

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 carved 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.

while his face was grave and full of trouble. "I used to think I was fairly brave, but I find I am a positive coward. I dare not tell her! She—Thelma—is not like other women. You may think me a fool—I dare say you do—but I swear to you I am afraid to speak, because—because, old boy—if she were to refuse me—if I knew there was no hope—well, I don't want to be sentimental—but my life would be utterly empty and worthless—so useless that I doubt if I should care to live it out to the bitter end!"

Lorimer heard him in silence—a silence maintained partly out of sympathy, and partly that he might keep his own feelings well under control.

"But why persist in looking at the gloomy side of the picture?" he said, at last. "Suppose she loves you?"

"Suppose an angel flew down from heaven!" replied Philip, with rather a sad smile. "My dear fellow, who am I that I should flatter myself so far? If she were one of those ordinary women to whom marriage is the be-all and the end-all of existence, it would be different—but she is not. Her thoughts are like those of a child or a poet—why should I trouble them by the selfishness of my passion? for all passion is selfish, even at its best. Why should I venture to break the calm friendship she may have for me by telling her of a love which might prove unwelcome?"

Lorimer looked at him with a gentle amusement depicted in his face.

"Phil, you are less conceited than I thought you were," he said, with a light laugh, "or else you are blind—blind as a bat, old man! Take my advice—don't lose any more time about it. Make the 'king's daughter of Norrøya' happy," and a brief sigh escaped him. "You are the man to do it. I am surprised at your density; Sigurd, the lunatic, has more perception. He sees which way the wind blows—and that's why he's so desperately unhappy. He thinks—and thinks rightly too—that he will lose his 'beautiful rose of the northern forest,' as he calls her—and that you are to be the robber. Hence his dislike to you. Dear me!" and Lorimer lighted a cigarette and puffed at it complacently. "It seems to me that my wits are becoming sharper as I grow older, and that yours, my dear boy—pardon me!—are getting somewhat blunted, otherwise you would certainly have perceived—" he broke off abruptly.

"Well, go on!" exclaimed Philip, eagerly, with flashing eyes. "Perceived what?"

Lorimer laughed. "That the boat containing your sun-empress is coming along very rapidly, old fellow, and that you'd better make haste to receive her!"

This was the fact—and Duprez had risen from his chair and was waving his French newspaper energetically to the approaching

visitors. Errington hastened to the gangway with a brighter flush than usual on his handsome face, and his heart beating with a new sense of exhilaration and excitement. If Lorimer's hints had any foundation of truth—if Thelma loved him ever so little—how wild a dream it seemed!—why not risk his fate? He resolved to speak to her that very day if opportunity favored him—and having thus decided, felt quite masterful and heroic about it.

This feeling of proud and tender elation increased when Thelma stepped on deck that morning and laid her hands in his. For, as he greeted her and her father, he saw at a glance that she was slightly changed. Some restless dream must have haunted her—or his hurried words beneath the porch, when he parted from her the previous evening, had startled her and troubled her mind. Her blue eyes were no longer raised to his in absolute candor—her voice was timid, and she had lost something of her usual buoyant and graceful self-possession. But she looked lovelier than ever with that air of shy hesitation and appealing sweetness. Love had thrown his network of light about her soul and body till, like Keats's "Madeleine,"

"She seemed a splendid angel newly drest
Save wings, for heaven!"

As soon as the Guldmar were on board, the anchor was weighed with many a cheery and musical cry from the sailors; the wheel revolved rapidly under Valdemar Svensen's firm hand—and with a grand outward sweeping courtesy to the majestic fjord she left behind her, the "Eulalie" steamed away, cutting a glittering line of white foam through the smooth water as she went, and threading her way swiftly among the clustering picturesque islands—while the inhabitants of every little farm and hamlet on the shores stopped for awhile in their occupations to stare at the superb vessel, and to dreamily envy the wealth of the English Herren who could afford to pass the summer months in such luxury and idleness. Thelma seated herself at once by Duprez, and seemed glad to divert attention from herself to him.

