

row us along, why should we take you away from your friends? I won't hear of such a thing! And now, regarding the great fall of Njedegorze: Mr. Macfarlane here says you have not visited it yet. Well, the best guide you can have there is Sigurd. We'll make up a party and go when it is agreeable to you; it is a grand sight—well worth seeing. To-morrow we shall meet again for the salmon-spearing—I warrant I shall be able to make the time pass quickly for you! How long do you think of staying here?"

"As long as possible!" answered Errington, absently, his eyes wandering to Thelma, who was just then shaking hands with his friends and bidding them farewell.

Guldmar laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "That means till you are tired of the place," he said, good-humoredly. "Well, you shall not be dull if I can prevent it! Good-bye, and thanks for your hospitality."

"Ah, yes!" added Thelma, gently, coming up at that moment and laying her soft hand in his. "I have been so happy all day, and it is all your kindness! I am very grateful!"

"It is I who have cause to be grateful," said Errington, hurriedly, clasping her hand warmly, "for your company and that of your father. I trust we shall have many more pleasant days together."

"I hope so too!" she answered, simply, and then, the boat being ready, they departed. Errington and Lorimer leaned on the deck-rails, waving their hats and watching them disappear over the gleaming water, till the very last glimpse of Thelma's crimson hood had vanished, and then they turned to rejoin their companions who were strolling up and down smoking.

"*Belle comme un ange!*" said Duprez, briefly. "In short, I doubt if the angels are so good looking!"

"The auld pagan's a fine scholar," added Macfarlane, meditatively. "He corrected me in a bit o' Latin."

"Did he, indeed?" And Lorimer laughed indolently. "I suppose you think better of him now, Sandy?"

Sandy made no reply, and as Errington persisted in turning the conversation away from the merits or demerits of their recent guest, they soon entered on other topics. But that night, before retiring to rest, Lorimer laid a hand on his friend's shoulder, and said, quietly, with a keen look:

"Well, old man, have you made up your mind? Have I seen the future Lady Bruce-Errington?"

Sir Philip smiled—then, after a brief pause, answered, steadily:

"Yes, George, you have! That is—if I can win her!"

Lorimer laughed a little and sighed. "There's no doubt about that, Phil." And eyeing Errington's fine figure and noble features musingly, he repeated again, thoughtfully: "No doubt about that,

my boy!" Then, after a pause, he said, somewhat abruptly: "Time to turn in—good-night!"

"Good-night, old fellow!" And Errington wrung his hand warmly, and left him to repose.

But Lorimer had rather a bad night—he tossed and tumbled a good deal, and had dreams—unusual visitors with him—and once or twice he muttered in his sleep: "No doubt about it—not the least in the world—and if there were——"

But the conclusion of this sentence was inaudible.

CHAPTER XI.

Tu vas faire un beau rêve,
Et t'enivrer d'un plaisir dangereux.
Sur ton chemin l'étoile qui se lève
Longtemps encore éblouira tes yeux!

DE MUSSET.

A FORTNIGHT passed. The first excursion in the "Eulalie" had been followed by others of a similar kind, and Errington's acquaintance with the Guldmars was fast ripening into a pleasant intimacy. It had grown customary for the young men to spend that part of the day which, in spite of persistent sunshine, they still called evening, in the comfortable, quaint parlor of the old farm-house—looking at the view through the rose-wreathed windows—listening to the fantastic legends of Norway as told by Olaf Guldmar—or watching Thelma's picturesque figure as she sat pensively apart in her shadowed corner spinning. They had fraternized with Sigurd too—that is, as far as he would permit them—for the unhappy dwarf was uncertain of temper, and if at one hour he were docile and yielding as a child, the next he would be found excited and furious at some imaginary slight that he fancied had been inflicted upon him. Sometimes, if good-humored, he would converse almost rationally—only allowing his fancy to play with poetical ideas concerning the sea, the flowers, or the sunlight—but he was far more often sullen and silent. He would draw a low chair to Thelma's side, and sit there with half-closed eyes and compressed lips, and none could tell whether he listened to the conversation around him, or was utterly indifferent to it. He had taken a notable fancy to Lorimer, but he avoided Errington in the most marked and persistent manner. The latter did his best to overcome this unreasonable dislike, but his efforts were useless—and deciding in his own mind that it was best to humor Sigurd's vagaries, he soon let him alone, and devoted his attention more entirely to Thelma.

One evening, after supper at the farm-house, Lorimer, who for some time had been watching Philip and Thelma conversing to-

gether in low tones near the open widow, rose from his seat quietly without disturbing the hilarity of the *bonde*, who was in the middle of a rollicking sea-story, told for Macfarlane's entertainment, and slipped out into the garden, where he strolled along rather absently till he found himself in the little close thicket of pines—the very same spot where he and Philip had stood on the first day of their visit thither. He threw himself down on the soft emerald moss and lighted a cigar, sighing rather drearily as he did so.

