

"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

into the room and diplomatically ignoring the girl's efforts to hide the tears that still threatened to have their way. "But I was sent in advance to tell you not to be frightened. There has been a slight accident—"

She grew very pale. "Is it my father?" she asked, tremblingly. "Sir Philip—"

"No, no!" answered Lorimer, reassuringly. "It is nothing serious, really, upon my honor! Your father's all right—so is Phil—our lively friend Pierre is the victim. The fact is, we've had some trouble with Sigurd. I can't think what has come to the boy! He was as amiable as possible when we started, but after we had climbed about half-way up the mountain, he took it into his head to throw stones about rather recklessly. It was only fun, he said. Your father tried to make him leave off, but he was obstinate. At last, in a particularly bright access of playfulness, he got hold of a large flint and nearly put Phil's eye out with it—Phil dodged it, and it flew straight at Duprez, splitting open his cheek in rather an unbecoming fashion— Don't look so horrified, Miss Guldmar—it is really nothing!"

"Oh, but indeed it is something!" she said, with true womanly anxiety in her voice. "Poor fellow! I am so sorry! Is he much hurt? Does he suffer?"

"Pierre? Oh, no, not a bit of it! He's as jolly as possible! We bandaged him up in a very artistic fashion; he looks quite interesting, I assure you. His beauty's spoiled for a time, that's all. Phil thought you might be alarmed when you saw us bringing home the wounded—that is why I came on to tell you all about it."

"But what can be the matter with Sigurd?" asked the girl, raising her hand furtively to dash off a few tear-drops that still hung on her long lashes. "And where is he?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you!" answered Lorimer. "He is perfectly incomprehensible to-day. As soon as he saw the blood flowing from Duprez's cheek, he uttered a howl as if some one had shot him, and away he rushed into the woods as fast as he could go. We called him, and shouted his name till we were hoarse—all no use! He wouldn't come back. I suppose he'll find his way home by himself?"

"Oh, yes," said Thelma, gravely. "But when he comes I will scold him very much! It is not like him to be so wild and cruel. He will understand me when I tell him how wrong he has been."

"Oh, don't break his heart, poor little chap!" said Lorimer, easily. "Your father has given him a terrible scolding already. He hasn't got his wits about him, you know—he can't help being queer sometimes. But what have *you* been doing with yourself during our absence?" And he regarded her with friendly scrutiny. "You were crying when I came in. Now, weren't you?"

She met his gaze quite frankly. "Yes!" she replied, with a plaintive thrill in her voice. "I could not help it! My heart ached and the tears came. Somehow I felt that everything was wrong—and that it was all my fault—"

"Your fault!" murmured Lorimer, astonished. "My dear Miss Guldmar, what do you mean? What *is* your fault?"

"Everything!" she answered, sadly, with a deep sigh. "I am very foolish; and I am sure I often do wrong without meaning it. Mr. Dyceworthy has been here and—" she stopped abruptly, and a wave of color flushed her face.

Lorimer laughed lightly. "Dyceworthy!" he exclaimed. "The mystery is explained! You have been bored by 'the good religious,' as Pierre calls him. You know what *boring* means now, Miss Guldmar, don't you?" She smiled slightly, and nodded. "The first time you visited the 'Eulalie,' you didn't understand the word, I remember—ah!" and he shook his head—"if you were in London society, you'd find that expression very convenient—it would come to your lips pretty frequently, I can tell you!"

"I shall never see London," she said, with a sort of resigned air. "You will all go away very soon, and I—I shall be lonely—"

She bit her lips in quick vexation, as her blue eyes filled again with tears in spite of herself.

Lorimer turned away and pulled a chair to the open window.

"Come and sit down here," he said, invitingly. "We shall be able to see the others coming down the hill. Nothing like fresh air for blowing away the blues." Then, as she obeyed him, he added: "What has Dyceworthy been saying to you?"

"He told me I was wicked," she murmured, "and that all the people here think very badly of me. But that was not the worst"—and a little shudder passed over her—"there was something else—something that made me very angry—so angry!"—and here she raised her eyes with a gravely penitent air—"Mr. Lorimer, I do not think I have ever had so bad and fierce a temper before!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lorimer, with a broad smile. "You alarm me, Miss Guldmar! I had no idea you were a 'bad, fierce' person—I shall get afraid of you—I shall really!"

"Ah, you laugh!" and she spoke half reproachfully. "You will not be serious for one little moment!"

"Yes, I will! Now look at me," and he assumed a solemn expression, and drew himself up with an air of dignity. "I am all attention! Consider me your father-confessor, Miss Guldmar, and explain the reason of this 'bad, fierce' temper of yours."

