hear their voices, cold and hollow as the winter wind, calling, calling you, and saying: ‘Come, come, proud robber, from over the far seas; come and gather the beautiful rose of the northern forest?’ Yes, yes! You have obeyed the dead—the dead who feign sleep, but are ever wakeful—you have come as a thief in the golden midnight, and the thing you seek is the life of Sigurd. Yes—yes, it is true. The spirit cannot lie. You

must kill, you must steal. See how the blood drips, drop by drop, from the heart of Sigurd! And the jewel you steal—ah, what a jewel!—you shall not find such another in Norway!”

His excited voice sank by degrees to a plaintive and forlorn whisper, and dropping his torch with a gesture of despair on the ground, he looked at it burning, with an air of mournful and utter desolation. Profoundly touched, as he immediately understood the condition of his companion's wandering wits, Errington spoke to him soothingly.

“You mistake me,” he said, in gentle accents; “I would not steal anything from you, nor have I come to kill you. See,” and he held out his hand, “I wouldn't harm you for the world. I didn't know this cave belonged to you. Forgive me for having entered it. I am going to rejoin my friends. Good-bye!”

The strange, half-crazy creature touched his outstretched hand timidly and with a sort of appeal.

“Good-bye, good-bye!” he muttered. “That is what they all say—even the dead—good-bye, but they never go—never, never! You cannot be different to the rest. And you do not wish to hurt poor Sigurd?”

“Certainly not, if *you* are Sigurd,” said Philip, half laughing; “I should be very sorry to hurt you.”

“You are *sure*?” he persisted, with a sort of obstinate eagerness. “You have eyes which tell truths; but there are other things which are truer than eyes—things in the air, in the grass, in the waves, and they talk very strangely of you. I know you, of course. I knew you ages ago—long before I saw you dead on the field of battle, and the black-haired Valkyrie galloped with you to Valhalla. Yes, I knew you long before that, and you knew me, for I was your king, and you were my vassal, wild and rebellious—not the proud, rich Englishman you are to-day.”

Errington started. How could this Sigurd, as he called himself, be aware of either his wealth or nationality?

The dwarf observed his movement of surprise with a cunning smile.

“Sigurd is wise—Sigurd is brave. Who shall deceive him? He knows you well; he will always know you. The old gods teach Sigurd all his wisdom—the gods of the sea and the wind—the sleepy gods that lie in the hearts of the flowers—the small spirits that sit in shells and sing all day and all night.” He paused, and his eyes filled with a wistful look of attention. He drew closer.

“Come,” he said, earnestly, “come, you must listen to my music; perhaps you can tell me what it means.”

He picked up his smoldering torch and held it aloft again, then, beckoning Errington to follow him, he led the way to a small grotto, cut deeply into the wall of the cavern. Here there were no shell patterns. Little green ferns grew thickly out of the stone

crevices, and a minute runlet of water trickled slowly from above, freshening the delicate frondage as it fell. With quick, agile fingers he removed a loose stone from this aperture, and as he did so a low shuddering wail resounded through the arches—a melancholy moan that rose and sank, and rose again in weird, sorrowful minor echoes.

“Hear her,” murmured Sigurd plaintively. “She is always complaining; it is a pity she cannot rest. She is a spirit, you know. I have often asked her what troubles her, but she will not tell me; she only weeps.”

His companion looked at him compassionately. The sound that so affected his disordered imagination was nothing but the wind blowing through a narrow hole formed by the removal of the stone, but it was useless to explain this simple fact to one in his condition.

“Tell me,” and Sir Philip spoke very gently, “is this your home?”

The dwarf surveyed him almost scornfully. “*My* home!” he echoed. “My home is everywhere—on the mountains, in the forests, on the black rocks and barren shores. My soul lives between the sun and the sea; my heart is with Thelma!”

Thelma! Here was perhaps a clew to the mystery.

“Who is Thelma?” asked Errington, somewhat hurriedly.

Sigurd broke into violent and derisive laughter. “Do you think I will tell *you*?” he cried, loudly. “*You*—one of that strong, cruel race who must conquer all they see; who covet everything fair under heaven, and will buy it, even at the cost of blood and tears. Do you think I will unlock the door of my treasure to *you*? No, no; besides,” and his voice sunk lower, “what should you do with Thelma? She is dead.”

And, as if possessed by a sudden access of frenzy, he brandished his pine-torch wildly above his head till it showered a rain of bright sparks above him, and exclaimed, furiously:

“Away, away, and trouble me not. The days are not yet fulfilled—the time is not yet ripe. Why seek to hasten my end? Away, away, I tell you. Leave me in peace. I will die when Thelma bids me, but not till then.”