"Upon my life," he mused with a half smile, "I am very nearly being a hero—a regular stage-martyr—the noble creature of the piece! By Jove, I wish I were a soldier! I'm certain I could stand the enemy's fire better than this? Self-denial? Well, no wonder the preachers make such a fuss about it. It's a tough, uncomfortable duty. But am I self-denying? Not a bit of it! Look here, George Lorimer"—here he tapped himself very vigorously on his broad chest—"don't you imagine yourself to be either virtuous or magnanimous! If you were anything of a man at all you would never let your feelings get the better of you—you would be sublimely indifferent, stoically calm—and, as it is, you know what a sneaking, hang-dog state of envy you were in just now when you came out of that room! Aren't you ashamed of yourself—rascal?"

The inner self he thus addressed was most probably abashed by this adjuration, for his countenance cleared a little, as though he had received an apology from his own conscience. He puffed lazily at his cigar, and felt somewhat soothed. Light steps below him attracted his attention, and, looking down from the little knoll on which he lay, he saw Thelma and Philip pass. They were walking slowly along a little winding path that led to the orchard, which was situated at some little distance from the house. The girl's head was bent, and Philip was talking to her with evident eagerness. Lorimer looked after them earnestly, and his honest eyes were full of trouble.

"God bless them both!" he murmured, half aloud. "There's no harm in saying that, anyhow! Dear old Phil! I wonder whether——"

What he would have said was uncertain, for at that moment he was considerably startled by the sight of a meager, pale face, peering through the parted pine-boughs—a face in which two wild eyes shone with a blue-green glitter like that of newly-sharpened steel.

"Halloo, Sigurd!" said Lorimer, good-naturedly, as he recognized his visitor. "What are you up to? Going to climb a tree?"

Sigurd pushed aside the branches cautiously and approached. He sat down by Lorimer, and, taking his hand, kissed it deferentially.

"I followed you. I saw you go away to grieve alone. I came to grieve also!" he said with a patient gentleness.

Lorimer laughed languidly. "By Jove, Sigurd, you're too clever for your age! Think I came away to grieve, eh? Not so, my boy—came away to smoke! There's a come-down for you! I never grieve—don't know how to do it. What *is* grief?"

"To love!" answered Sigurd, promptly. "To see a beautiful elf with golden wings come fluttering, fluttering gently down from the sky—you open your arms to catch her—so!—and just as you think you have her, she leans only a little bit on one side and falls, not into your heart—no!—into the heart of some one else! That is grief, because, when she has gone, no more elves come down from the sky—for you, at any rate; good things may come for others—but for *you* the heavens are empty!"

Lorimer was silent, looking at the speaker curiously.

"How do you get all this nonsense into your head, eh?" he inquired, kindly.

"I do not know," replied Sigurd, with a sigh. "It comes! But, tell me"—and he smiled wistfully—"it is true, dear friend—good friend—it is all true, is it not? For you the heavens are empty? You know it!"

Lorimer flushed hotly, and then grew strangely pale. After a pause, he said, in his usual indolent way:

"Look here, Sigurd; you're romantic! I'm not. I know nothing about elves or empty heavens. I'm all right! Don't you bother yourself about me."

The dwarf studied his face attentively, and a smile of almost fiendish cunning suddenly illumined his thin features. He laid his weak-looking white hand on the young man's arm and said, in a lower tone:

"I will tell you what to do. Kill him!"

The last two words were uttered with such intensity of meaning that Lorimer positively recoiled from the accents and the terrible look which accompanied them.

"I say, Sigurd, this won't do," he remonstrated gravely. "You mustn't talk about killing, you know! It's not good for you. People don't kill each other nowadays so easily as you seem to think. It can't be done, Sigurd! Nobody wants to do it."

"It *can* be done?" reiterated the dwarf, imperatively. "It *must* be done, and either you or I will do it! He shall not rob us—he shall not steal the treasure of the golden midnight. He shall not gather the rose of all roses——"

"Stop!" said Lorimer, suddenly. "Who are you talking about?"

"Who!" cried Sigurd, excitedly. "Surely you know. Of him—that tall, proud, gray-eyed Englishman—your foe, your rival; the rich, cruel Errington——"

Lorimer's hand fell heavily on his shoulder, and his voice was very stern.

"What nonsense, Sigurd! You don't know what you are talking about to-day. Errington my foe! Good heavens! Why, he's my best friend! Do you hear?"

Sigurd stared up at him in vacant surprise, but nodded feebly.

"Well, mind you remember it! The spirits tell lies, my boy, if they say that he is my enemy. I would give my life to save his!"