"You are better, Monsieur Duprez, are you not?" she asked, gently. "We saw Sigurd this morning; he came home last night. He is very, very sorry to have hurt you!"

"He need not apologize," said Duprez, cheerfully. "I am delighted he gave me this scar, otherwise I am confident he would have put out the eye of the Phil-eep. And that would have been a misfortune! For what would the ladies in London say if *le beau* Errington returned to them with one eye! *Mon Dieu!* they would all be *au désespoir!*"

Thelma looked up. Philip was standing at some little distance with Olaf Guldmar and Lorimer, talking and laughing gayly. His cap was slightly pushed off his forehead, and the sun shone on his

thick dark chestnut curls; his features, warmly colored by the wind and sea, were lighted up with mirth, and his even white teeth sparkled in an irresistible smile of fascinating good humor. He was the *beau-ideal* of the best type of Englishman in the full tide of youth, health, and good spirits.

"I suppose he is a great favorite with all those beautiful ladies?" she asked, very quietly.

Something of gentle resignation in her tone struck the Frenchman's sense of chivalry; had she been like any ordinary woman, bent on conquest, he would have taken mischievous delight in inventing a long list of fair ones supposed to be deeply enamored of Errington's good looks—but this girl's innocent inquiring face inspired him with quite a different sentiment.

"*Mais certainement!*" he said, frankly and emphatically. "Philip is a favorite everywhere! Yet not more so with women than with men. I love him extremely—he is a charming boy! Then you see, *chère mademoiselle*, he is rich—very rich—and there are so many pretty girls who are very poor—naturally they are enchanted with our Errington—*voyez vous?*"

"I do not understand," she said, with a puzzled brow. "It is not possible that they should like him better because he is rich. He would be the same man without money as with it—it makes no difference!"

"Perhaps not to you," returned Duprez, with a smile; "but to many it would make an immense difference! *Chère mademoiselle*, it is a grand thing to have plenty of money—believe me!"

Thelma shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps," she answered, indifferently. "But one cannot spend much on one's self, after all. The nuns at Arles used to tell me that poverty was a virtue, and that to be very rich was to be very miserable. They were poor—all those good women—and they were always cheerful."

"The nuns! *ah, mon Dieu!*" cried Duprez. "The darlings know not the taste of joy—they speak of what they cannot understand! How should they know what it is to be happy or unhappy when they bar their great convent doors against the very name of love!"

She looked at him, and her color rose.

"You always talk of *love*," she said, half reproachfully, "as if it were so common a thing! You know it is sacred—why will you speak as if it were all a jest?"

A strange emotion of admiring tenderness stirred Pierre's heart—he was very impulsive and impressionable.

"Forgive me!" he murmured, penitently; then he added suddenly: "You should have lived ages ago, *ma belle*—the world of to-day will not suit you! You will be made very sorrowful in it, I assure you—it is not a place for good women!"

She laughed. "You are morose," she said. "That is not like

you! No one is good—we all live to try and make ourselves better."

"What highly moral converse is going on here?" inquired Lorimer, strolling leisurely up to them. "Are you giving Duprez a lecture, Miss Guldmar? He needs it—so do I. Please give me a scolding!"

And he folded his hands with an air of demure appeal.

A sunny smile danced in the girl's blue eyes. "Always you will be foolish!" she said. "One can never know you, because I am sure you never show your real self to anybody. No—I will not scold you—but I should like to find you out!"

"To find me out!" echoed Lorimer. "Why, what do you mean?"

She nodded her bright head with much sagacity.

"Ah, I do observe you often! There is something you hide; it is like when my father has tears in his eyes, he pretends to laugh, but the tears are there all the time. Now I see in you—" she paused, and her questioning eyes rested on his seriously.

"This is interesting!" said Lorimer, lazily drawing a camp-stool opposite to her, and seating himself thereon. "I had no idea I was a human riddle. Can you read me, Miss Guldmar?"

"Yes," she answered, slowly and meditatively. "Just a little. But I will not say anything; no—except this—that you are not altogether what you seem."