She peeped at him shyly from under her silken lashes.

"It is more dreadful than you think," she answered, in a low tone. "Mr. Dyceworthy asked me to marry him."

Lorimer's keen eyes flashed with indignation. This was beyond a jest—and he clinched his fist as he exclaimed:

"Impudent donkey! What a jolly good thrashing he deserves!—and I shouldn't be surprised if he got it one of these days! And so, Miss Guldmar"—and he studied her face with some solicitude—"you were very angry with him?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied, "but when I told him he was a coward, and that he must go away, he said some very cruel things—" she stopped, and blushed deeply; then, as if seized by some sudden impulse, she laid her small hand on Lorimer's, and said, in the tone of an appealing child: "You are very good and kind to me, and you are clever—you know so much more than I do! You must help me—you will tell me, will you not, if it is wrong of me to like you all? It is as if we had known each other a long time, and I have been very happy with you and your friends. But you must teach me to behave like the girls you have seen in London—for I could not bear that Sir Philip should think me wicked!"

"Wicked!" and Lorimer drew a long breath. "Good heavens! If you knew what Phil's ideas about you are, Miss Guldmar—"

"I do not wish to know," interrupted Thelma, steadily. "You must quite understand me—I am not clever to hide my thoughts, and—and—you are glad when you talk sometimes to Sir Philip, are you not?" He nodded, gravely studying every light and shadow on the fair, upturned, innocent face.

"Yes!" she continued, with some eagerness, "I see you are! Well, it is the same thing with me—I do love to hear him speak! You know how his voice is like music, and how his kind ways warm the heart—it is pleasant to be in his company—I am sure you also find it so! But for me—it seems it is wrong—it is not wise for me to show when I am happy. I do not care what other people say—but I would not have *him* think ill of me for all the world!"

Lorimer took her hand and held it in his with a most tender loyalty and respect. Her naïve, simple words had, all unconsciously to herself, laid bare the secret of her soul to his eyes—and though his heart beat with a strange sickening sense of unrest that flavored of despair, a gentle reverence filled him, such as a man might feel if some little snow-white shrine, sacred to purity and peace, should be suddenly unveiled before him.

"My dear Miss Guldmar," he said, earnestly, "I assure you, you have no cause to be uneasy! You must not believe a word Dyceworthy says—every one with a grain of commonsense can see what a liar and hypocrite he is! And as for you, you never do anything wrong—don't imagine such nonsense! I wish there were more women like you!"

"Ah, that is very kind of you!" half laughed the girl, still allowing her hand to rest in his. "But I do not think everybody would have such a good opinion." They both started, and their hands fell asunder as a shadow darkened the room, and Sir Philip stood before them.

"Excuse me!" he said, stiffly, lifting his hat with ceremonious politeness. "I ought to have knocked at the door—I—"

"Why?" asked Thelma, raising her eyebrows in surprise.

"Yes—why, indeed?" echoed Lorimer, with a frank look at his friend.

"I am afraid"—and for once the generally good-humored Errington looked positively petulant—"I am afraid I interrupted a pleasant conversation!" And he gave a little, forced laugh of feigned amusement, but evident vexation.

"And if it was pleasant, shall you not make it still more so?" asked Thelma, with timid and bewitching sweetness, though her heart beat very fast—she was anxious. Why was Sir Philip so cold and distant? He looked at her, and his pent-up passion leaped to his eyes and filled them with a glowing and fiery tenderness—her head drooped suddenly, and she turned quickly to avoid that searching, longing gaze. Lorimer glanced from one to the other with a slight feeling of amusement.

"Well, Phil," he inquired, lazily, "how did you get here so soon? You must have glided into the garden like a ghost, for I never heard you coming."

"So I imagine!" retorted Errington, with an effort to be sarcastic, in which he utterly failed as he met his friend's eyes—then after a slight and somewhat embarrassed pause he added, more mildly: "Duprez cannot get on very fast—his wound still bleeds, and he feels rather faint now and then. I don't think we bandaged him up properly, and I came on to see if Britta could prepare something for him."

"But you will not need to ask, Britta," said Thelma, quietly, with a pretty air of authority, "for I shall myself do all for Mr. Duprez. I understand well how to cure his wound, and I do think he will like me as well as Britta." And, hearing footsteps approaching, she looked out at the window. "Here they come!" she exclaimed. "Ah, poor Monsieur Pierre! he does look very pale; I will go and meet them."

And she hurried from the room, leaving the two young men together. Errington threw himself into Olaf Guldmar's great arm-chair with a slight sigh.

"Well?" said Lorimer, inquiringly.

"Well!" he returned, somewhat gruffly.