And he rushed down the long gallery and disappeared in the furthest chamber, where he gave vent to a sort of long sobbing cry, which rang dolefully through the cavern and then subsided into utter silence.

Feeling as if he were in a chaotic dream, Errington pursued his interrupted course through the winding passages with a bewildered and wandering mind. What strange place had he inadvertently lighted on, and who were the still stranger beings in connection with it? First the beautiful girl herself; next the mysterious coffin, hidden in its fanciful shell temple, and now this deformed

madman, with the pale face and fine eyes, whose utterances, though incoherent, savored somewhat of poesy and prophecy. And what spell was attached to that name of Thelma? The more he thought of his morning's adventure the more puzzled he became. As a rule, he believed more in the commonplace than in the romantic—most people do. But truth to tell, romance is far more common than the commonplace. There are few who have not, at one time or other of their lives, had some strange or tragic episode woven into the tissue of their every-day existence, and it would be difficult to find one person, even among humdrum individuals, who, from birth to death, has experienced nothing out of the common.

Errington generally dismissed all tales of adventure as mere exaggerations of heated fancy, and had he read in some book of a respectable nineteenth-century yachtsman having such an interview with a madman in a sea-cavern he would have laughed at the affair as an utter improbability, though he could not have explained why he considered it improbable. But now it had occurred to himself, he was both surprised and amused at the whole circumstance; moreover, he was sufficiently interested and curious to be desirous of sifting the matter to its foundation.

It was, however, somewhat of a relief to him when he again reached the outer cavern. He replaced the lamp on the shelf where he had found it, and stepped once more into the brilliant light of the very early dawn, which then had all the splendor of full morning. There was a deliciously balmy wind, the blue sky was musical with a chorus of larks, and every breath of air that waved aside the long grass sent forth a thousand odors from hidden beds of wild thyme and bog-myrtle.

He perceived the "Eulalie" at anchor in her old place on the fjord; she had returned while he was absent on his explorations. Gathering together his rug and painting materials, he blew a whistle sharply three times; he was answered from the yacht, and presently a boat, manned by a couple of sailors, came skimming over the water toward him. It soon reached the shore, and, entering it, he was speedily rowed away from the scene of his morning's experience back to his floating palace, where, as yet, none of his friends were stirring.

"How about Jedke?" he inquired of one of his men. "Did they climb it?"

A slow grin overspread the sailor's brown face.

"Lord bless you, no, sir. Mr. Lorimer, he just looked at it and sat down in the shade; the other gentleman played pitch-and-toss with pebbles. They was main hungry too, and eat a mighty sight of 'am and pickles. Then they came on board and all turned in at once."

Errington laughed. He was amused at the utter failure of

Lorimer's recent sudden energy, but not surprised. His thoughts were, however, busied with something else, and he next asked:

"Where's our pilot?"

"Valdemar Svensen, sir? He went down to his bunk as soon as we anchored, for a snooze, he said."

"All right. If he comes on deck before I do, just tell him not to go ashore for anything till I see him. I want to speak to him after breakfast."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Whereupon Sir Philip descended to his private cabin. He drew the blind at the port-hole to shut out the dazzling sunlight, for it was nearly three o'clock in the morning, and quickly undressing, he flung himself into his berth with a slight, not altogether unpleasant, feeling of exhaustion. To the last as his eyes closed drowsily he seemed to hear the slow drip, drip of the water behind the rocky cavern, and the desolate cry of the incomprehensible Sigurd, while through these sounds that mingled with the gurgle of little waves lapping against the sides of the "Eulalie," the name of "Thelma" murmured itself in his ears till slumber drowned his senses in oblivion.

CHAPTER III.

Hast any mortal name,
Fit appellation for this dazzling frame,
Or friends or kinsfolk on the citted earth?

KEATS.

"This is positively absurd," murmured Lorimer, in mildly injured tones, seven hours later, as he sat on the edge of his berth, surveying Errington, who, fully dressed and in the highest spirits, had burst in to upbraid him for his laziness while he was yet but scantily attired. "I tell you, my good fellow, there are some things which the utmost stretch of friendship will *not* stand. Here am I in shirt and trousers with only one sock on, and you dare to say you have had an adventure. Why, if you had cut a piece out of the sun you ought to wait till a man is shaved before mentioning it."

"Don't be snappish, old boy," laughed Errington, gaily. "Put on that other sock and listen. I don't want to tell those other fellows just yet, they might go making inquiries about her—"

"Oh, there is a 'her' in the case, is there?" said Lorimer, opening his eyes rather widely. "Well, Phil! I thought you had had enough, and something too much, of women."

"This is not a woman!" declared Philip, with heat and eagerness, "at least not the sort of woman I have ever known. This is