"Here, Phil!" called Lorimer, as he saw Errington approaching, arm in arm with Olaf Guldmar, "come and admire this young lady's power of perception. She declares I am not such a fool as I look!"

"Now," said Thelma, shaking her forefinger at him, "you know very well that I did not put it in that way. But is it not true, Sir Philip"—and she looked up for a moment, though her eyes drooped again swiftly under his ardent gaze, "is it not true that many people do hide their feelings, and pretend to be quite different to what they are?"

"I should say it was a very common fault," replied Errington. "It is a means of self-defense against the impertinent curiosity of outsiders. But Lorimer is free from it—he has nothing to hide. At any rate, he has no secrets from me—I'm sure of that!" And he clapped his hand heartily on his friend's shoulder.

Lorimer flushed slightly, but made no remark, and at that moment Macfarlane emerged from the saloon, where the writing of his journal had till now detained him. In the general hand-shaking and salutations which followed, the conversation took a different turn, for which Lorimer was devoutly thankful. Her face was a tell-tale one—and he was rather afraid of Philip's keen eyes. "I hope to Heaven he'll speak to her to-day," he thought, vexedly. "I hate being in suspense! My mind will be easier when I once

know that he has gained his point—and that there's not the ghost of a chance for any other fellow!"

Meanwhile the yacht skimmed along by the barren and rocky coast of Seiland; the sun was dazzling; yet there was a mist in the air as though the heavens were full of unshed tears. A bank of nearly motionless clouds hung behind the dark, sharp peaks of the Altenguard mountains, which now lay to the southward, as the vessel pursued her course. There was no wind; the flag on the mast flapped idly now and then with the motion of the yacht; and Thelma found herself too warm with her pretty crimson hood—she therefore unfastened it and let the sunshine play on the uncovered gold of her hair. They had a superb view of the jagged glacier of Jedke—black in some parts, and in others white with unmelted snow—and seeming, as it rose straight up against the sky, to be the majestic monument of some giant Viking. Presently, at her earnest request, Errington brought his portfolio of Norwegian sketches for Thelma to look at; most of them were excellently well done, and elicited much admiration from the *bonde*.

"It is what I have wondered at all my life," said he, "that skill of the brush dipped in color. Pictures surprise me as much as poems. Ah, men are marvelous creatures, when they are once brought to understand that they *are* men—not beasts! One will take a few words and harmonize them into a song or a verse that clings to the world forever; another will mix a few paints and daub a brush in them, and give you a picture that generation after generation shall flock to see. It is what is called genius—and genius is a sort of miracle. Yet I think it is fostered by climate a good deal—the further north, the less inspiration. Warmth, color, and the lightness of heart that a generally bright sky brings enlarges the brain and makes it capable of creative power."

"My dear sir," said Lorimer, "England does not possess these climatic advantages, and yet Shakespeare was an Englishman."

"He must have traveled," returned Guldmar, positively. "No one will make me believe that the man never visited Italy. His Italian scenes prove it—they are full of the place and the people. The whole of his works, full of such wonderful learning, and containing so many types of different nations, show—to *my* mind, at least—that countries were his books of study. Why I, who am only a farmer, and proprietor of a bit of Norwegian land—I have learned many a thing from simply taking a glance at a new shore each year. That's the way I used to amuse myself when I was young—now I am old, the sea tempts me less, and I am fonder of my arm-chair; yet I've seen a good deal in my time—enough to provide me with memories for my declining days. And it's a droll thing, too," he added, with a laugh, "the further south you go, the more immoral and merry are the people; the further north

the more virtuous and miserable. There's a wrong balance somewhere—but where, 'tis not easy to find out."

"Weel," said Macfarlane, "I can give ye a direct contradecction to your theory. Scotland lies to the north, and ye'll not find a grander harvest o' sinfu' souls anywhere between this an' the day o' judgment. I'm a Scotchman, an' I'm just proud o' my country—I'd back its men against a' the human race—but I wadna say much for the stabeelity o' its women. I wad just tak to my heels and run if I saw a real, thumpin', red-cheeked, big-boned Scotch lassie makin' up to me. There's nae bashfulness in they sort, and nae safety."