Lorimer laughed, and crossing the room, approached him and clapped a hand on his shoulder.

"Look here, old man!" he said, earnestly, "don't be a fool! I know that 'love maketh men mad,' but I never supposed the lunacy would lead you to the undesirable point of distrusting your friend—your true friend, Phil—by all the gods of the past and present!"

And he laughed again—a little huskily this time, for there was

a sudden, unaccountable and unwashed-for lump in his throat, and a moisture in his eyes which he had not bargained for. Philip looked up, and silently held out his hand, which Lorimer as silently clasped. There was a moment's hesitation, and then the young baronet spoke out manfully,

"I'm ashamed of myself, George! I really am! But I tell you, when I came in and saw you two standing there—you've no idea what a picture you made!—by Jove! I was furious!" And he smiled. "I suppose I was jealous!"

"I suppose you were!" returned Lorimer, amusedly. "Novel sensation, isn't it? A sort of hot, prickly, 'have-at-thee-villain' sort of thing; must be frightfully exhausting! But why you should indulge this emotion at my expense is what I cannot, for the life of me, understand!"

"Well," murmured Errington, rather abashed, "you see, her hands were in yours—"

"As they will be again, and yet again, I trust!" said Lorimer, with cheery fervor. "Surely you'll allow me to shake hands with your wife?"

"I say, George, be quiet!" exclaimed Philip, warningly, as at that moment Thelma passed the window with Pierre Duprez leaning on her arm, and her father and Macfarlane following.

She entered the room with the stately step of a young queen—her tall, beautiful figure forming a strong contrast to that of the narrow-shouldered little Frenchman, upon whom she smiled down with an air of almost maternal protection.

"You will sit here, Monsieur Duprez," she said, leading him to the *bonde's* arm-chair which Errington instantly vacated, "and father will bring you a good glass of wine. And the pain will be nothing when I have attended to that cruel wound. But I am so sorry—so very sorry, to see you suffer!"

Pierre did indeed present rather a dismal spectacle. There was a severe cut on his forehead as well as his cheek; his face was pale and streaked with blood, while the hastily-improvised bandages which were tied under his chin by no means improved his personal appearance. His head ached with the pain, and his eyes smarted with the strong sunlight to which he had been exposed all the day, but his natural gayety was undiminished, and he laughed as he answered:

"*Chère mademoiselle*, you are too good to me! It is a piece of good fortune that Sigurd threw that stone—yes! since it brings me your pity! But do not trouble; a little cold water and a fresh handkerchief is all I need."

But Thelma was already practicing her own simple surgery for his benefit. With deft, soft fingers she laid bare the throbbing wound—washed and dressed it carefully and skillfully—and used, withal, such exceeding gentleness that Duprez closed his eyes in

a sort of rapture during the operation, and wished it could last longer. Then taking the glass of wine her father brought in obedience to her order, she said, in a tone of mild authority:

"Now, you will drink this, Monsieur Pierre, and you will rest quite still till it is time to go back to the yacht; and to-morrow you will not feel any pain, I am sure. And I do think it will not be an ugly scar for long."

"If it is," answered Pierre, "I shall say I received it in a duel! Then I shall be great—glorious!—and all the pretty ladies will love me!"

She laughed—but looked grave a moment afterward.

"You must never say what is not true," she said. "It is wrong to deceive any one—even in a small matter."

Duprez gazed up at her wonderingly, feeling very much like a hidden child.

"Never say what is not true!" he thought. "*Mon Dieu!* what would become of my life?"

It was a new suggestion, and he reflected upon it with astonishment. It opened such a wide vista of impossibilities to his mind.

Meanwhile old Guldmar was engaged in pouring out wine for the other young men, talking all the time.

"I tell thee, Thelma mine," he said, seriously, "something must be very wrong with our Sigurd. The poor lad has always been gentle and tractable, but to-day he was like some wild animal for mischief and hardihood. I grieve to see it! I fear the time may come when he may no longer be a safe servant for thee, child."

"Oh, father!"—and the girl's voice was full of tender anxiety—"surely not! He is too fond of us to do us any harm—he is so docile and affectionate!"

"May be, may be!" and the old farmer shook his head doubtfully. "But when the wits are away the brain is like a ship without ballast—there is no safe sailing possible. He would not mean any harm, perhaps—and yet in his wild moods he might do it, and be sorry for it directly afterwards. 'Tis little use to cry when the mischief is done—and I confess I do not like his present humor."

"By the bye," observed Lorimer, "that reminds me! Sigurd has taken an uncommonly strong aversion to Phil. It's curious, but it's a fact. Perhaps it is that which upsets his nerves?"

