

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

stones at the entrance, "and we had some trouble to find our way."

"Ye might hae called to us i' the way o' friendship," observed Macfarlane somewhat suspiciously, "and we wad hae lighted ye through."

"Oh, it was no matter!" said Thelma, with a charming smile. "Sir Philip seemed well to know the way, and it was not so very dark!"

Lorimer glanced at her and read plainly all that was written in her happy face. His heart sunk a little; but, noticing that the old *bonde* was studying his daughter with a slight air of vexation and surprise, he loyally determined to divert the general attention from her bright blushes and too brilliantly sparkling eyes.

"Well, here you both are, at any rate," he said, lightly, "and I should strongly advise that we attempt no more exploration of the island of Soroe to-day. Look at the sky; and just now there was a clap of thunder."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Errington. "I never heard it!"

"I dare say not!" said Lorimer, with a quiet smile. "Still we heard it pretty distinctly, and I think we'd better make for the yacht."

"All right!" and Sir Philip sprung gayly into the long-boat to arrange the cushions in the stern for Thelma. Never had he looked handsomer or more high-spirited, and his elation was noticed by all his companions.

"Something joyous has happened to our Phil-eep," said Duprez, in a half whisper. "He is in the air!"

"And something in the ither way has happened vera suddenly to Mr. Guldmar," returned Macfarlane. "Th' auld man is in the dumps."

The *bonde's* face in truth looked sad and somewhat stern. He scarcely spoke at all as he took his place in the boat beside his daughter—once he raised her little hand, looked at it, and kissed it fondly.

They were all soon on their way back to the "Eulalie," over a sea that had grown rough and white-crested during their visit to the stalactite cave. Clouds had gathered thickly over the sky, and though a few shafts of sunlight still forced a passage through them, the threatening darkness spread with steady persistency, especially to the northern side of the horizon, where Storm hovered in the shape of a black wing edged with coppery crimson. As they reached the yacht a silver glare of lightning sprang forth from beneath this sable pinion, and a few large drops of rain began to fall. Errington hurried Thelma on deck and down into the saloon. His friends, with Guldmar, followed—and the vessel was soon plunging through waves of no small height on her way back to the Alten Fjord. A loud peal of thunder like a salvo of artillery

accompanied their departure from Soroe, and Thelma shivered a little as she heard it.

"You are nervous, Mademoiselle Guldmar?" asked Duprez, noticing her tremor.

"Oh, no," she answered brightly. "Nervous? That is to be afraid—I am not afraid of a storm, but I do not like it. It is a cruel, fierce thing; and I should have wished to-day to be all sunshine—all gladness!" She paused, and her eyes grew soft and humid.

"Then you have been happy to-day?" said Lorimer, in a low and very gentle voice.

She smiled up at him from the depths of the velvet lounge in which Errington had placed her.

"Happy? I do not think I have ever been so happy before!" She paused, and a bright blush crimsoned her cheeks; then, seeing the piano open, she said, suddenly: "Shall I sing to you? or perhaps you are all tired, and would rather rest?"

"Music *is* rest," said Lorimer, rather dreamily, watching her as she rose from her seat—a tall, supple, lithe figure—and moved towards the instrument. "And *your* voice, Miss Guldmar, would soothe the most weary soul that ever dwelt in clay."

She glanced round at him, surprised at his sad tone.

"Ah, you are very, very tired, Mr. Lorimer, I am sure! I will sing you a Norse cradle-song to make you go to sleep. You will not understand the words though—will that matter?"

"Not in the least!" answered Lorimer, with a smile. "The London girls sing in German, Italian, Spanish and English. Nobody knows what they are saying: they scarcely know themselves—but it's all right, and quite fashionable."