He spoke quietly, and rose from his seat on the moss as he finished his words, and his face had an expression that was both noble and resolute.

Sigurd still gazed upon him. "And you—you do not love Thelma?" he murmured.

Lorimer started, but controlled himself instantly. His frank English eyes met the feverishly brilliant ones fixed so appealingly upon him.

"Certainly not!" he said, calmly, with a serene smile. "What makes you think of such a thing? Quite wrong, Sigurd—the spirits have made a mistake again! Come along—let us join the others."

But Sigurd would not accompany him. He sprung away like a frightened animal, in haste, and abruptly plunging into the depths of a wood that bordered on Olaf Guldmar's grounds, was soon lost to sight. Lorimer looked after him in a little perplexity.

"I wonder if he ever gets dangerous?" he thought. "A fellow with such queer notions might do some serious harm without meaning it. I'll keep an eye on him!"

And once or twice during that same evening he felt inclined to speak to Errington on the subject, but no suitable opportunity presented itself—and after awhile, with his habitual indolence, he partly forgot the circumstance.

On the following Sunday afternoon Thelma sat alone under the wide blossom-covered porch, reading. Her father and Sigurd—accompanied by Errington and his friends—had all gone for a mountain ramble, promising to return for supper, a substantial meal which Britta was already busy preparing. The afternoon was very warm—one of those long, lazy stretches of heat and brilliancy in which Nature herself seems to have lain down to rest like a child tired of play, sleeping in the sunshine with drooping flowers in her hands. The very ripple of the stream seemed hushed, and Thelma, though her eyes were bent seriously on the book she held, sighed once or twice heavily as though she were tired. There was a change in the girl—an undefinable something seemed to have passed over her and toned down the redundant brightness of her beauty. She was paler, and there were darker shadows than usual under the splendor of her eyes. Her very attitude, as she leaned her head against the dark, fantastic carving of the porch, had a touch of listlessness and indifference in it; her sweetly arched lips drooped with a plaintive little line at the corners, and her whole air was indicative of fatigue mingled with sadness.

She looked up now and then from the printed page, and her gaze wandered over the stretch of the scented, flower-filled garden to the little silvery glimmer of the fjord, from whence arose, like delicate black streaks against the sky, the slender masts of the "Eulalie"—and then she would resume her reading with a slight movement of impatience.

The volume she held was Victor Hugo's "Orientales," and though her sensitive imagination delighted in poetry as much as in sunshine, she found it for once hard to rivet her attention as closely as she wished to do on the exquisite wealth of language and glow of color that distinguishes the writings of the Shakespeare of France. Within the house Britta was singing cheerily at her work, and the sound of her song alone disturbed the silence. Two or three pale-blue butterflies danced drowsily in and out a cluster of honeysuckle that trailed downward, nearly touching Thelma's shoulder, and a diminutive black kitten, with a pink ribbon round its neck, sat gravely on the garden path, washing its face within its tiny velvety paws in that deliberate and precise fashion common to the spoiled and petted members of its class. Everything was still and peaceful as became a Sunday afternoon—so that when the sound of a heavy, advancing footstep disturbed the intense calm, the girl was almost nervously startled, and rose from her seat with so much precipitation that the butterflies, who had possibly been considering whether her hair might not be some new sort of sunflower, took fright and flew far upward, and the demure kitten, scared out of its absurd self-consciousness, scrambled hastily up the nearest little tree. The intruder on the quietude of Guldmar's domain was the Rev. Mr. Dyceworthy—and as Thelma, standing erect in the porch, beheld him coming, her face grew stern and resolute, and her eyes flashed disdainfully.

Ignoring the repellent, almost defiant dignity of the girl's attitude, Mr. Dyceworthy advanced, rather out of breath and somewhat heated, and smiling benevolently, nodded his head by way of greeting, without removing his hat.

"Ah, Froken Thelma!" he observed, condescendingly. "And how are you to-day? You look remarkably well—remarkably so, indeed!" And he eyed her with mild approval.

"I am well, I thank you," she returned, quietly. "My father is not in, Mr. Dyceworthy."

The Reverend Charles wiped his hot face, and his smile grew wider.

"What matter?" he inquired, blandly. "We shall, no doubt, entertain ourselves excellently without him! It is with you alone, Froken, that I am desirous to hold converse."

And, without waiting for her permission, he entered the porch and settled himself comfortably on the bench opposite to her, heaving a sigh of relief as he did so. Thelma remained standing,

and the Lutheran minister's covetous eye glanced greedily over the sweeping curves of her queenly figure, the dazzling whiteness of her slim, arched throat, and the glitter of her rich hair. She was silent—and there was something in her manner as she confronted him that made it difficult for Mr. Dyceworthy to speak. He hummed and hawed several times, and settled his stiff collar once or twice as though it hurt him; finally he said, with an evident effort:

"I have found a—a—trinket of yours—a trifling toy which, perhaps, you would be glad to have again." And he drew carefully out of his waistcoat pocket a small parcel wrapped up in tissue-paper, which he undid with his fat fingers, thus displaying the little crucifix he had kept so long in his possession. "Concerning this," he went on, holding it up before her, "I am grievously troubled—and would fain say a few necessary words—"

She interrupted him, reaching out her hand for the cross as she spoke.

