

companion-ladder into his little boat. "You are sure you will not sail away?"

Errington balanced himself lightly on the ladder and smiled.

"I am sure, Sigurd! I have no wish to sail away. Are you all right there?"

He spoke cheerily, feeling in his own mind that it was scarcely safe for a madman to be quite alone in a cockle-shell of a boat on a deep fjord, the shores of which were indented with dangerous rocks as sharp as the bristling teeth of fabled sea-monsters, but Sigurd answered him almost contemptuously.

"All right!" he echoed. "That is what the English say always. All right! As if it were ever wrong with me and the sea! We know each other—we do each other no harm. *You* may die on the sea, but *I* shall not! No, there is another way to Valhalla!"

"Oh, I dare say there are no end of ways," said Errington, good-temperedly, still poising himself on the ladder, and holding on to the side of his yacht, as he watched his late visitor take the oars and move off. "Good-bye, Sigurd! Take care of yourself! Hope I shall see you again soon."

But Sigurd replied not. Bending to the oars, he rowed swiftly and strongly, and Sir Philip, pulling up the ladder and closing the gangway, saw the little skiff flying over the water like a bird in the direction of the Guldmar's landing-place. He wondered again and again what relationship, if any, this half-crazed being bore to the *bonde* and his daughter. That he knew all about them was pretty evident; but how? Catching sight of the pansies left on the deck bench, Errington took them, and, descending to the saloon, set them on the table in a tumbler of water.

"Thelma's thoughts, the poor little fellow called them," he mused, with a smile. "A pretty fancy of his, and linked with the crazy imaginings of Ophelia too. 'There's pansies, that's for thoughts,' *she* said, but Sigurd's idea is different; he believes they are Thelma's own thoughts in flower. 'No rough touch has spoiled their smoothness,' he declared; he's right there, I'm sure. And shall I ruffle the sweet leaves? shall I crush the tender petals? or shall I simply transform them from pansies into roses—from the dream of love into love itself?"

His eyes softened as he glanced at the drooping rose he wore, which Thelma herself had given him, and as he went to his sleeping cabin, he carefully detached it from his buttonhole, and taking down a book—one which he greatly prized, because it had belonged to his mother—he prepared to press the flower within its leaves. It was the "Imitation of Christ," bound quaintly and fastened with silver clasps, and as he was about to lay his fragrant trophy on the first page that opened naturally of itself, he glanced at the words that there presented themselves to his eyes.

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing

higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or in earth!" And with a smile, and a warmer flush of color than usual on his handsome face, he touched the rose lightly yet tenderly with his lips and shut it reverently within its sacred resting-place.

#### CHAPTER IX.

Our manners are infinitely corrupted, and wonderfully incline to the worse; of our customs, there are many barbarous and monstrous.—MONTAIGNE.

THE next day was very warm and bright, and that pious Lutheran divine, the Rev. Charles Dyceworthy, was seriously incumbered by his own surplus flesh material, as he wearily rowed himself across the fjord toward Olaf Guldmar's private pier. As the perspiration bedewed his brow, he felt that Heaven had dealt with him somewhat too liberally in the way of fat—he was provided too amply with it ever to excel as an oarsman. The sun was burning hot, the water was smooth as oil, and very weighty—it seemed to resist every stroke of his clumsily wielded blades. Altogether it was hard, uncongenial work—and, being rendered somewhat flabby and nerveless by his previous evening's carouse with Macfarlane's whisky, Mr. Dyceworthy was in a plaintive and injured frame of mind. He was bound on a mission—a holy and edifying errand, which would have elevated any minister of his particular sect. He had found a crucifix with the name of Thelma engraved thereon—he was now about to return it to the evident rightful owner, and in returning it he purposed denouncing it as an emblem of the "Scarlet Woman, that sitteth on the Seven Hills," and threatening all those who dared to hold it sacred as doomed to eternal torture, "where the worm dieth not." He had thought over all he meant to say; he had planned several eloquent and rounded sentences, some of which he murmured placidly to himself as he propelled his slow boat along.