Thelma laughed gayly. "How funny!" she exclaimed. "It is to amuse people, I suppose! Well—now listen." And, playing a soft prelude, her rich contralto rippled forth in a tender, passionate, melancholy melody—so sweet and heart-penetrating that the practical Macfarlane sat as one in a dream—Duprez forgot to finish making the cigarette he was daintily manipulating between his fingers, and Lorimer had much ado to keep tears from his eyes. From one song she glided to another and yet another; her soul seemed possessed by the very spirit of music. Meanwhile Errington, in obedience to an imperative sign from old Guldmar, left the saloon with him. Once outside the door, the *bonde* said, in a somewhat agitated voice:

"I desire to speak to you, Sir Philip, alone and undisturbed, if such a thing be possible."

"By all means!" answered Philip. "Come to my 'den' on deck. We shall be quite solitary there."

He led the way, and Olaf Guldmar followed him in silence.

It was raining fiercely, and the waves, green towers of strength,

broke every now and then over the sides of the yacht with a hissing shower of salt white spray. The thunder rolled along the sky in angry reverberating echoes—frequent flashes of lightning leaped out like swords drawn from dark scabbards—yet toward the south the sky was clearing, and arrowy beams of pale gold fell from the hidden sun with a soothing and soft luster on the breast of the troubled water.

Guldmar looked about him, and heaved a deep sigh of refreshment. His eyes rested lovingly on the tumbling billows—he bared his white head to the wind and rain.

“This is the life, the blood, the heart of a man!” he said, while a sort of fierce delight shone in his keen eyes. “To battle with the tempest—to laugh at the wrath of waters—to set one’s face against the wild wind—to sport with the elements as though they were children or serfs—this is the joy of manhood! A joy,” he added slowly, “that few so-called men of to-day can ever feel.”

Errington smiled gravely. “Perhaps you are right, sir,” he said; “but perhaps, at the same time, you forget that life has grown very bitter to all of us during the last hundred years or so. May be the world is getting old and used up, may be the fault is in ourselves—but it is certain that none of us nowadays are particularly happy, except at rare intervals when—”

At that moment, in a lull of the storm, Thelma’s voice pealed upward from the saloon. She was singing a French song, and the refrain rang out clearly:

“Ah! le doux son d’un baiser tendre!”

Errington paused abruptly in his speech, and turning toward a little closed and covered place on deck which was half cabin, half smoking-room, and which he kept as his own private sanctum, he unlocked it, saying:

“Will you come in here, sir? It’s not very spacious, but I think it’s just the place for a chat—especially a private one.”

Guldmar entered, but did not sit down—Errington shut the door against the rain and beating spray, and also remained standing. After a pause, during which the *bonde* seemed struggling with some inward emotion, he said, resolutely:

“Sir Philip, you are a young man, and I am an old one. I would not willingly offend you—for I like you—yes!” And the old man looked up frankly, “I like you enough to respect you—which is more than I can say to many men I have known! But I have a weight on my heart that must be lifted. You and my child have been much together for many days—and I was an old fool not to have foreseen the influence your companionship might have upon her. I may be mistaken in the idea that has taken hold of me—some wild words let fall by the poor boy Sigurd this morn-

ing, when he entreated my pardon for his misconduct of yesterday, have perhaps misled my judgment—but—by the gods! I cannot put it into suitable words! I—”

“You think I love your daughter?” said Sir Philip, quietly. “You are not mistaken, sir! I love her with my whole heart and soul! I want you to give her to me as my wife.”

A change passed over the old farmer’s face. He grew deathly pale, and put out one hand feebly as though to seek some support. Errington caught it in his own and pressed it hard.

“Surely you are not surprised, sir?” he added, with eagerness. “How can I help loving her! She is the best and loveliest girl I have ever seen! Believe me—I would make her happy!”

“And have you thought, young man,” returned Guldmar, slowly, “that you would make me desolate?—or, thinking it, have you cared?”

There was an infinite pathos in his voice, and Errington was touched and silent. He found no answer to this reproach. Guldmar sat down, leaning his head on his hand.

“Let me think a little,” he said. “My mind is confused a bit. I was not prepared for—”

He paused and seemed lost in sorrowful meditation. By and by he looked up, and meeting Errington’s anxious gaze, he broke into a short laugh.