"I will go to Scotland!" said Duprez, enthusiastically. "I feel that those—what do you call them, *lassies*?—will charm me!"

"Scotland I never saw," said Guldmar. "From all I have heard, it seems to me 'twould be too much like Norway. After one's eyes have rested long on these dark mountains and glaciers, one likes now and then to see a fertile sunshiny stretch of country such as France, or the plains of Lombardy. Of course there may be exceptions, but I tell you climatic influences have a great deal to do with the state of mind and morals. Now, take the example of that miserable old Lovisa Elsland. She is the victim of religious mania—and religious mania, together with superstition of the most foolish kind, is common in Norway. It happens often during the long winters; the people have not sufficient to occupy their minds; no clergyman—not even Dyceworthy—can satisfy the height of their fanaticism. They preach and pray and shriek and groan in their huts; some swear that they have the spirit of prophecy—others that they are possessed of devils—others imagine witchcraft, like Lovisa—and altogether there is such a howling on the name of Christ that I am glad to be out of it—for 'tis a sight to awaken the laughter and contempt of a pagan such as I am!"

Thelma listened with a slight shadow of pain on her features.

"Father is not a pagan," she declared, turning to Lorimer. "How can one be pagan if one believes that there is good in everything—and that nothing happens except for the best?"

"It sounds to me more Christian than pagan," averred Lorimer, with a smile. "But it's no use appealing to *me* on such matters, Miss Guldmar. I am an advocate of the Law of Nothing. I remember a worthy philosopher who—when he was in his cups—earnestly assured me it was all right—'everything was nothing, and nothing was everything.' 'You are sure that is so?' I would say to him. 'My dear young friend—*hic*—I am positive! I have—*hic*—worked out the problem with—*hic*—care!' And he would shake me by the hand warmly, with a mild and moist smile, and would retire to bed walking sideways in the most amiable manner. I'm certain his ideas were correct as well as luminous."

They laughed, and then looking up saw that they were passing a portion of the coast of Seiland which was more than usually picturesque. Facing them was a great cavernous cleft in the rocks, tinted with a curious violet hue intermingled with bronze—and in the strong sunlight these colors flashed with the brilliancy of jewels, reflecting themselves in the pale slate-colored sea. By Errington's orders the yacht slackened speed, and glided along with an almost noiseless motion—and they were silent, listening to the dash and drip of water that fell invisibly from the toppling crags that frowned above, while the breathless heat and stillness of the air added to the weird solemnity of the scene. They all rose from their chairs and leaned on the deck-rails, looking, but uttering no word.

"In one of these islands," said Thelma, at last, very softly—"it was either Seiland or Soroe—they once found the tomb of a great chief. There was an inscription outside that warned all men to respect it, but they laughed at the warning and opened the tomb. And they saw, seated in a stone chair, a skeleton with a gold crown on its head and a great carved seal in its hand, and at its feet there was a stone casket. The casket was broken open, and it was full of gold and jewels. Well, they took all the gold and jewels, and buried the skeleton—and now—do you know what happens? At midnight a number of strange persons are seen searching on the shore and among the rocks for the lost treasure, and it is said they often utter cries of anger and despair. And those who robbed the tomb all died suddenly."

"Served them right!" said Lorimer. "And now they are dead, I suppose the wronged ghosts don't appear any more?"

"Oh, yes, they do," said Guldmar, very seriously. "If any sailor passes at midnight and sees them or hears their cries, he is doomed."

"But does he see or hear them?" asked Errington, with a smile.

"Well, I don't know," returned Guldmar, with a grave shake of his head. "I'm not superstitious myself, but I should be sorry to say anything against the berg-folk. You see they *may* exist, and it's no use offending them."

"And what do ye mean by the berg-folk?" inquired Macfarlane.