"I have noticed it myself," said Errington, "and I'm sorry for it, for I've done him no harm that I can remember. He certainly asked me to go away from the Alten Fjord, and I refused—I'd no idea he had any serious meaning in his request. But it's evident he can't endure my company."

"Ah, then!" said Thelma, simply and sorrowfully, "he must be very ill—because it is natural for every one to like you."

She spoke in perfect good faith and innocence of heart; but

Errington's eyes flashed and he smiled—one of those rare, tender smiles of his which brightened his whole visage.

"You are very kind to say so, Miss Guldmar!"

"It is not kindness; it is the truth!" she replied, frankly.

At that moment a very rosy face and two sparkling eyes peered inquiringly in at the door.

"Yes, Britta!" Thelma smiled; "we are quite ready!"

Whereupon the face disappeared, and Olaf Guldmar led the way into the kitchen, which was at the same time the dining-room, and where a substantial supper was spread on the polished pine table. The farmer's great arm-chair was brought in for Duprez, who, though he declared he was being spoiled by too much attention, seemed to enjoy it immensely; and they were all, including Britta, soon clustered round the hospitable board whereon antique silver and quaint glasses of foreign make sparkled bravely, their effect enhanced by the snowy whiteness of the homespun table-linen.

A few minutes set them all talking gayly. MacFarlane vied with the ever-gallant Duprez in making a few compliments to Britta, who was pretty and engaging enough to merit attention, and who, after all, was something more than a mere servant, possessing, as she did, a great deal of her young mistress's affection and confidence, and being always treated by Guldmar himself as one of the family. There was no reserve or coldness in the party, and the hum of their merry voices echoed up to the cross-rafters of the stout wooden ceiling and through the open door and window, from whence a patch of the gorgeous afternoon sky could be seen, glimmering redly, like a distant lake of fire. They were in the full enjoyment of their repast, and the old farmer's rollicking "Ha, ha, ha!" in response to a joke of Lorimer's, had just echoed jovially through the room, when a strong, harsh voice called aloud:

"Olaf Guldmar!"

There was a sudden silence. Each one looked at the other in surprise. Again the voice called:

"Olaf Guldmar!"

"Well!" roared the *bonde*, testily, turning sharply round in his chair. "Who calls me?"

"I do!" and the tall, emaciated figure of a woman advanced and stood on the threshold, without actually entering the room. She dropped the black shawl that enveloped her, and in so doing disordered her hair, which fell in white, straggling locks about her withered features, and her dark eyes gleamed maliciously as she fixed them on the assembled party. Britta, on perceiving her, uttered a faint shriek, and without considering the propriety of her action, buried her nut-brown curls and sparkling eyes in Duprez's coat-sleeve, which, to do the Frenchman justice, was exceedingly

prompt to receive and shelter its fair burden. The *bonde* rose from his chair, and his face grew stern.

"What do you here, Lovisa Elsland? Have you walked thus far from Talvig to pay a visit that must needs be unwelcome?"

"Unwelcome I know I am," replied Lovisa, disdainfully noting the terror of Britta and the astonished glances of Errington and his friends—"unwelcome at all times—but most unwelcome at the hour of feasting and folly—for who can endure to receive a message from the Lord when the mouth is full of savory morsels and the brain reels with the wicked wine? Yet I have come in spite of your iniquities, Olaf Guldmar—strong in the strength of the Lord, I dare to set foot upon your accursed threshold, and once more make my just demand. Give me back the child of my dead daughter!—restore to me the erring creature who should be the prop of my defenseless age, had not your pagan spells alienated her from me—release her, and bid her return with me to my desolate hearth and home. This done, I will stay the tempest that threatens your habitation—I will hold back the dark clouds of destruction—I will avert the wrath of the Lord!—yes! for the sake of the past—for the sake of the past!"

These last words she muttered in a low tone, more to herself than to Guldmar; and, having spoken, she averted her eyes from the company, drew her shawl closely about her, and waited for an answer.

"By all the gods of my fathers!" shouted the *bonde*, in a towering passion. "This passes my utmost endurance! Have I not told thee again and again, thou silly soul—that thy grandchild is no slave? She is free—free to return to thee an' she will; free also to stay with us, where she has found a happier home than thy miserable hut at Talvig. Britta!" and he thumped his fist on the table. "Look up, child! Speak for thyself! Thou hast a spirit of thine own. Here is thy one earthly relation. Wilt thou go with her? Neither thy mistress nor I will stand in the way of thy pleasure."

Thus adjured, Britta looked up so suddenly that Duprez—who had rather enjoyed the feel of her little nestling head hidden upon his arm—was quite startled, and he was still more so at the utter defiance that flashed into the small maiden's round, rosy face.