“Don’t mind me, my lad!” he said, sturdily. “Tis a blow, you see! I had not thought so far as this. I’ll tell you the plain truth, and you must forgive me for wronging you. I know what young blood is, all the world over. A fair face fires it—and impulse makes it gallop beyond control. ’Twas so with me when I was your age—though no woman, I hope, was ever the worse for my harmless love-making. But Thelma is different from most women—she has a strange nature—moreover, she has a heart and a memory—if she once learns the meaning of love, she will never unlearn the lesson. Now, I thought, that like most young men of your type, you might, without meaning any actual evil, trifle with her—play with her feelings—”

“I understand, sir,” said Philip, coolly, without displaying any offense. “To put it plainly, in spite of your liking for me, you thought me a snob.”

This time the old man laughed heartily and unforcedly.

“Dear, dear!” he exclaimed. “You are what is termed in your own land, a peppery customer! Never mind—I like it! Why, my lad, the men of to-day think it fair sport to trifle with a pretty woman now and then—”

“Pardon!” interrupted Philip, curtly. “I must defend my sex. We *may* occasionally trifle with those women who show us that they wish to be trifled with—but never with those who, like your daughter, win every man’s respect and reverence.”

Guldmar rose and grasped his hand fervently.

"By all the gods, I believe you are a true gentleman!" he said. "I ask your pardon if I have offended you by so much as a thought. But now"—and his face grew very serious—"we must talk this matter over. I will not speak of the suddenness of your love for my child, because I know, from my own past experience, that love is a rapid impulse—a flame ignited in a moment. Yes, I know that well!" He paused, and his voice trembled a little, but he soon steadied it and went on—"I think, however, my lad, that you have been a little hasty—for instance, have you thought what your English friends and relatives will say to your marrying a farmer's daughter who—though she has the blood of kings in her veins—is, nevertheless, as this present world would judge, beneath you in social standing? I say, have you thought of this?"

Philip smiled proudly. "Certainly, sir, I have *not* thought of any such trifle as the opinion of society—if that is what you mean. I have no relatives to please or displease—no friends in the truest sense of the word except Lorimer. I have a long list of acquaintances undoubtedly—infinite bores, most of them—and whether they approve or disapprove of my actions is to me a matter of profound indifference."

"See you!" said the *bonde*, firmly and earnestly. "It would be an ill day for me if I gave my little one to a husband who might—mind! I only say *might*—in the course of years, regret having married her."

"Regret!" cried Philip, excitedly, then quieting down, he said, gently: "My good friend, I do not think you understand me. You talk as if Thelma were beneath *me*. Good God! It is *I* who am infinitely beneath *her*! I am utterly unworthy of her in every way, I assure you—and I tell you so frankly. I have led a useless life, and a more or less selfish one. I have principally sought to amuse and interest myself all through it. I've had my vices too, and have them still. Beside Thelma's innocent white soul mine looks villainous! But I can honestly say I never knew what love was till I saw her—and now—well! I would give my life away gladly to save her from even a small sorrow."

"I believe you—I thoroughly believe you!" said Guldmar. "I see you love the child. The gods forbid that I should stand in the way of her happiness! I am getting old, and 'twas often a sore point with me to know what would become of my darling when I was gone—for she is fair to look upon, and there are many human wolves ready to devour such lambs. Still, my lad, you must learn all. Do you know what is said of me in Bosekop?"

Errington smiled and nodded in the affirmative.

