

were all three very silent—the *bonde* was pensive, Thelma shy, and Errington himself was too happy for speech. Arriving at the farmhouse, they saw Sigurd curled up under the porch, playing idly with the trailing rose branches, but, on hearing their footsteps, he looked up, uttered a wild exclamation, and fled. Guldmar tapped his own forehead significantly.

"He grows worse and worse, the poor lad!" he said, somewhat sorrowfully. "And yet there is a strange mingling of foresight and wit with his wild fancies. Wouldst thou believe it, Thelma, child"—and here he turned to his daughter and encircled her waist with his arm—"he seemed to know how matters were with thee and Philip when I was yet in the dark concerning them!"

This was the first allusion her father had made to her engagement, and her head drooped with a sort of sweet shame.

"Nay, now, why hide thy face?" went on the old man cheerily. "Didst thou think I would grudge my bird her summer-time? Not I! And little did I hope for thee, my darling, that thou wouldst find a shelter worthy of thee in this wild world!" He paused a moment, looking tenderly down upon her, as she nestled in mute affection against his breast—then addressing himself to Errington, he went on:

"We have a story in our Norse religion, my lad, of two lovers who declared their passion to each other on one stormy night in the depth of winter. They were together in a desolate hut on the mountains, and around them lay unbroken tracts of frozen snow. They were descended from the gods, and therefore the gods protected them—and it happened that after they had sworn their troth, the doors of the snow-bound hut flew suddenly open, and lo! the landscape had changed—the hills were gay with grass and flowers—the sky was blue and brilliant, the birds sung, and everywhere was heard the ripple of waters let loose from their icy fetters, and gamboling down the rocks in the joyous sun. This was the work of the goddess Friga—the first kiss exchanged by the lovers she watched over banished Winter from the land, and Spring came instead. 'Tis a pretty story, and true all the world over—true for all men and women of all creeds! It must be an ice-bound heart indeed that will not warm to the touch of love—and mine, though aged, grows young again in the joy of my children." He put his daughter gently from him toward Philip, saying with more gravity, "Go to him, child—go—with thy old father's blessing! And take with thee the three best virtues of a wife—truth, humility, and obedience. Good-night, my son!" and he wrung Errington's hand with fervor. "You'll take longer to say good-night to Thelma," and he laughed, "so I'll go in and leave you to it!"

And with a good-natured nod, he entered the house, whistling a tune as he went, that they might not think he imagined himself lonely or neglected—and the two lovers paced slowly up and down

the garden path together, exchanging those first confidences which to outsiders seem so eminently foolish, but which to those immediately concerned are most wonderful, delightfully strange, and enchanting beyond all description. Where, from a practical point of view, is the sense of such questions as these—"When did you love me first?" "What did you feel when I said so-and-so?" "Have you dreamed of me often?" "Will you love me always, always, always?" and so on *ad infinitum*. "Ridiculous rubbish!" exclaims the would-be strong-minded but secretly savage old maid—and the selfishly matter-of-fact but privately fidgety and lonely old bachelor. Ah! but there are those who could tell you that at one time or another of their lives this "ridiculous rubbish" seemed far more important than the decline and fall of empires—more necessary to existence than light and air—more fraught with hope, fear, suspense, comfort, despair, and anxiety than anything that could be invented or imagined! Philip and Thelma—man and woman in the full flush of youth, health, beauty, and happiness—had just entered their Paradise—their fairy-garden—and every little flower and leaf on the way had special, sweet interest for them. Love's indefinable glories—Love's proud possibilities—Love's long ecstasies—these, like so many spirit-figures, seemed to smile and beckon them on, on, on, through golden seas of sunlight—through flower-filled fields of drowsy entrancement—through winding ways of rose-strewn and lily-scented leafage—on, on, with eyes and hearts absorbed in one another—unseeing any end to the dream-like wonders that, like some heavenly picture-scroll, unrolled slowly and radiantly before them. And so they murmured those unwise, tender things which no wisdom in the world has ever surpassed, and when Philip at last said "Good-night!" with more reluctance than Romeo, and pressed his parting kiss on his love's sweet, fresh mouth—the riddle with which he had puzzled himself so often was resolved at last—life *was* worth living, worth cherishing, worth ennobling. The reason of all things seemed clear to him—Love, and Love only, supported, controlled, and grandly completed the universe! He accepted this answer to all perplexities—his heart expanded with a sense of large content—his soul was satisfied.

Meanwhile, during his friend's absence from the yacht, Lorimer took it upon himself to break the news to Duprez and Macfarlane. These latter young gentlemen had had their suspicions already, but they were not quite prepared to hear them so soon confirmed. Lorimer told the matter in his own way.

"I say, you fellows!" he remarked, carelessly, as he sat smoking in their company on deck, "you'd better look out! If you stare at Miss Guldmar too much, you'll have Phil down upon you!"

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Duprez, slyly, "the dear Phil-eep is in love?"

"Something more than that," said Lorimer, looking absently at the cigarette he held between his fingers. "He's an engaged man."

"Engaged!" cried Macfarlane, excitedly. "Ma certes! He has the deevil's own luck! He's just secured for himself the grandest woman in the world!"

"*Je le crois bien!*" said Duprez, gravely, nodding his head several times. "Phil-eep is a wise boy! He is the fortunate one! I am not for marriage at all—no! not for myself—it is to tie one's hands, to become a prisoner—and that would not suit me; but if I were inclined to captivity, I should like Mademoiselle Guldmar for my beautiful jailer. And beautiful she is, *mon Dieu!*—beyond all comparison!"

Lorimer was silent, so was Macfarlane. After a pause, Duprez spoke again.