"That was my mother's crucifix," she said, in solemn, infinitely tender accents, with a mist as of unshed tears in her sweet blue eyes. "It was round her neck when she died. I knew I had lost it, and was very unhappy about it. I do thank you with all my heart for bringing it back to me!"

And the hauteur of her face relaxed, and her smile—that sudden sweet smile of hers—shone forth like a gleam of sunshine athwart a cloud.

Mr. Dyceworthy's breath came and went with curious rapidity. His visage grew pale, and a clammy dew broke out upon his forehead. He took the hand she held out—a fair, soft hand with a pink palm like an upcurled shell—and laid the little cross within it, and still retaining his hold of her, he stammeringly observed:

"Then we are friends, Froken Thelma!—good friends, I hope?"

She withdrew her fingers quickly from his hot, moist clasp, and her bright smile vanished.

"I do not see that at all!" she replied, frigidly. "Friendship is very rare. To be friends, one must have similar tastes and sympathies—many things which we have not—and which we shall never have. I am slow to call any person my friend."

Mr. Dyceworthy's small, pursy mouth drew itself into a tight, thin line.

"Except," he said, with a suave sneer, "except when 'any person' happens to be a rich Englishman with a handsome face and easy manners!—then you are not slow to make friends, Froken—on the contrary, you are remarkably quick!"

The cold, haughty stare with which the girl favored him might have frozen a less conceited man to a pillar of ice.

"What do you mean?" she asked, abruptly, and with an air of surprise.

The minister's little ferret-like eyes dropped under their puffy lids, and he fidgeted on the seat with uncomfortable embarrassment. He answered her in the mildest of mild voices.

"You are unlike yourself, my dear Froken!" he said, with a soothing gesture of one of his well-trimmed white hands. "You are generally frank and open, but to-day I find you just a little—well!—what shall I say—secretive? Yes, we will call it secretive! Oh, fy!" and Mr. Dyceworthy laughed a gentle little laugh; "you must not pretend ignorance of what I mean! All the neighborhood is talking of you and the gentleman you are so often seen with. Notably concerning Sir Philip Errington—the evil tongue of rumor is busy—for, according to his first plans, when his yacht arrived here, he was bound for the North Cape—and should have gone there days ago. Truly, I think—and there are others who think also in the same spirit of interest for you—that the sooner this young man leaves our peaceful fjord the better—and the less he has to do with the maidens of the district, the safer we shall be from the risk of scandal." And he heaved a pious sigh.

Thelma turned her eyes upon him in wonderment.

"I do not understand you," she said, coldly. "Why do you speak of *others*? No others are interested in what I do. Why should they be? Why should *you* be? There is no need!"

Mr. Dyceworthy grew slightly excited. He felt like a runner nearing the winning-post.

"Oh, you wrong yourself, my dear Froken," he murmured, softly, with a sickly attempt at tenderness in his tone. "You really wrong yourself! It is impossible—for me, at least—not to be interested in you—even for our dear Lord's sake. It troubles me to the inmost depths of my soul to behold in you one of the foolish virgins whose light hath been extinguished for lack of the saving oil—to see you wandering as a lost sheep in the paths of darkness and error, without a hand to rescue your steps from the near and dreadful precipice! Ay, truly! my spirit yearneth for you as a mother for an own babe—fain would I save you from the devices of the Evil One—fain would I—" here the minister drew out his handkerchief and pressed it lightly to his eyes—then, as if with an effort, overcoming his emotion, he added, with the gravity of a butcher presenting an extortionate bill, "But first—before my own humble desires for your salvation—first, ere I go further in converse, it behoveth me to enter on the Lord's business!"

Thelma bent her head slightly, with an air as though she said: "Indeed; pray do not be long about it!" And, leaning back against the porch, she waited somewhat impatiently.

"The image I have just restored to you," went on Mr. Dyceworthy, in his most pompous and ponderous manner, "you say belonged to your unhappy mother—"

"She was not unhappy," interposed she girl, calmly.

"Ay, ay!" and the minister nodded with a superior air of wisdom. "So you imagine, so you think—you must have been too young to judge of these things. She died—"

"I saw her die," again she interrupted, with a musing tenderness in her voice. "She smiled and kissed me—then she laid her thin white hand on this crucifix, and, closing her eyes, she went to sleep. They told me it was death; since then I have known that death is beautiful!"