"You do?" exclaimed the old man, somewhat surprised. "You know they say I killed my wife—my wife! the creature before whom my soul knelt in worship night and day—whose bright head

was the sunlight of my life! Let me tell you of her, Sir Philip—'tis a simple story. She was the child of my dearest friend, and many years younger than myself. This friend of mine, Erik Erlandsen, was the captain of a stout Norwegian bark, running constantly between these wild waters and the coast of France. He fell in love with, and married a blue-eyed beauty from the Sogne Fjord; he carried her secretly away from her parents, who would not consent to the marriage. She was a timid creature, in spite of her queenly ways, and, for fear of her parents, she would never land again on the shores of Norway. She grew to love France—and Erik often left her there in some safe shelter when he was bound on some extra long and stormy passage. She took to the Catholic creed, too, in France, and learned to speak the French tongue, so Erik said, as though it were her own. At the time of the expected birth of her child, her husband had taken her far inland to Arles, and there business compelled him to leave her for some days. When he returned she was dead!—laid out for burial, with flowers and tapers round her. He fell prone on her body insensible—and not for many hours did the people of the place dare to tell him that he was the father of a living child—a girl, with the great blue eyes and white skin of her mother. He would scarce look at it—but at last, when carried a bit, he carried the little thing in his arms to the great convent at Arles, and, giving the nuns money, he bade them take it and bring it up as they would, only giving it the name of Thelma. Then poor Erlandsen came home—he sought me out; he said: 'Olaf, I feel that I am going on my last voyage. Promise you will see to my child—guard her, if you can, from an evil fate! For me there is no future!' I promised, and strove to cheer him—but he spoke truly—his ship went down in a storm on the Bay of Biscay, and all on board were lost. Then it was that I commenced my journeyings to and fro, to see the little maiden that was growing up in the convent at Arles. I watched her for sixteen years—and when she reached her seventeenth birthday, I married her and brought her to Norway."

"And she was Thelma's mother?" said Errington, with interest.

"She was Thelma's mother," returned the *bonde*, "and she was more beautiful than even Thelma is now. Her education had been almost entirely French—but, as a child, she had learned that I generally spoke English, and as there happened to be an English nun in the convent, she studied that language and mastered it for the love of me—yes!"—he repeated with musing tenderness—"all for the love of me—for she loved me, Sir Philip—ay! as passionately as I loved her, and that is saying a great deal! We lived a solitary happy life—but we did not mix with our neighbors—our creeds were different—our ways apart from theirs. We had some time of perfect happiness together. Three years passed before our

child was born, and then"—the *bonde* paused awhile, and again continued—"then my wife's health grew frail and uncertain. She liked to be in the fresh air, and was fond of wandering about the hills with her little one in her arms. One day—shall I ever forget it!—when Thelma was about two and a half years old, I missed them both, and went out to search for them, fearing my wife had lost her way, and knowing that our child could not toddle far without fatigue. I found them"—the *bonde* shuddered—"but how? My wife had slipped and fallen through a chasm in the rocks—high enough, indeed, to have killed her—she was alive, but injured for life. She lay there white and motionless—little Thelma meanwhile sat smilingly on the edge of the rock, assuring me that her mother had gone to sleep 'down there.' Well!" and Guldmar brushed the back of his hand across his eyes, "to make a long story short, I carried my darling home in my arms a wreck—she lingered for ten years of patient suffering—ten long years! She could only move about on crutches—the beauty of her figure was gone—but the beauty of her face grew more perfect every day! Never again was she seen on the hills—and so to the silly folks of Bosekop she seemed to have disappeared. Indeed, I kept her very existence a secret—I could not endure that others should hear of the destruction of all that marvelous grace and queenly loveliness! She lived long enough to see her daughter blossom into girlhood—then—she died. I could not bear to have her laid in the damp, wormy earth—you know in our creed earth-burial is not practiced—so I laid her tenderly away in a king's tomb of antiquity—a tomb known only to myself and one who assisted me to lay her in her last resting-place. There she sleeps right royally—and now is your mind relieved, my lad? For the reports of the Bosekop folk must certainly have awakened some suspicions in your mind?"

"Your story has interested me deeply, sir," said Errington; "but I assure you I never had any suspicions of you at all. I always disregard gossip—it is generally scandalous, and seldom true. Besides, I took your face on trust—as you took mine."

"Then," declared Guldmar, with a smile, "I have nothing more to say—except"—and he stretched out both hands—"may the great gods prosper your wooing! You offer a fairer fate to Thelma than I had dreamed of for her—but I know not what the child herself may say—"

Philip interrupted him. His eyes flashed, and he smiled.