"Go with *you*!" she cried, shrilly, addressing the old woman, who remained standing in the same attitude, with an air of perfect composure. "Do you think I have forgotten how you treated my mother, or how you used to beat me and starve me? You wicked old woman? How dare you come here? I'm ashamed of you! You frightened my mother to death—you know you did!—and now you want to do the same to me! But you won't—I can tell you? I'm old enough to do as I like, and I'd rather die than live with you!"

Then, overcome by excitement and temper, she burst out crying, heedless of Pierre Duprez's smiling nods of approval and the admiring remarks he was making under his breath, such as: "*Brava, ma petite! C'est bien fait! C'est joliment bien dit! Mais je crois bien!*"

Lovisa seemed unmoved; she raised her head and looked at Guldmar.

"Is this your answer?" she demanded.

"By the sword of Odin!" cried the *bonde*, "the woman must be mad! *My* answer? The girl has spoken for herself—and plainly enough, too! Art thou deaf, Lovisa Elsland? or are thy wits astray?"

"My hearing is very good," replied Lovisa, calmly, "and my mind, Olaf Guldmar, is as clear as yours. And, thanks to your teaching in mine early days"—she paused and looked keenly at him, but he appeared to see no meaning in her allusion—"I know the English tongue, of which we hear far too much—too often! There is nothing Britta has said that I do not understand. But I know well it is not the girl herself that speaks—it is a demon in her—and that demon shall be cast forth before I die! Yea, with the help of the Lord I shall—"

She stopped abruptly and fixed her eyes, glowing with fierce wrath, on Thelma. The girl met her evil glance with a gentle surprise. Lovisa smiled malignantly.

"You know me, I think!" said Lovisa. "You have seen me before?"

"Often," answered Thelma, mildly. "I have always been sorry for you."

"Sorry for me!" almost yelled the old woman. "Why—why are you sorry for me?"

"Do not answer her, child!" interrupted Guldmar, angrily. "She is mad as the winds of a wild winter, and will but vex thee."

But Thelma laid her hand soothingly on her father's, and smiled peacefully as she turned her fair face again toward Lovisa.

"Why?" she said. "Because you seem so very lonely and sad—and that must make you cross with every one who is happy! And it is a pity, I think, that you do not let Britta alone—you only quarrel with each other when you meet. And would you not like her to think kindly of you when you are dead?"

Lovisa seemed choking with anger—her face worked into such hideous grimaces, that all present, save Thelma, were dismayed at her repulsive aspect.

"When I am dead!" she muttered, hoarsely. "So you count upon that already, do you? Ah! But do you know which of us shall die first!" Then raising her voice with the effort she exclaimed:

"Stand forth, Thelma Guldmar! Let me see you closely—face to face!"

Errington said something in a low tone, and the *bonde* would have again interfered, but Thelma shook her head, smiled and rose from her seat at table.

"Anything to soothe her, poor soul!" she whispered, as she left Errington's side and advanced toward Lovisa, till she was within reach of the old woman's hand. She looked like some grand white angel who had stepped down from a cathedral altar, as she stood erect and stately with a gravely pitying expression in her lovely eyes, confronting the sable-draped, withered, leering hag who fixed upon her a steady look of the most cruel and pitiless hatred.

"Daughter of Satan!" said Lovisa, then, in intense piercing tones that somehow carried with them a sense of awe and horror—"creature, in whose veins the fire of hell burns without ceasing—my curse upon you! My curse upon the beauty of your body—may it grow loathsome in the sight of all men! May those who embrace you embrace misfortune and ruin!—may love betray you and forsake you! May your heart be broken even as mine has been!—may your bridal bed be left deserted!—may your children wither and pine from their hour of birth! Sorrow track you to the grave!—may your death be lingering and horrible! God be my witness and fulfill my words!"

And, raising her arms with a wild gesture, she turned and left the house. The spell of stupefied silence was broken with her disappearance. Old Guldmar prepared to rush after her and force her to retract her evil speech—Errington was furious, and Britta cried bitterly. The lazy Lorimer was excited and annoyed.

"Fetch her back," he said, "and I'll dance upon her!"

But Thelma stood where the old woman had left her—she smiled faintly, but she was very pale. Errington approached her—she turned to him and stretched out her hands with a little appealing gesture.

"My friend," she said, softly, "do you think I deserve so many curses? Is there something about me that is evil?"

What Errington would have answered is doubtful—his heart beat wildly—he longed to draw those little hands in his own and cover them with passionate kisses—but he was intercepted by old Guldmar, who caught his daughter in his arms and hugged her closely, his silvery beard mingling with the gold of her rippling hair.