"They are supposed to be the souls of persons who died impenitent," said Thelma, "and they are doomed to wander on the hills till the day of judgment. It is a sort of purgatory."

Duprez shook his fingers emphatically in the air.

"Ah, bah!" he said, "what droll things remain still in the world! Yes, in spite of liberty, equality, fraternity! You do not believe in foolish legends, mademoiselle? For example—do you think you will suffer purgatory?"

"Indeed, yes!" she replied, "no one can be good enough to go

straight to heaven. There must be some little stop on the way in which to be sorry for all the bad things one has done."

"Tis the same idea as ours," said Guldmar. "We have two places of punishment in the Norse faith; one, *Nifleheim*, which is a temporary thing like the Catholic purgatory; the other *Nastrond*, which is the counterpart of the Christian hell. Know you not the description of *Nifleheim* in the *Edda*?—'tis terrible enough to satisfy all tastes. '*Hela*, or Death, rules over the Nine Worlds of *Nifleheim*. Her hall is called Grief. Famine is her table, and her only servant is Delay. Her gate is a precipice, her porch Faintness, her bed Leanness—Cursing and Howling are her tent. Her glance is dreadful and terrifying—and her lips are blue with the venom of Hatred.' These words," he added, "sound finer in Norwegian, but I have given the meaning fairly."

"Ma certes!" said Macfarlane, chuckling. "I'll tell my aunt in Glasgie about it. This *Nifleheim* was suit her pairfectly—she wad send a' her relations there wi' tourist tickets, not available for the return journey!"

"It seems to me," observed Errington, "that the Nine Worlds of *Nifleheim* have a resemblance to the different circles of Dante's Purgatory."

"Exactly so," said Lorimer. "All religions seem to me to be more or less the same—the question I can never settle is—which is the right one?"

"Would you follow it if you knew?" asked Thelma, with a slight smile. Lorimer laughed.

"Well, upon my life, I don't know!" he answered, frankly, "I never was a praying sort of fellow—I don't seem to grasp the idea of it somehow. But there's one thing I'm certain of—I can't endure a bird without song—a flower without scent, or a woman without religion—she seems to me no woman at all."

"But are there any such women?" inquired the girl, surprised.

"Yes, there are undoubtedly! Free-thinking, stump-orator, have-your-rights sort of creatures. You don't know anything about them, Miss Guldmar—be thankful! Now, Phil, how long is this vessel of yours going to linger here?"

Thus reminded, Errington called to the pilot, and in a few minutes the "*Eulalie*" resumed her usual speed, and bore swiftly on toward Soroe. This island, dreary and dark in the distance, grew somewhat more inviting in aspect on a nearer approach. Now and then a shaft of sunlight fell on some glittering point of felspar or green patch of verdure—and Valdemar Svensen stated that he knew of a sandy creek where, if the party chose, they could land and see a small cave of exquisite beauty, literally hung all over with stalactites.

"I never heard of this cave," said Guldmar, fixing a keen eye on

the pilot. "Art thou a traveler's guide to all such places in Norway?"

Somewhat to Errington's surprise, Svensen changed color and appeared confused; moreover, he removed his red cap altogether when he answered the *bonde*, to whom he spoke deferentially in rapid Norwegian. The old man laughed as he listened, and seemed satisfied; then, turning away, he linked his arm through Philip's and said:

"You must pardon him, my lad, that he spoke in your presence a tongue unfamiliar to you. No offense was meant. He is of my creed, but fears to make it known, lest he should lose all employment—which is likely enough, seeing that so many of the people are fanatics. Moreover, he is bound to me by an oath—which in olden days would have made him my serf—but which leaves him free enough just now—with one exception."

"And that exception?" asked Errington, with some interest.

"Is, that should I ever demand a certain service at his hands, he dare not refuse it. Odd, isn't it? or so it seems to you," and Guldmar pressed the young man's arm lightly and kindly; "but our Norse oaths are taken with great solemnity, and are as binding as the obligation of death itself. However, I have not commanded Valdemar's obedience yet, nor do I think I am likely to do so for some time. He is a fine, faithful fellow—though too much given to dreams."