"She loves me!" he said, simply. Guldmar looked at him, laughed a little and sighed.

"She loves thee?" he said, relapsing into the *thee* and *thou* he was wont to use with his daughter. "Thou hast lost no time, my lad. When didst thou find that out?"

"To-day!" returned Philip, with that same triumphant smile

playing about his lips. "She told me so—yet even now I cannot believe it!"

"Ah, well, thou mayest believe it truly," said Guldmar, "for Thelma says nothing that she does not mean! The child has never stooped to even the smallest falsehood."

Errington seemed lost in a happy dream. Suddenly he roused himself and took Guldmar by the arm.

"Come," he said, "let us go to her! She will wonder why we are so long absent. See! the storm has cleared—the sun is shining. It is understood? You will give her to me?"

"Foolish lad!" said Guldmar, gently. "What have I to do with it? She has given herself to thee! Love has overwhelmed both of your hearts, and before the strong sweep of such an ocean, what can an old man's life avail? Nothing—less than nothing! Besides, I *should* be happy—if I have regrets—if I feel the tooth of sorrow biting at my heart—'tis naught but selfishness. 'Tis my own dread of parting with her"—his voice trembled, and his fine face quivered with suppressed emotion.

Errington pressed his arm. "Our house shall be yours, sir!" he said eagerly. "Why not leave this place and come with us?"

Guldmar shook his head. "Leave Norway!" he said—"leave the land of my fathers—turn my back on these mountains and fjords and glaciers? Never! No, no, my lad—you're kind-hearted and generous as becomes you, and I thank you from my heart. But 'twould be impossible! I should be like a caged eagle, breaking my wings against the bars of English conventionalities. Besides, young birds must make their nest without interference from the old ones."

He stepped out on deck as Errington opened the little cabin door, and his features kindled with enthusiasm as he looked on the stretch of dark mountain scenery around him, illumined by the brilliant beams of the sun that shone out now in full splendor, as though in glorious defiance of the retreating storm, which had rolled gradually away in clouds that were tumbling one over the other at the extreme edge of the northern horizon like vanquished armies taken to hasty flight.

"Could I stand the orderly tameness of your green England, think you, after this?" he exclaimed with a comprehensive gesture of his hand. "No, no! When death comes—and 'twill not be long coming—let it find me with my face turned to the mountains, and nothing but their kingly crests between me and the blessed sky! Come, my lad!" and he relapsed into his ordinary tone. "If thou art like me when I was thy age, every minute passed away from thy love seems an eternity! Let us go to her—we had best wait till the decks are dry before we assemble up here again."

They descended at once into the saloon, where they found Thel-

ma being initiated into the mysteries of chess by Duprez, while Macfarlane and Lorimer looked idly on. She glanced up from the board as her father and Errington entered, and smiled at them both with a slightly heightened color.

"This is such a wonderful game, father!" she said. "And I am so stupid I cannot understand it! So Monsieur Pierre is trying to make me remember the moves."

"Nothing is easier!" declared Duprez. "I was showing you how the bishop goes, so—crossways," and he illustrated his lesson. "He is a dignitary of the Church, you perceive. *Bien!* it follows that he cannot go in a straight line—if you observe them well, you will see that all the religious gentlemen play at cross-purposes. You are very quick, Mademoiselle Guldmar—you have perfectly comprehended the move of the castle, and the pretty plunge of the knight. Now, as I told you, the queen can do anything—all the pieces shiver in their shoes before her!"

"Why?" she asked, feeling a little embarrassed, as Sir Philip came and sat beside her, looking at her with an undoubtedly composed air of absolute proprietorship.

"Why? *Enfin*, the reason is simple!" answered Pierre, "the queen is a woman—everything must give way to her wish!"

"And the king?" she inquired.

"Ah! *Le pauvre Roi!* He can do very little—almost nothing! He can only move one step at a time, and that with much labor and hesitation—he is the wooden image of Louis XVI.!"