"Yea!" he observed, in a mild sotto-voce—"ye shall be cut off root and branch! Ye shall be scorched even as stubble—and utterly destroyed." Here he paused and mopped his streaming forehead with his clean, perfumed handkerchief. "Yea!" he resumed, peacefully, "the worshipers of idolatrous images are accursed; they shall have ashes for food and gall for drink! Let them turn and repent themselves, lest the wrath of God consume them as straw whirled on the wind. Repent!—or ye shall be cast into everlasting fire. Beauty shall avail not, learning shall avail not, meekness shall avail not; for the fire of hell is a searching, endless, destroying—" here Mr. Dyceworthy, by plunging one oar with too much determination into the watery depths, caught a

crab, as the saying is, and fell violently backward in a somewhat undignified posture. Recovering himself slowly, he looked about him in a bewildered way, and for the first time noticed the vacant, solitary appearance of the fjord. Some object was missing; he realized what it was immediately—the English yacht “Eulalie” was gone from her point of anchorage.

“Dear me!” said Mr. Dyceworthy, half aloud, “what a very sudden departure! I wonder now if those young men have gone for good, or whether they are coming back again? Pleasant fellows—very pleasant! flippant, perhaps, but pleasant.”

And he smiled benevolently. He had no remembrance of what had occurred after he had emptied young Macfarlane’s flask of Glenlivet; he had no idea that he had been almost carried from his garden into his parlor, and there flung on the sofa and left to sleep off the effects of his strong tippie; least of all did he dream that he had betrayed any of his intentions toward Thelma Guldmar, or given his religious opinions with such free and undisguised candor. Blissfully ignorant on these points, he resumed his refractory oars, and after nearly an hour of laborious effort, succeeded at last in reaching his destination. Arrived at the little pier, he fastened up his boat, and with the lofty air of a thoroughly moral man, he walked deliberately up to the door of the *bonde’s* house. Contrary to custom, it was closed, and the place seemed strangely silent and deserted. The afternoon heat was so great that the song-birds were hushed and in hiding under the cool green leaves—the clambering roses round the porch hung down their bright heads for sheer faintness—and the only sounds to be heard were the subdued coo-cooing of the doves on the roof, and the soft trickling rush of a little mountain stream that flowed through the grounds. Somewhat surprised, though not abashed, at the evident “not-at-home” look of the farm-house, Mr. Dyceworthy rapped loudly at the rough oaken door with his knuckles, there being no such modern convenience as a bell or a knocker. He waited some time before he was answered, repeating his summons violently at frequent intervals, and swearing irreligiously under his breath as he did so. But at last the door was flung sharply open, and the tangle-haired, rosy-cheeked Britta confronted him with an aspect which was by no means encouraging or polite. Her round blue eyes sparkled saucily, and she placed her bare, plump red arms, wet with recent soap-suds, akimbo on her sturdy little hips, with an air that was decidedly impertinent.

“Well, what do you want?” she demanded, with rude abruptness.

Mr. Dyceworthy regarded her in speechless dignity. Vouchsafing no reply, he attempted to pass her and enter the house. But Britta settled her arms more defiantly than ever, and her voice had a sharper ring as she said:

“It’s no use your coming in! There’s no one here but me. The master nas gone out for the day.”

“Young woman,” returned Mr. Dyceworthy, with polite severity, “I regret to see that your manners stand in sore need of improvement. Your master’s absence is of no importance to me. It is with the Froken Thelma I desire to speak.”

Britta laughed and tossed her rough brown curls back from her forehead. Mischievous dimples came and went at the corners of her mouth—indications of suppressed fun.

“The Froken is out too,” she said demurely. “It’s timeshe had a little amusement; and the gentlemen treat her as if she were a queen!”

Mr. Dyceworthy started and his red visage became a trifle paler.