A gay chorus of laughter here broke from the little group seated on deck, of which Thelma was the center—and Guldmar stopped in his walk, with an attentive smile on his open, ruddy countenance.

"Tis good for the heart to hear the merriment of young folks," he said. "Think you not my girl's laugh is like the ripple of a lark's song—just so clear and joyous?"

"Her voice is music itself!" declared Philip, quickly and warmly. "There is nothing she says, or does, or looks—that is not absolutely beautiful!"

Then, suddenly aware of his precipitation, he stopped abruptly. His face flushed as Guldmar regarded him fixedly, with a musing and doubtful air. But whatever the old man thought, he said nothing. He merely held the young baronet's arm a little closer, and together they joined the others—though it was noticeable that during the rest of the day the *bonde* was rather abstracted and serious—and that every now and then his eyes rested on his daughter's face with an expression of tender yearning and melancholy.

It was about two hours after luncheon that the "Eulalie" approached the creek spoken of by the pilot, and they were all fascinated by the loveliness, as well as by the fierce grandeur of the scene. The rocks on that portion of Soroe appeared to have split violently asunder to admit some great in-rushing passage of the sea, and were piled up in toppling terraces to the height

of more than two thousand feet above the level of the water. Beneath these wild and craggy fortresses of nature a shining stretch of beach had formed itself, on which the fine white sand mixed with crushed felspar sparkled like powdered silver. On the left-hand side of this beach could be distinctly seen the round opening of the cavern to which Valdemar Svensen directed their attention. They decided to visit it—the yacht was brought to a standstill, and the long-boat lowered. They took no sailors with them, Errington and his companions rowing four oars, while Thelma and her father occupied the stern. A landing was easily effected, and they walked toward the cavern, treading on thousands of beautiful little shells which strewed the sand beneath their feet. There was a deep stillness everywhere—the island was so desolate that it seemed as though the very sea-birds refused to make their homes in the black clefts of such steep and barren rocks.

At the entrance of the little cave Guldmar looked back to the sea.

"There's a storm coming!" he announced. "Those clouds we saw this morning have sailed thither almost as quickly as ourselves!"

The sky had indeed grown darker, and little wrinkling waves disturbed the surface of the water. But the sun as yet retained his sovereignty, and there was no wind. By the pilot's advice, Errington and his friends had provided themselves each with a pine torch, in order to light up the cavern as soon as they found themselves within it. The smoky crimson flare illuminated what seemed at a first glance to be a miniature fairy palace studded thickly with clusters of diamonds. Long pointed stalactites hung from the roof at almost mathematically even distances from one another—the walls glistened with varying shades of pink and green and violet—and in the very midst of the cave was a still pool of water in which all the fantastic forms and hues of the place mirrored themselves in miniature. In one corner the stalactites had clustered into the shape of a large chair overhung by a canopy, and Duprez perceiving it, exclaimed:

"*Voilà!* A queen's throne! Come, Mademoiselle Guldmar, you must sit in it!"

"But I am not a queen," laughed Thelma. "A throne is for a king, also—will not Sir Philip sit there?"

"There's a compliment for you, Phil!" cried Lorimer, waving his torch enthusiastically. "Let us awaken the echoes with the shout of 'Long live the king!'"

But Errington approached Thelma, and taking her hand in his, said gently:

"Come! let me see you throned in state, Queen Thelma! To please me, come!"

She looked up—the flame of the bright torch he carried illumined his face, on which love had written what she could not fail to read—but she trembled as with cold, and there was a kind of appealing wonder in her troubled eyes. He drew closer and pressed her hand more tightly; again he whispered: “Come, Queen Thelma!” As in a dream she allowed him to lead her to the stalactite chair, and when she was seated therein, she endeavored to control the rapid beating of her heart and to smile unconcernedly on the little group that surrounded her with shouts of mingled mirth and admiration.