"Never fear a wicked tongue, my bird!" said the old man, fondly. "There is naught of harm that would touch thee either on earth or in heaven—and a foul-mouthed curse must roll off thy soul like water from a dove's wing! Cheer thee, my darling—cheer thee! What! Thine own creed teaches thee that the

gentle Mother of Christ, with her little white angels round her, watches over all innocent maids—and thinkest thou she will let an old woman's malice and envy blight thy young days? No, no! *Thou* accursed?" And the *bonde* laughed loudly to hide the tears that moistened his keen eyes. "Thou art the sweetest blessing of my heart, even as thy mother was before thee! Come, come! Raise thy pretty head—here are these merry lads growing long-faced—and Britta is weeping enough salt water to fill a bucket! One of thy smiles will set us all right again—ay, there now!"—as she looked up and, meeting Philip's eloquent eyes, blushed, and withdrew herself gently from her father's arms—"Let us finish our supper and think no more of yonder villainous old hag—she is crazy, I believe, and knows not what she says half her time. Now, Britta, cease thy grunting and sighing—'twill spoil thy face and will not mend the hole in thy grandmother's brain!"

"Wicked, spiteful, ugly old thing!" sobbed Britta; "I'll never, never, never forgive her!" Then, running to Thelma, she caught her hand and kissed it affectionately. "Oh, my dear, my dear! To think she should have cursed you! What dreadful, dreadful wickedness! Oh!" and Britta looked volumes of wrath. "I could have beaten her black and blue!"

Her vicious eagerness was almost comic—every one laughed, including Thelma, though she pressed the hand of her little servant very warmly.

"Oh, fy!" said Lorimer, seriously. "Little girls mustn't whip their grandmothers; it's specially forbidden in the prayer-book, isn't it, Phil?"

"I'm sure I don't know!" replied Errington, merrily. "I believe there is something to the effect that a man may not marry his grandmother—perhaps that is what you mean?"

"Ah, no doubt!" murmured Lorimer, languidly, as, with the others, he resumed his seat at the supper-table. "I knew there was a special mandate respecting one's particularly venerable relations with a view to self-guidance in case they should prove troublesome like Britta's good grandmamma. What a frightfully picturesque mouthing old lady she is!"

"She is *la pétroleuse* of Norway!" exclaimed Duprez. "She would make an admirable dancer in the Carmagnole!"

Macfarlane, who had preserved a discreet silence throughout the whole scene, here looked up.

"She's just a screech-owl o' mistaken piety," he said. "She minds me o' a glowerin' auld warlock of an aunt o' mine in Glasgie, wha sits in her chair a' day wi' ae finger on the Bible. She says she's gaun straight to heaven by special invitation o' the Lord, leavin' a' her blood relations howlin' vainly after her from their roastin' fires down below. Ma certes! she'll give ye a good rousin' curse if ye like! She's cursed me ever since I can remember her

—cursed me in and out from sunrise to sunset—but I'm no the worst for 't as yet—an' it's dootful whether she's any the better."

"And yet Lovisa Elsland used to be as merry and lissome a lass as ever stepped," said Guldmar, musingly. "I remember her well when both she and I were young. I was always on the sea at that time—never happy unless the waves tossed me and my vessel from one shore to another. I suppose the restless spirit of my fathers was in me. I was never contented unless I saw some new coast every six months or so. Well, Lovisa was always foremost among the girls of the village who watched me leave the fjord—and however long or short a time I might be absent, she was certain to be on the shore when my ship came sailing home again. Many a joke I have cracked with her and her companions—and she was a bonny enough creature to look at then, I tell you—though now she is like a battered figure-head on a wreck. Her marriage spoiled her temper—her husband was as dark and sour a man as could be met with in all Norway, and when he and his fishing-boat sunk in a squall off the Lofoden Islands, I doubt if she shed many tears for his loss. Her only daughter's husband went down in the same storm—and he but three months wedded—and the girl—Britta's mother—pined and pined, and even when her child was born took no sort of comfort in it. She died four years after Britta's birth—her death was hastened, so I have heard, through old Lovisa's harsh treatment—anyhow the little lass she left behind her had no very easy time of it all alone with her grandmother—eh, Britta?"

Britta looked up and shook her head emphatically.

"Then," went on Guldmar, "when my girl came back the last time from France, Britta chanced to see her, and, strangely enough"—here he winked shrewdly—"took a fancy to her face—odd, wasn't it? However, nothing would suit her but that she must be Thelma's handmaiden, and here she is. Now you know her history—she would be happy enough if her grandmother would let her alone; but the silly old woman thinks the girl is under a spell, and that Thelma is the witch that works it"—and the old farmer laughed. "There's a grain of truth in the notion too—but not in the way she has of looking at it."