“Gentlemen? What gentlemen?” he demanded, with some impatience.

Britta’s inward delight evidently increased.

“The gentlemen from the yacht of course,” she said. “What other *gentlemen* are there?” This with a contemptuous up-and-down sort of look at the Lutheran minister’s portly form. “Sir Philip Errington was here with his friend yesterday evening and stayed a long time—and to-day a fine boat with four oars came to fetch the master and Froken Thelma, and they are all gone for a sail to the Kaa Fjord, or some other place near here—I cannot remember the name. And I am so glad!” went on Britta, clasping her plump hands in ecstasy. “They are the grandest hand-somest Herren I have ever seen—and one can tell they think wonders of the Froken—nothing is too good for her!”

Mr. Dyceworthy’s face was the picture of dismay. This was a new turn to the course of events, and one, moreover, that he had never once contemplated. Britta watched him amusedly.

“Will you leave any message for them when they return?” she asked.

“No,” said the minister dubiously. “Yet, stay; yes! I will! Tell the Froken that I have found something which belongs to her, and that when she wishes to have it, I will myself bring it.”

Britta looked cross. “If it is hers you have no business to keep it?” she said, brusquely. “Why not leave it—whatever it is—with me?”

Mr. Dyceworthy regarded her with a bland and lofty air.

“I trust no concerns of mine or hers to the keeping of a paid domestic,” he said. “A domestic, moreover, who deserts the ways of her own people—who hath dealings with the dwellers in darkness—who even bringeth herself to forget much of her own native tongue, and who devoteth herself to—”

What he would have said was uncertain, as at that moment he was nearly thrown down by a something that slipped agilely between his legs, pinching each fat calf as it passed—a something that looked like a ball, but proved to be a human creature—no other than the crazy Sigurd, who, after accomplishing his uncouth gambol successfully, stood up, shaking back his streaming fair locks and laughing wildly.

“Ha, ha!” he exclaimed. “That was good; that was clever! If I had upset you now, you would have said your prayers backward! What are you here for? This is no place for you! They are all gone out of it. *She* has gone—all the world is empty! There is nothing anywhere but air, air, air!—no birds, no flowers, no trees, no sunshine! All gone with her on the sparkling, singing water!” and he swung his arms round violently, and snapped his fingers in the minister’s face. “What an ugly man you are!” he exclaimed with refreshing candor. “I think you are uglier than I am! You are straight—but you are like a load of peat—heavy and barren and fit to burn. Now, I—I am the crooked bough of a tree, but I have bright leaves where a bird hides and sings all day! You—you have no song, no foliage; only ugly and barren and fit to burn!” He laughed heartily, and, catching sight of Britta where she stood in the doorway entirely unconcerned at his eccentric behavior, he went up to her and took hold of the corner of her apron. “Take me in Britta, dear—pretty Britta!” he said coaxingly. “Sigurd is hungry! Britta, sweet little Britta—come and talk to me and sing! Good-bye, fat man!” he added, suddenly, turning round once more on Dyceworthy. “You will never overtake the big ship that has gone away with Thelma over the water. Thelma will come back—yes!—but one day she will go never to come back.” He dropped his voice to a mysterious whisper. “Last night I saw a little spirit come out of a rose—he carried a tiny golden hammer and nail, and a ball of cord like a rolled-up sunbeam. He flew away so quickly I could not follow him; but I know where he went! He fastened the nail in the heart of Thelma, deeply, so that the little drops of blood flowed—but she felt no pain; and then he tied the gold cord to the nail and left her, carrying the other end of the string with him—to whom? Some other heart must be pierced! Whose heart?” Sigurd looked infinitely cunning as well as melancholy, and sighed deeply.

The Rev. Mr. Dyceworthy was impatient and disgusted.

“It is a pity,” he said, with an air of solemn patience, “that this hapless creature, accursed of God and man, is not placed in some proper abode suitable to the treatment of his affliction. You, Britta, as the favored servant of a—a—well, let us say, of a peculiar mistress, should persuade her to send this—this—person away, lest his vagaries become harmful.”