Mr. Dyceworthy coughed—a little cough of quiet incredulity. He was not fond of sentiment in any form, and the girl's dreamy, pensive manner annoyed him. Death "beautiful"? Faugh! it was the one thing of all others that he dreaded; it was an unpleasant necessity concerning which he thought as little as possible. Though he preached frequently on the peace of the grave and the joys of heaven, he was far from believing in either—he was nervously terrified of illness, and fled like a frightened hare from the very rumor of any infectious disorder, and he had never been known to attend a death-bed. And now, in answer to Thelma, he nodded piously and rubbed his hands, and said:

"Yes, yes; no doubt, no doubt! All very proper on your part, I am sure! But concerning this same image of which I came to speak—it is most imperative that you should be brought to recognize it as a purely carnal object, unfitting a maiden's eyes to rest upon. The true followers of the Gospel are those who strive to forget the sufferings of our dear Lord as much as possible—or to think of them only in spirit. The minds of sinners, alas! are easily influenced—and it is both unseemly and dangerous to gaze freely upon the carved semblance of the Lord's limbs! Yea, truly, it hath oft been considered as damnatory to the soul—more especially in the cases of women immured as nuns, who encourage themselves in an undue familiarity with our Lord, by gazing long and earnestly upon his body nailed to the accursed tree."

Here Mr. Dyceworthy paused for breath. Thelma was silent, but a faint smile gleamed on her face.

"Wherefore," he went on, "I do adjure you, as you desire grace and redemption, to utterly cast from you the vile trinket, I have—Heaven knows how reluctantly!—returned to your keeping—to trample upon it, and renounce it as a device of Satan—" He stopped, surprised and indignant, as she raised the much-abused emblem to her lips and kissed it reverently.

"It is the sign of peace and salvation," she said, steadily; "to me, at least. You waste your words, Mr. Dyceworthy; I am a Catholic."

"Oh, say not so!" exclaimed the minister, now thoroughly roused to a pitch of unctuous enthusiasm. "Say not so! Poor child! who knowest not the meaning of the word used. Catholic signifies universal. God forbid a universal papacy! You are not

Catholic—no! You are a Roman—by which name we understand all that is most loathsome and displeasing unto God! But I will wrestle for your soul—yea, night and day will I bend my spiritual sinews to the task—I will obtain the victory—I will exorcise the fiend! Alas, alas! you are on the brink of hell—think of it!" and Mr. Dyceworthy stretched out his hand with his favorite pulpit gesture. "Think of the roasting and burning—the scorching and withering of souls! Imagine, if you can, the hopeless, bitter, eternal damnation"—and here he smacked his lips as though he were tasting something excellent—"from which there is no escape!—for which there shall be no remedy!"

"It is a gloomy picture," said Thelma, with a quiet sparkle in her eye. "I am sorry—for *you*. But I am happier—my faith teaches of purgatory—there is always a little hope!"

"There is none, there is none!" exclaimed the minister, rising in excitement from his seat, and swaying ponderously to and fro as he gesticulated with hands and head. "You are doomed—doomed! There is no middle course between hell and heaven. It must be one thing or the other; God deals not in half-measures! Pause, oh, pause! ere you decide to fall! Even at the latest hour the Lord desires to save your soul—the Lord yearns for your redemption, and maketh me to yearn also. Froken Thelma!" and Mr. Dyceworthy's voice deepened in solemnity, "there is a way which the Lord hath whispered in mine ears—a way that pointeth to the white robe and the crown of glory—a way by which you shall possess the inner peace of the heart with bliss on earth as the forerunner of bliss in heaven!"

She looked at him steadfastly. "And that way is—what?" she inquired.

Mr. Dyceworthy hesitated, and wished with all his heart that this girl was not so thoroughly self-possessed. Any sign of timidity in her would have given him an increase of hardihood. But her eyes were coldly brilliant, and glanced him over without the smallest embarrassment. He took refuge in his never-failing remedy, his benevolent smile—a smile that covered a multitude of hypocrisies.

"You ask a plain question, Froken," he said, sweetly, "and I should be loath not to give you a plain answer. That way—that glorious way of salvation for you is—through *me*!"

And his countenance shone with smug self-satisfaction as he spoke, and he repeated, softly: "Yes, yes; that way is through *me*!"

She moved with a slight gesture of impatience. "It is a pity to talk any more," she said, rather wearily. "It is all no use! Why do you wish to change me in my religion? I do not wish to change *you*. I do not see why we should speak of such things at all."

"Of course!" replied Mr. Dyceworthy, blandly. "Of course you do not see. And why? Because you are blind." Here he

drew a little nearer to her, and looked covetously at the curve of her full, firm waist.