"All women are witches!" said Duprez. "Britta is a little witch herself!"

Britta's rosy cheeks grew rosier at this, and she tossed her chestnut curls with an air of saucy defiance that delighted the Frenchman. He forgot his wounded cheek and his disfiguring bandages in the contemplation of the little plump figure cased in its close-fitting scarlet bodice and the tempting rosy lips that were in such close proximity to his touch.

"If it were not for those red hands!" he thought. "*Dieu!* what a charming child she would be! One would instantly kill the grandmother and kiss the granddaughter!"

And he watched her with admiration as she busied herself about the supper-table, attending to every one with diligence and care, but reserving her special services for Thelma, whom she waited on with a mingled tenderness and reverence that were both touching and pretty to see.

The conversation now became general, and nothing further occurred to disturb the harmony and hilarity of the party—only Errington seemed somewhat abstracted, and answered many questions that were put to him at hap-hazard, without knowing, or possibly caring, whether his replies were intelligible or incoherent. His thoughts were dream-like and brilliant with fairy sunshine. He understood at last what poets meant by their melodious musings, woven into golden threads of song—he seemed to have grasped some hitherto unguessed secret of his being—a secret that filled him with as much strange pain as pleasure. He felt as though he were endowed with a thousand senses—each one keenly alive and sensitive to the smallest touch—and there was a pulsation in his blood that was new and beyond his control—a something that beat wildly in his heart at the sound of Thelma's voice or the passing flutter of her white garments near him. Of what use to disguise it from himself any longer? He loved her! The terrible, beautiful tempest of love had broken over his life at last; there was no escape from its thunderous passion and dazzling lightning glory.

He drew a sharp, quick breath—the hum of the gay voices around him was more meaningless to his ears than the sound of the sea breaking on the beach below. He glanced at the girl—the fair and innocent creature who had, in his imagination, risen to a throne of imperial height from whence she could bestow on him death or salvation. How calm she seemed! She was listening with courteous patience to a long story of Macfarlane's, whose Scotch accent rendered it difficult for her to understand. She was pale, Philip thought, and her eyes were heavy: but she smiled now and then—such a smile!

Even so sweetly might the "kiss-worthy" lips of the Greek Aphrodite part could that eloquent and matchless marble for once breathe into life. He looked at her with a sort of fear. Her hands held his fate. What if she could not love him? What if he must lose her utterly? This idea overpowered him; his brain whirled, and he suddenly pushed away his untasted glass of wine, and rose abruptly from the table, heedless of the surprise his action excited.

"Halloo, Phil, where are you off to?" cried Lorimer. "Wait for me!"

"Tired of our company, my lads?" said Guldmar, kindly. "You've had a long day of it—and what with the climbing and the strong air, no doubt you'll be glad to turn in."

"Upon my life, sir," answered Errington, with some confusion. "I don't know why I got up just now! I was thinking—I'm rather a dreamy sort of fellow sometimes, and——"

"He was asleep, and doesn't want to own it!" interrupted Lorimer, sententiously. "You will excuse him; he means well! He looks rather seedy. I think, Mr. Guldmar, we'll be off to the yacht. By the way, you're coming with us to-morrow, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Thelma. "We will sail with you round by Soroe—it is weird and dark and grand; but I think it is beautiful. And there are many stories of the elves and berg-folk, who are said to dwell there among the deep ravines. Have you heard about the berg-folk?" she continued, addressing herself to Errington, unaware of the effort he was making to appear cool and composed in her presence. "No? Then I must tell you to-morrow."

They all walked out of the house into the porch, and while her father was interchanging farewells with the others, she looked at Sir Philip's grave face with some solicitude.

"I am afraid you are very tired, my friend?" she asked, softly, "or your head aches—and you suffer?"

He caught her hands swiftly and raised them to his lips.

"Would you care much—would you care at all, if I suffered?" he murmured, in a low tone.

Then before she could speak or move, he let go her hands again, and turned with his usual easy courtesy to Guldmar. Then we may expect you without fail to-morrow, sir! Good-night."

"Good-night, my lad!"

And with many hearty salutations the young men took their departure, raising their hats to Thelma as they turned down the winding path to the shore. She remained standing near her father—and, when the sound of their footsteps had died away, she drew closer still and laid her head against his breast.

"Cold, my bird?" queried the old man. "Why, thou art shivering, child!—and yet the sunshine is as warm as wine. What ails thee?"