Britta glanced very kindly at Sigurd, who still held her apron with the air of a trustful child.

“He’s no more harmful than you are,” she said, promptly, in answer to the minister’s remark. “He’s a good fellow, and if he talks strangely he can make himself useful—which is more than can be said of certain people. He can saw and chop the wood, make hay, feed the cattle, pull a strong oar, and sweep and keep the garden—can’t you, Sigurd?” She laid her hand on Sigurd’s shoulder, and he nodded his head emphatically, as she enumerated his different talents. “And as for climbing—he can guide you anywhere over the hills, or up the streams to the big waterfalls—no one better. And if you mean by peculiar—that my mistress is different to other people, why, I know she is, and am glad of it—at any rate, she’s a great deal too kind-hearted to shut this poor boy up in a house for madmen! He’d die if he couldn’t have the fresh air.” She paused, out of breath with her rapid utterance, and Mr. Dyceworthy held up his hands in dignified astonishment.

“You talk too glibly, young woman,” he said. “It is necessary that I should instruct you without loss of time as to how you should be sparing of your words in the presence of your superiors and betters—”

Bang! The door was closed with a decision that sent a sharp echo through the silent, heated air, and Mr. Dyceworthy was left to contemplate it at his leisure. Full of wrath, he was about to knock peremptorily and insist that it should be re-opened; but on second thoughts he decided that it was beneath his dignity to argue with a servant, much less with a declared lunatic like Sigurd—so he made the best of his way back to his boat, thinking gloomily of the hard labor awaiting him in the long pull back to Bosekop.

Other thoughts, too, tortured and harassed his brain, and as he again took the oars and plied them wearily through the water, he was in an exceedingly unchristian humor. Though a specious hypocrite, he was no fool. He knew the ways of men and women, and he thoroughly realized the present position of affairs. He was quite aware of Thelma Guldmar’s exceptional beauty—and he felt pretty certain that no man could look upon her without admiration. But up to this time, she had been, as it were, secluded from all eyes—a few haymakers and fishermen were the only persons of the male sex who had ever been within the precincts of Olaf Guldmar’s dwelling, with the exception of himself, Dyceworthy—who, being armed with a letter of introduction from the actual minister of Bosekop, whose place he for the present filled, had intruded his company frequently and persistently on the *bonde* and his daughter, though he knew himself to be entirely unwelcome. He had gathered together as much as he could, all the scraps of information concerning them; how Olaf Guldmar was credited with having made away with his wife by foul means; how nobody even knew where his

wife had come from ; how Thelma had been mysteriously educated, and had learned strange things concerning foreign lands, which no one else in the place understood anything about ; how she was reputed to be a witch, and was believed to have cast her spells on the unhappy Sigurd, to the destruction of his reason—and how nobody could tell where Sigurd himself had come from.

All this Mr. Dyceworthy had heard with much interest, and as the sensual part of his nature was always more or less predominant, he had resolved in his own mind that here was a field of action suitable to his abilities. To tame and break the evil spirit in the reputed witch ; to convert her to the holy and edifying Lutheran faith ; to save her soul for the Lord, and take her beautiful body for himself—these were Mr. Dyceworthy's laudable ambitions. There was no rival to oppose him, and he had plenty of time to mature his plans. So he had thought. He had not bargained for the appearance of Sir Philip Bruce-Errington on the scene—a man, young, handsome, and well-bred, with vast wealth to back up his pretensions, should he make any.

"How did he find her out?" thought the Rev. Charles, as he dolefully pulled his craft along. "And that brutal pagan Guldmar, too, who pretends he cannot endure strangers!"

And as he meditated, a flush of righteous indignation crimsoned his flabby features.