"Oh, why!" he resumed in a sort of rapture—"why should we say it is a pity to talk any more? Why should we say it is all no use? It *is* of use—it is noble, it is edifying to converse of the Lord's good pleasure! And what is His good pleasure at this moment? To unite two souls in His service! Yea, He hath turned my desire toward you, Froken Thelma—even as Jacob's desire was toward Rachel! Let me see this hand." He made a furtive grab at the white taper fingers that played listlessly with the jasmine leaves on the porch, but the girl dexterously withdrew them from his clutch and moved a little further back, her face flushing proudly. "Oh, will it not come to me? Cruel hand!" and he rolled his little eyes with an absurdly sentimental air of reproach. "It is shy—it will not clasp the hand of its protector! Do not be afraid, Froken!—I, Charles Dyceworthy, am not the man to trifle with your young affections! Let them rest where they have flown! I accept them! Yea! in spite of wrath and error and moral destitution—my spirit inclineth toward you—in the language of carnal men, I love you! More than this, I am willing to take you as my lawful wife—"

He broke off abruptly, somewhat startled at the bitter scorn of the flashing eyes that, like two quivering stars, were blazing upon him. Her voice, clear as a bell ringing in frosty air, cut through the silence like the sweep of a sword-blade.

"How dare you!" she said, with a wrathful thrill in her low, intense tones. "How dare you come here to insult me!"

Insult her! He—the Reverend Charles Dyceworthy—considered guilty of insult in offering honorable marriage to a mere farmer's daughter! He could not believe his own ears—and in his astonishment he looked up at her. Looking, he recoiled and shrunk into himself, like a convicted knave before some queenly accuser. The whole form of the girl seemed to dilate with indignation. From her proud mouth, arched like a bow, sprung barbed arrows of scorn that flew straightly and struck home.

"Always I have guessed what you wanted," she went on, in that deep, vibrating tone which had such a rich quiver of anger within it; "but I never thought you would—" She paused, and a little disdainful laugh broke from her lips. "You would make *me* your wife—*me*? You think *me* likely to accept such an offer?" And she drew herself up with a superb gesture, and regarded him fixedly.

"Oh, pride, pride!" murmured the unabashed Dyceworthy, recovering from the momentary abasement into which he had been thrown by her look and manner. "How it overcometh our natures and mastereth our spirit! My dear, my dearest Froken—I fear you do not understand me! Yet it is natural that you should

not; you were not prepared for the offer of my—my affections"—and he beamed all over with benevolence—"and I can appreciate a maidenly and becoming coyness, even though it assume the form of a repellent and unreasonable anger. But take courage, my—my dear girl!—our Lord forbid that I should wantonly play with the delicate emotions of your heart! Poor little heart! does it flutter?" and Mr. Dyceworthy leered sweetly. "I will give it time to recover itself? Yes, yes! a little time! and then you will put that pretty hand in mine"—here he drew nearer to her, "and with one kiss we will seal the compact!"

And he attempted to steal his arm round her waist, but the girl sprung back indignantly, and pulling down a thick branch of the clambering prickly roses from the porch, held it in front of her by way of protection. Mr. Dyceworthy laughed indulgently.

"Very pretty—very pretty indeed!" he mildly observed, eying her as she stood at bay barricaded by the roses. "Quite a picture! There, there! do not be frightened—such shyness is very natural! We will embrace in the Lord another day! In the meantime one little word—the word—will suffice me—yea, even one little smile—to show me that you understand my words—that you love me" here he clasped his plump hands together in flabby ecstasy—"even as you are loved!"

His absurd attitude—the weak, knock-kneed manner in which his clumsy legs seemed, from the force of sheer sentiment, to bend under his weighty body, and the inanely amatory expression of his puffy countenance, would have excited most women to laughter—and Thelma was perfectly conscious of his utterly ridiculous appearance, but she was too thoroughly indignant to take the matter in a humorous light.

"Love you!" she exclaimed, with a movement of irrepressible loathing. "You must be mad! I would rather die than marry you!"

Mr. Dyceworthy's face grew livid and his little eyes sparkled vindictively; but he restrained his inward rage, and merely smiled, rubbing his hands softly one against the other.

"Let us be calm!" he said, soothingly. "Whatever we do, let us be calm! Let us not provoke one another to wrath! Above all things, let us, in a spirit of charity and patience, reason out this matter without undue excitement. My ears have most painfully heard your last words, which, taken literally, might mean that you reject my honorable offer. The question is, *do* you mean this? I cannot—I will not believe that you would foolishly stand in the way of your own salvation"—and he shook his head with doleful gentleness. "Moreover, Froken Thelma, though it sorely distresses me to speak of it—it is my duty, as a minister of the Lord, to remind you that an honest marriage—a marriage of virtue and respectability such as I propose, is the only way to restore your reputation—which, alas! is sorely damaged, and—"

Mr. Dyceworthy stopped abruptly, a little alarmed, as she suddenly cast aside her barrier of roses and advanced toward him, her blue eyes blazing.