“Ye just look fine!” said Macfarlane, with undisguised delight. “She’d mak’ a grand picture, wouldn’t she, Errington?”

Philip gazed at her, but said nothing—his heart was too full. Sitting there among the glittering, intertwined and suspended rocks—with the blaze from the torches flashing on her winsome face and luxuriant hair—with that half troubled, half happy look in her eyes, and an uncertain shadowy smile quivering on her sweet lips, the girl looked almost dangerously lovely—Helen of Troy could scarce have fired more passionate emotion among the old-world heroes than she unconsciously excited at that moment in the minds of all who beheld her. Duprez for once understood what it was to reverence a woman’s beauty, and decided that the flippant language of compliment was out of place—he therefore said nothing, and Lorimer, too, was silent, battling bravely against wild desires that were now, in his opinion, nothing but disloyalty to his friend. Old Guldmar’s hearty voice aroused and startled them all.

“Now Thelma, child! If thou art a queen, give orders to these lads to be moving! ’Tis a damp place to hold a court in, and thy throne must needs be a cold one. Let us out to the blessed sunshine again—maybe we can climb one of yon wild rocks and get a view worth seeing.”

“All right, sir!” said Lorimer, chivalrously resolving that now Errington should have a chance. “Come on, Mac! *Allons, marchons*—Pierre! Mr. Guldmar exacts our obedience! Phil, you take care of the queen!”

And skillfully pushing on Duprez and Macfarlane before him, he followed Guldmar, who preceded them all—thus leaving his friend in a momentary comparative solitude with Thelma. The girl was a little startled as she saw them thus taking their departure, and sprang up from her stalactite throne in haste. Sir Philip had laid aside his torch in order to assist her with both hands to descend the sloping rocks; but her embarrassment at being left almost alone with him made her nervous and uncertain of foot—she was hurried and agitated and anxious to overtake the others, and in trying to walk quickly she slipped and nearly fell. In one

second she was caught in his arms and clasped passionately to his heart.

“Thelma! Thelma!” he whispered. “I love you, my darling—I love you!”

She trembled in his strong embrace, and strove to release herself, but he pressed her more closely to him, scarcely knowing that he did so, but feeling that he held the world, life, time, happiness, and salvation in this one fair creature. His brain was in a wild whirl—the glitter of the stalactite cave turned to a gyrating wheel of jewel work, there was nothing any more—no universe, no existence—nothing but love, love, love, beating strong hammer-strokes through every fiber of his frame. He glanced up, and saw that the slowly retreating forms of his friends had nearly reached the outer opening of the cavern. Once there, they would look back and—

“Quick, Thelma!” and his warm breath touched her cheek. “My darling! my love! if you are not angry—kiss me! I shall understand.”

She hesitated. To Philip that instant of hesitation seemed a cycle of slow revolving years. Timidly she lifted her head. She was very pale, and her breath came and went quickly. He gazed at her in speechless suspense—and saw as in a vision the pure radiance of her face and star-like eyes shining more and more closely upon him. Then came a touch—soft and sweet as a rose-leaf pressed against his lips—and for one mad moment he remembered nothing—he was caught up like Homer’s Paris in a cloud of gold, and knew not which was earth or heaven.

“You love me, Thelma?” he murmured in a sort of wondering rapture. “I cannot believe it, sweet! Tell me—you love me?”

She looked up. A new, unspeakable glory flushed her face, and her eyes glowed with the mute eloquence of awakening passion.

“Love you?” she said in a voice so low and sweet that it might have been the whisper of a passing fairy. “Ah, yes! more than my life!”

CHAPTER XIV.

Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks, sweet eyes, sweet mouth;
Each singly wooed and won!

DANTE ROSSETTI.

“HALLOO, ho!” shouted Guldmar, vociferously, peering back into the shadows of the cavern from whence the figures of his daughter and Errington were seen presently emerging. “Why, what kept you so long, my lad? We thought you were close behind us. Where’s your torch?”

“It went out,” replied Philip, promptly, as he assisted Thelma with grave and ceremonious politeness to cross over some rough