"Let her take care," he half muttered, with a smile that was not pleasant ; "let her take care ! There are more ways than one to bring down her pride ! Sir Philip Errington must be too rich and popular in his own country to think of wishing to marry a girl who is only a farmer's daughter after all. He may trifle with her ; yes !—and he will help me by so doing. The more mud on her name, the better for me ; the more disgrace, the more need of rescue, and the more grateful she will have to be. Just a word to Ulrika—and the scandal will spread. Patience—patience !"

And somewhat cheered by his own reflections, though still wearing an air of offended dignity, he rowed on, glancing up every now and then to see if the "Eulalie" had returned, but her place was still empty.

Meanwhile, as he thought and planned, other thoughts and plans were being discussed at a meeting which was held in a little ruined stone hut, situated behind some trees on a dreary hill just outside Bosekop. It was a miserable place, barren of foliage—the ground was dry and yellow, and the hut itself looked as if it had been struck by lightning. The friends whose taste had led them to select this dilapidated dwelling as a place of conference were two in number, both women—one of them no other than the minister's servant, the drear-faced Ulrika. She was crouched on the earth floor in an attitude of utter debasement, at the feet of her companion—an aged dame of tall and imposing appearance, who, stand-

ing erect, looked down upon her with an air of mingled contempt and malevolence. The hut was rather dark, for the roof was not sufficiently destroyed to have the advantage of being open to the sky.

The sunlight fell through holes of different shapes and sizes—one specially bright patch of radiance illumining the stately form and strongly marked, though withered features of the elder woman, whose eyes, deeply sunken in her head, glittered with a hawk-like and evil luster, as they rested on the prostrate figure before her. When she spoke, her accents were harsh and commanding.

"How long?" she said, "how long must I wait? How long must I watch the work of Satan in the land? The fields are barren and will not bring forth ; the curse of bitter poverty is upon us all ; and only he, the pagan Guldmar, prospers and gathers in harvest, while all around him starve ! Do I not know the devil's work when I see it?—I, the chosen servant of the Lord !" And she struck a tall staff she held violently into the ground to emphasize her words. "Am I not left deserted in my age? The child Britta—sole daughter of my sole daughter—is she not stolen, and kept from me? Has not her heart been utterly turned away from mine? All through that vile witch—accursed of God and man ! She it is who casts the blight on our land ; she it is who makes the hands and hearts of our men heavy and careless, so that even luck has left the fishing ; and yet you hesitate—you delay, you will not fulfill your promise ! I tell you, there are those in Bosekop who, at my bidding, would cast her naked into the fjord, and leave her there, to sink or swim according to her nature !"

"I know," murmured Ulrika, humbly, raising herself slightly from her kneeling posture ; "I know it well !—but, good Lovisa, be patient ! I work for the best ! Mr. Dyceworthy will do more for us than we can do for ourselves ; he is wise and cautious—"

Lovisa interrupted her with a fierce gesture. "Fool !" she cried. "What need of caution? A witch is a witch—burn her, drown her ! There is no other remedy ! But two days since the child of my neighbor Engla passed her on the fjord ; and now the boy has sickened of some strange disease, and 'tis said he will die. Again, the drove of cattle owned by Hildmar Bjorn were herded home when she passed by. Now they are seized by the murrain plague ! Tell your good saint Dyceworthy these things ; if he can find no cure, I can—and will."

Ulrika shuddered slightly as she rose from the ground and stood erect, drawing her shawl closely about her.

"You hate her so much, Lovisa?" she asked, almost timidly.

Lovisa's face darkened, and her yellow, claw-like hand closed round her strong staff in a cruel and threatening manner.

"Hate her!" she muttered; "I have hated her ever since she was born! I hated her mother before her! A nest of devils, every one of them; and the curse will always be upon us while they dwell here."

She paused and looked at Ulrika steadily.

"Remember!" she said, with an evil leer on her lips, "I hold a secret of yours that is worth the keeping! I give you two weeks more; within that time you must act! Destroy the witch—bring back to me my grandchild Britta, or else—it will be *my* turn!"