"Then," said the girl quickly, "the object of the game is to protect a king who is not worth protecting!"

Duprez laughed. "Exactly! And thus, in this charming game, you have the history of many nations! Mademoiselle Guldmar has put the matter excellently! Chess is for those who intend to form republics. All the worry and calculation—all the moves of pawns, bishops, knights, castles, and queen—all to shelter the throne which is not worth protecting! Excellent! Mademoiselle, you are not in favor of monarchies!"

"I do not know," said Thelma; "I have never thought of such things. But kings should be great men—wise and powerful, better and braver than all their subjects, should they not?"

"Undoubtedly!" remarked Lorimer, "but it's a curious thing, they seldom are. Now, our queen, God bless her—"

"Hear, hear!" interrupted Errington, laughing good-humoredly. "I won't have a word said against the dear old lady, Lorimer! Granted that she hates London, and sees no fun in being stared at by vulgar crowds, I think she's quite right—and I sympathize heartily with her liking for a cup of tea in peace and quiet with some old Scotch body who doesn't care whether she's queen or a washerwoman."

"I think," said Macfarlane, slowly, "that royalty has its duties,

ye see, an' though I canna say I object to her majesty's homely way o' behavin', still there are a few matters that wad be the better for her pairsonal attention."

"Oh, bother!" said Errington, gayly. "Look at that victim of the nation, the Prince of Wales! The poor fellow hasn't a moment's peace of his life—what with laying foundation stones, opening museums, inspecting this and visiting that, he is like a costermonger's donkey, that must gee-up or gee-wo as his master, the people, bid. If he smiles at a woman, it is instantly reported that he's in love with her—if he frankly says he considers her pretty, there's no end to the scandal. Poor royal wretch! I pity him from my heart! The unwashed, beer-drinking, gin-swilling classes who clamor for shortened hours of labor, and want work to be expressly invented for their benefit, don't suffer a bit more than Albert Edward, who is supposed to be rolling idle in the very lap of luxury, and who can hardly call his soul his own. Why, the man can't eat a mutton-chop without there being a paragraph in the papers headed, 'Diet of the Prince of Wales.' His life is made an infinite bore to him, I'm positive!"

Guldmar looked thoughtful. "I know little about kings or princes," he said, "but it seems to me, from what I do know, that they have but small power. They are mere puppets. In olden times they possessed supremacy, but now—"

"I will tell you," interrupted Duprez, excitedly, "who it is that rules the people in these times—it is the *Pen—Madame la Plume!* A little black, sharp, scratching devil she is—empress of all nations! No crown but a point, no royal robe save ink! It is certain that as long as *Madame la Plume* gambols freely over her realms of paper, so long must kings and autocrats shake in their shoes and be uncertain of their thrones. *Mon Dieu!* if I had but the gift of writing, I would conquer the world!"

"There are an immense number of people writing just now, Pierre," remarked Lorimer, with a smile, "yet they don't do much in the conquering line."

"Because they are afraid!" said Duprez. "Because they have not the courage of their opinions! Because they dare not tell the truth!"

"Upon my life I believe you are right!" said Errington. "If there were a man bold enough to declare truths and denounce lies, I should imagine it quite possible that he might conquer the world—or, at any rate, make it afraid of him."

"But is the world so full of lies?" asked Thelma, timidly.

Lorimer looked at her gravely. "I fear so, Miss Guldmar! I think it has a tolerable harvest of them every year—a harvest, too, that never fails! But I say, Phil! Look at the sun shining! Let us go up on deck—we shall soon be getting back to the Alten Fjord."

They all rose, threw on their caps, and left the saloon, with the

exception of Errington, who lingered behind, watching his opportunity, and as Thelma followed her father, he called her back softly :

"Thelma!"

She hesitated, and then turned toward him—her father saw her movement, smiled at her, and nodded kindly, as he passed through the saloon doors and disappeared. With a beating heart she sprung quickly to her lover's side, and as he caught her in his arms she whispered :

"You have told him?"