"Nothing, father!" And she raised her eyes, glowing and brilliant as stars. "Tell me—do you think often of my mother now?"

"Often!" And Guldmar's fine resolute face grew sad and tender. "She is never absent from my mind! I see her night and day, ay! I can feel her soft arms clinging round my neck—why dost thou ask so strange a question, little one? Is it possible to forget what has been once loved?"

Thelma was silent for many minutes. Then she kissed her father and said "good-night." He held her by the hand and looked at her with a sort of vague anxiety.

"Art thou well, my child?" he asked. "This little hand burns

like fire—and thine eyes are too bright, surely, for sleep to visit them? Art sure that nothing ails thee?"

"Sure, quite sure," answered the girl, with a strange, dreamy smile. "I am quite well—and happy!"

And she turned to enter the house.

"Stay!" called the father. "Promise me thou wilt think no more of Lovisa!"

"I had nearly forgotten her," she responded. "Poor thing! She cursed me because she is so miserable, I suppose, all alone, and unloved; it must be hard! Curses sometimes turn to blessings, father! Good-night!"

And she ascended the one flight of wooden stairs in the house to her own bedroom—a little three-cornered place as clean and white as the interior of a shell. Never once glancing at the small mirror that seemed to invite her charms to reflect themselves therein, she went to the quaint latticed window and knelt down by it, folding her arms on the sill while she looked far out to the fjord. She could see the English flag fluttering from the masts of the "Eulalie;" she could almost hear the steady plash of the oars wielded by Errington and his friends as they rowed themselves back to the yacht. Bright tears filled her eyes, and brimmed over, falling warmly on her folded hands.

"Would I care if you suffered?" she whispered. "Oh, my love!—my love!"

Then, as if afraid lest the very winds should have heard her half-breathed exclamation, she shut her window in haste, and a hot blush crimsoned her cheeks.

Undressing quickly, she slipped into her little white bed, and, closing her eyes, fancied she slept, though her sleep was but a waking dream of love in which all bright hopes reached their utmost fulfillment, and yet were in some strange way crossed with shadows which she had no power to disperse. And later on, when old Guldmar slumbered soundly, and the golden midnight sunshine lighted up every nook and gable of the farm-house with its lustrous glory—making Thelma's closed lattice sparkle like a carven jewel—a desolate figure lay prone on the grass beneath her window, with meager pale face, and wide-open wild blue eyes upturned to the fiery brilliancy of the heavens. Sigurd had come home—Sigurd was repentant, sorrowful, ashamed—and broken-hearted.

CHAPTER XIII.

O Love! O Love! O Gateway of Delight!
 Thou porch of peace, thou pageant of the prime
 Of all God's creatures! I am here to climb
 Thine upward steps, and daily and by night
 To gaze beyond them and to search aright
 The far-off splendor of thy track sublime.

ERICK MACKAY'S *Love-letters of a Violinist*.

On the following morning the heat was intense—no breath of wind stirred a ripple on the fjord, and there was a heaviness in the atmosphere which made the very brightness of the sky oppressive. Such hot weather was unusual for that part of Norway, and according to Valdemar Svensen, betokened some change. On board the "Eulalie" everything was ready for the trip to Soroe—steam was getting up prior to departure—and a group of red-capped sailors stood prepared to weigh the anchor as soon as the signal was given. Breakfast was over—Macfarlane was in the saloon writing his journal, which he kept with great exactitude, and Duprez, who, on account of his wound, was considered something of an invalid, was seated in a lounge-chair on deck, delightedly turning over a bundle of inflammatory French political journals received that morning. Errington and Lorimer were pacing the deck arm in arm, keeping a sharp lookout for the first glimpse of the returning boat which had been sent off to fetch Thelma and her father. Errington looked vexed and excited—Lorimer bland and convincing.

"I can't help it, Phil!" he said. "It's no use fretting and fuming at me. It's like Dyceworthy's impudence, of course—but there's no doubt he proposed to her—and it's equally certain that she rejected him. I thought I'd tell you you had a rival—not in me, as you seemed to think yesterday—but in our holy fat friend."

"Rival! pshaw!" returned Errington, with an angry laugh. "He is not worth kicking!"

"Possibly not! Still I have a presentiment that he's the sort of fellow that won't take 'no' for an answer. He'll dodge that poor girl and make her life miserable if he can, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Philip, quickly.

Lorimer stopped in his walk, and, leaning against the deck-railings, looked his friend straight in the eyes.

"Unless you settle the matter," he said, with a slight effort.

"You love her—tell her so!"

Errington laid one hand earnestly on his shoulder.

"Ah, George, you don't understand!" he said, in a low tone.