And she laughed silently. Ulrika's face grew paler, and the hand that grasped the folds of her shawl trembled violently. She made an effort, however, to appear composed, as she answered:

"I have sworn to obey you, Lovisa—and I will. But tell me one thing—how do you know that Thelma Guldmar is indeed a witch?"

"How do I know?" almost yelled Lovisa. "Have I lived all these years for nothing? Look at her! Am *I* like her? Are *you* like her? Are any of the honest women of the neighborhood like her? Meet her on the hills with knives and pins—prick her, and see if the blood will flow! I swear it will not—not one drop! Her skin is too white; there is no blood in those veins—only fire! Look at the pink in her cheeks—the transparency of her flesh—the glittering light in her eyes, the gold of her hair—it is all devil's work, it is not human, it is not natural! I have watched her—I used to watch her mother, and curse her every time I saw her—ay! curse her till I was breathless with cursing—"

She stopped abruptly. Ulrika gazed at her with as much wonder as her plain, heavy face was capable of expressing. Lovisa saw the look and smiled darkly.

"One would think *you* had never known what love is!" she said, with a sort of grim satire in her tone. "Yet even your dull soul was on fire once! But I—when I was young, I had beauty such as you never had, and I loved—Olaf Guldmar."

Ulrika uttered an exclamation of astonishment. "You! and yet you hate him now?"

Lovisa raised her hand with an imperious gesture.

"I have grown hate like a flower in my breast," she said, with a sort of stern impressiveness. "I have fostered it year after year, and now—it has grown too strong for me! When Olaf Guldmar was young he told me I was fair; once he kissed my cheek at parting! For those words—for that kiss—I loved him then—for the same things I hate him now! When I knew he had married, I cursed him; on the day of my own marriage with a man I despised, I cursed him! I have followed him and all his surroundings with more curses than there are hours in the day! I have had some little revenge—yes!"—and she laughed grimly—"but I want

more! For Britta has been caught by his daughter's evil spell. Britta is mine, and I must have her back. Understand me well!—do what you have to do without delay! Surely it is an easy thing to ruin a woman!"

Ulrika stood as though absorbed in meditation, and said nothing for some moments. At last she murmured, as though to herself:

"Mr. Dyceworthy could do much—if—"

"Ask him, then," said Lovisa, imperatively. "Tell him the village is in fear of her. Tell him that if he will do nothing, *we* will. And if all fails, come to me again; and remember!—I shall not only act—I shall *speak!*"

And emphasizing the last word as a sort of threat, she turned and strode out of the hut.

Ulrika followed more slowly, taking a different direction to that in which her late companion was seen rapidly disappearing. On returning to the minister's dwelling, she found that Mr. Dyceworthy had not yet come back from his boating excursion. She gave no explanation of her absence to her two fellow-servants, but went straight up to her own room—a bare attic in the roof—where she deliberately took off her dress and bared her shoulders and breast. Then she knelt down on the rough boards, and clasping her hands began to writhe and wrestle as though she were seized with a sudden convulsion. She groaned and tortured the tears from her eyes; she pinched her own flesh till it was black and blue, and scratched it with her nails till it bled—and she prayed inaudibly, but with evident desperation. Sometimes her gestures were frantic, sometimes appealing; but she made no noise that was loud enough to attract attention from any of the dwellers in the house. Her stolid features were contorted with anguish—and had she been an erring nun of the creed she held in such bitter abhorrence, who, for some untold crime, endured a self-imposed penance, she could not have punished her own flesh much more severely.

She remained some quarter of an hour or twenty minutes thus; then rising from her knees, she wiped the tears from her eyes and reclined herself, and with her usual calm, immovable aspect—though smarting sharply from the injuries she had inflicted on herself—she descended to the kitchen, there to prepare Mr. Dyceworthy's tea with all the punctilious care and nicely befitting the meal of so good a man and so perfect a saint.