"Your father? Yes, my darling!" murmured Philip, as he kissed her sweet upturned lips. "Be quite happy—he knows everything. Come, Thelma! tell me again you love me—I have not heard you say it properly yet!"

She smiled dreamily as she leaned against his breast and looked up into his eyes.

"I cannot say it properly!" she said. "There is no language for my heart! If I could tell you all I feel, you would think it foolish, I am sure, because it is all so wild and strange"—she stopped, and her face grew pale. "Oh!" she murmured, with a slight tremor: "it is terrible!"

"What is terrible, my sweet one?" asked Errington, drawing her more closely and holding her more tightly in his arms.

She sighed deeply. "To have no more life of my own!" she answered, while her low voice quivered with intense feeling. "It has all gone—to you! And yours has come to me—is it not strange and almost sad? How your heart beats, poor boy—I can hear it throb, throb—so fast—here, where I am resting my head." She looked up, and her little white hand caressed his cheek. "Philip," she said very softly, "what are you thinking about? Your eyes shine so brightly—do you know you have beautiful eyes?"

"Have I?" he murmured abstractedly, looking down on that exquisite, innocent, glowing face and trembling with the force of the restrained passion that kindled through him. "I don't know about that—yours seem to me like two stars fallen from heaven! Oh! Thelma, my darling—God make me worthy of you."

He spoke with intense fervor—kissing her with a tenderness in which there was something of reverence as well as fear. The whole soul of the man was startled and roused to inexpressible devotion by the absolute simplicity and purity of her nature—the direct frankness with which she had said her life was his—his—and in what way was *he* fitted to be the guardian and possessor of this white lily from the garden of God? She was so utterly different to all women as he had known them—as different as a bird of paradise to a common house-sparrow. Meanwhile, as these thoughts fitted through his brain, she moved gently from his embrace and smiled proudly, yet sweetly.

"Worthy of me?" she said softly and wonderingly. "It is I that will pray to be made worthy of *you*! You must not put it wrongly, Philip!"

He made no answer, but looked at her as she stood before him, majestic as a young empress in her straight, unadorned white gown.

"Thelma!" he said suddenly, "do you know how lovely you are?"

"Yes!" she answered simply; "I know it, because I am like my mother. But it is not anything to be beautiful—unless one is loved—and then it is different! I feel much more beautiful now, since you think me pleasant to look at!"

Philip laughed and caught her hand. "What a child you are!" he said. "Now let me see this little finger." And he loosened from his watch-chain a half-hoop ring of brilliants.

"This belonged to *my* mother, Thelma," he continued, gently, "and since her death I have always carried it about with me. I resolved never to part with it except to—" He paused and slipped it on the third finger of her left hand, where it sparkled bravely.

She gazed at it in surprise. "You part with it now?" she asked, with wonder in her accents. "I do not understand!"

He kissed her. "No, I will explain again, Thelma—and you shall not laugh at me as you did the very first time I saw you! I resolved never to part with this ring, I say, except to—my promised wife. *Now* do you understand?"

She blushed deeply, and her eyes dropped before his ardent gaze. "I do thank you very much, Philip"—she faltered timidly—she was about to say something further when suddenly Lorimer entered the saloon. He glanced from Errington to Thelma, and from Thelma back again to Errington—and smiled. So have certain brave soldiers been known to smile in the face of a death-shot. He advanced with his usual languid step and nonchalant air, and removing his cap, bowed gravely and courteously.

"Let me be the first to offer my congratulations to the future Lady Errington! Phil, old man! I wish you joy!"

## CHAPTER XV.

Why, sir, in the universal game of double-dealing, shall not the cleverest tricksters play each other false by hap-hazard, and so betray their closest secrets, to their own and their friends' infinite amazement?—CONGREVE.

WHEN Olaf Guldmar and his daughter left the yacht that evening, Errington accompanied them, in order to have the satisfaction of escorting his beautiful betrothed as far as her own door. They