"My reputation!" she said, haughtily. "Who speaks of it?"

"Oh, dear, dear me!" moaned the minister, pathetically. "Sad!—very sad—to see so ungovernable a temper—so wild and untrained a disposition! Alas, alas! how frail we are without the Lord's support—without the strong staff of the Lord's mercy to lean upon! Not I, my poor child, not I, but the whole village speaks of you; to you the ignorant people attribute all the sundry evils that of late have fallen sorely upon them—bad harvests, ill-luck with the fishing, poverty, sickness"—here Mr. Dyceworthy pressed the tips of his fingers delicately together, and looked at her with a benevolent compassion—"and they call it a witchcraft—yes! strange, very strange! But so it is—ignorant as they are, such ignorance is not easily enlightened—and though I," he sighed, "have done my poor best to disabuse their minds of the suspicions against you, I find it is a matter in which I, though an humble mouthpiece of the Gospel, am powerless—quite powerless!"

She relaxed her defiant attitude, and moved away from him; the shadow of a smile was on her lips.

"It is not my fault if the people are foolish," she said, coldly; "I have never done harm to any one that I know of." And turning abruptly, she seemed about to enter the house, but the minister dexterously placed himself in her way, and barred her passage.

"Stay, oh stay!" he exclaimed, with unctuous fervor. "Pause, unfortunate girl, ere you reject the strong shield and buckler that the Lord has, in His great mercy, offered you in my person! For I must warn you—Froken Thelma, I must warn you seriously of the danger you run! I will not pain you by referring to the grave charges brought against your father, who is, alas! in spite of my spiritual wrestling with the Lord for his sake, still no better than a heathen savage; no! I will say nothing of this. But what—what shall I say"—here he lowered his voice to a tone of mysterious and weighty reproach—"what shall I say of your most unseemly and indiscreet companionship with these worldly young men who are visiting the fjord for their idle pastime? Ah, dear, dear! This is indeed a heavy scandal and a sore burden to my soul—for up to this time I have, in spite of many faults in your disposition, considered you were at least of a most maidenly and decorous deportment—but now—now! to think that you should, of your own free will and choice, consent to be the plaything of this idle stroller from the wicked haunts of fashion—the hour's toy of this Sir Philip Errington! Froken Thelma, I would never have believed it of you!" And he drew himself up with ponderous and sorrowful dignity.

A burning blush had covered Thelma's face at the mention of

Errington's name, but it soon faded, leaving her very pale. She changed her position so that she confronted Mr. Dyceworthy—her clear blue eyes regarded him steadfastly.

"Is this what is said of me?" she asked, calmly.

"It is—it is, most unfortunately!" returned the minister, shaking his bullet-like head a great many times; then, with a sort of elephantine cheerfulness, he added: "But what matter? There is time to remedy these things. I am willing to set myself as a strong barrier against the evil noises of rumor! Am I selfish or ungenerous? The Lord forbid it! No matter how I am compromised, no matter how I am misjudged—I am still willing to take you as my lawful wife, Froken Thelma—but," and here he shook his forefinger at her with a pretended playfulness, "I will permit no more converse with Sir Philip Errington; no, no! I cannot allow it!—I cannot, indeed!"

She still looked straight at him—her bosom rose and fell rapidly with her passionate breath, and there was such an eloquent breath of scorn in her face that he winced under it as though struck by a sharp scourge.

"You are not worth my anger," she said, slowly, this time without a tremor in her rich voice. "One must have something to be angry with, and you—you are nothing! Neither man nor beast—for men are brave, and beasts tell no lies! Your wife! I!" and she laughed aloud—then with a gesture of command: "Go!" she exclaimed, "and never let me see your face again!"

The clear, scornful laughter—the air of absolute authority with which she spoke—would have stung the most self-opinionated of men, even though his conscience were enveloped in a moral leather casing of hypocrisy and arrogance. And, notwithstanding his invariable air of mildness, Mr. Dyceworthy had a temper. That temper rose to a white heat just now—every drop of blood receded from his countenance—and his soft hands clinched themselves in a particularly ugly and threatening manner. Yet he managed to preserve his suave composure.

"Alas, alas!" he murmured. "How sorely my soul is afflicted to see you thus, Froken! I am amazed—I am distressed! Such language from your lips! oh, fy, fy! And has it come to this! And must I resign the hope I had of saving your poor soul? and must I withdraw my spiritual protection from you?" This he asked with a suggestive sneer on his prim mouth—and then continued: "I must—alas, I must! My conscience will not permit me to do more than pray for you! And as is my duty, I shall, in a spirit of forbearance and charity, speak warningly to Sir Philip concerning—"

But Thelma did not permit him to finish his sentence. She sprung forward like a young leopardess, and with a magnificent outward sweep of her arm motioned him down the garden path.

"Out of my sight—*coward!*" she cried, and then stood waiting for him to obey her, her whole frame vibrating with indignation like a harp struck too roughly. She looked so terribly beautiful, and there was such a suggestive power in that extended bare white arm of hers, that the minister, though quaking from head to heel with disappointment and resentment, judged it prudent to leave her.

"Certainly, I will take my departure, Froken!" he said, meekly, while his teeth glimmered wolfishly through his pale lips, in a snarl more than a smile. "It is best you should be alone to recover yourself—from this—this undue excitement! I shall not repeat my—my—offer; but I am sure your good sense will—in time—show you how very unjust and hasty you have been in this matter—and—and you will be sorry! Yes, indeed! I am quite sure you will be sorry! I wish you good-day, Froken Thelma!"

She made him no reply, and he turned from the house and left her, strolling down the flower-bordered path as though he were in the best of all possible moods with himself and the universe. But, in truth, he muttered a heavy oath under his breath—an oath that was by no means in keeping with his godly and peaceful disposition. Once, as he walked, he looked back, and saw the woman he coveted now more than ever, standing erect in the porch, tall, fair, and royal in her attitude, looking like some proud empress who had just dismissed an unworthy vassal. A farmer's daughter! and she had refused Mr. Dyceworthy with disdain! He had much ado to prevent himself shaking his fist at her!

"The lofty shall be laid low, and the stiff-necked shall be humbled," he thought, as with a vicious switch of his stick he struck off a fragrant head of purple clover. "Conceited fool of a girl! Hopes to be 'my lady,' does she? She had better take care!"

Here he stopped abruptly in his walk as if a thought had struck him—a malignant joy sparkled in his eyes, and he flourished his stick triumphantly in the air. "I'll have her yet!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "I'll set Lovisa on her!" And his countenance cleared; he quickened his pace like a man having some pressing business to fulfill, and was soon in his boat, rowing toward Bosekop with unaccustomed speed and energy.

Meanwhile Thelma stood motionless where he had left her; she watched the retreating form of her portly suitor till he had altogether disappeared, then she pressed one hand on her bosom, sighed, and laughed a little. Glancing at the crucifix so lately restored to her, she touched it with her lips and fastened it to a small silver chain she wore, and then a shadow crept over her fair face that made it strangely sad and weary. Her lips quivered pathetically; she shaded her eyes with her curved fingers as though the sunlight hurt her—then with faltering steps she turned away from the

warm stretch of garden, brilliant with blossom, and entered the house. There was a sense of outrage and insult upon her, and though in her soul she treated Mr. Dyceworthy's observations with the contempt they deserved, his coarse allusion to Sir Philip Errington had wounded her more than she cared to admit to herself.

Once in the quiet sitting-room, she threw herself on her knees by her father's arm-chair, and laying her proud little golden head down on her folded arms, she broke into a passion of silent tears.

Who shall unravel the mystery of a woman's weeping? Who shall declare whether it is a pain or a relief to the over-charged heart! The dignity of a crowned queen is capable of utterly dissolving and disappearing in a shower of tears, when Love's burning finger touches her pulse and marks its slow or rapid beatings. And Thelma wept as many of her sex weep, without knowing why, save that all suddenly she felt herself most lonely and forlorn like Sainte Beuve's—

"Colombe gémissante,
Qui demande par pitié
Sa moitié,
Sa moitié loin d'elle absente!"

CHAPTER XII.

A wicked will,
A woman's will; a cankered grandam's will!"

King John.

"By Jove!"

And Lorimer, after uttering this unmeaning exclamation, was silent out of sheer dismay. He stood hesitating and looking in at the door of the Guldmar's sitting-room, and the alarming spectacle he saw was the queenly Thelma down on the floor in an attitude of grief—Thelma giving way to little smothered sobs of distress—Thelma actually crying! He drew a long breath and stared, utterly bewildered. It was a sight for which he was unprepared—he was not accustomed to women's tears. What should he do? Should he cough gently to attract her attention, or should he retire on tiptoe and leave her to indulge her grief as long as she would, without making any attempt to console her? The latter course seemed almost brutal, yet he was nearly deciding upon it, when a slight creak of the door against which he leaned caused her to look up suddenly. Seeing him, she rose quickly from her desponding position and faced him, her cheeks somewhat deeply flushed and her eyes glittering feverishly.

"Mr. Lorimer!" she exclaimed, forcing a faint smile to her quivering lips. "You here? Why, where are the others?"

"They are coming on after me," replied Lorimer, advancing