"And do you know, *cher* Lorimer, when our Phil-eep will marry?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," returned Lorimer. "I know he's engaged, that's all."

Suddenly Macfarlane broke into a chuckling laugh.

"I say, Lorimer," he said, with his deep-set, small gray eyes sparkling with mischief. "'Twould be grand fun to see auld Dyce-worthy's face when he hears o't. By the Lord! He'll fall to cursin' an' swearin' like ma pious aunt in Glasgie, or that auld witch that cursed Miss Thelma yestreen!"

"An eminently unpleasant old woman *she* was!" said Lorimer, musingly. "I wonder what she meant by it!"

"She meant, *mon cher*," said Duprez, airily, "that she knew herself to be ugly and venerable, while mademoiselle was youthful and ravishing—it is a sufficient reason to excite profanity in the mind of a lady!"

"Here comes Errington!" said Macfarlane, pointing to the approaching boat that was coming swiftly back from the Guldmar's pier. "Lorimer, are we to congratulate him?"

"If you like!" returned Lorimer. "I dare say he won't object."

So that as soon as Sir Philip set foot on the yacht, his hands were cordially grasped, and his friends outvied each other in good wishes for his happiness. He thanked them simply and with a manly straightforwardness, entirely free from the usual affected embarrassment that some modern young men think it seemly to adopt under similar circumstances.

"The fact is," he said, frankly, "I congratulate myself—I'm more lucky than I deserve, I know!"

"What a sensation she will make in London, Phil!" said Lorimer suddenly. "I've just thought of it! Good heavens! Lady Winsleigh will cry for sheer spite and vexation!"

Philip laughed. "I hope not," he said. "I should think it would need immense force to draw a tear from her ladyship's cold bright eyes."

"She used to like you awfully, Phil!" said Lorimer. "You were a great favorite of hers."

"All men are her favorites with the exception of one—her husband!" observed Errington, gayly. "Come along, let's have some champagne to celebrate the day! We'll propose toasts and drink healths—we've got a fair excuse for jollity this evening."

They all descended into the saloon, and had a merry time of it, singing songs and telling good stories, Lorimer being the gayest of the party, and it was long past midnight when they retired to their cabins, without looking at the wonders of, perhaps, the most gorgeous sky that had yet shone on their travels—a sky of complete rose-color, varying from the deepest shade up to the palest, in which the sun glowed with a subdued radiance like an enormous burning ruby.

Thelma saw it, standing under her house-porch, where her father had joined her—Sigurd saw it—he had come out from some thicket where he had been hiding, and he now sat, in a humble, crouching posture at Thelma's feet. All three were silent, reverently watching the spreading splendor of the heavens. Once Guldmar addressed his daughter in a soft tone.

"Thou art happy, my bird?"

She smiled—the expression of her face was almost divine in its rapture.

"Perfectly happy, my father!"

At the sound of her dulcet voice, Sigurd looked up. His large blue eyes were full of tears, he took her hand and held it in his meager and wasted one.

"Mistress!" he said suddenly, "do you think I shall soon die?"

She turned her pitying eyes down upon him, startled by the vibrating melancholy of his tone.

"Thou wilt die, Sigurd," answered Guldmar, gently, "when the gods please—not one second sooner or later. Art thou eager to see Valhalla?"

Sigurd nodded dreamily. "They will understand me there!" he murmured. "And I shall grow straight and strong and brave! Mistress, if you meet me in Valhalla, you will love me!"

She stroked his wild fair locks. "I love you now, Sigurd," she said, tenderly. "But perhaps we shall all love each other better in heaven."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Sigurd, patting her hand caressingly. "When we are all dead, dead! When our bodies crumble away and turn to flowers and birds and butterflies—and our souls come out like white and red flames—yes! then we shall love each other and talk of such strange, strange things!" He paused and laughed

wildly. Then his voice sunk again into melancholy monotony—and he added: “Mistress, you are killing poor Sigurd!”

Thelma's face grew very earnest and anxious. “Are you vexed with me, dear?” she asked, soothingly. “Tell me what it is that troubles you?”

Sigurd met her eyes with a look of speechless despair, and shook his head.

“I cannot tell you!” he muttered. “All my thoughts have gone to drown themselves one by one in the cold sea! My heart was buried yesterday, and I saw it sealed down into its coffin. There is something of me left—something that dances before me like a flame—but it will not rest, it does not obey me. I call it, but it will not come! And I am getting tired, mistress—very, very tired!” His voice broke, and a low sob escaped him—he hid his face in the folds of her dress. Guldmar looked at the poor fellow compassionately.

“The wits wander further and further away!” he said to his daughter, in a low tone. “’Tis a mind like a broken rainbow, split through by storm—’twill soon vanish. Be patient with him, child—it cannot be for long!”

“No, not for long!” cried Sigurd, raising his head brightly. “That is true—not for long! Mistress, will you come to-morrow with me and gather flowers? You used to love to wander with your poor boy in the fields—but you have forgotten—and I cannot find any blossoms without you! They will not show themselves unless you come! Will you, dear, beautiful mistress! will you come?”

She smiled, pleased to see him a little more cheerful. “Yes, Sigurd,” she said; “I will come. We will go together early to-morrow morning and gather all the flowers we can find. Will that make you happy?”

“Yes!” he said, softly kissing the hem of her dress. “It will make me happy—for the last time.”

Then he rose in an attitude of attention, as though he had been called by some one at a distance—and with a grave, preoccupied air, he moved away, walking on tiptoe as though he feared to interrupt the sound of some soft invisible music. Guldmar sighed as he watched him disappear.

“May the gods make us thankful for a clear brain when we have it!” he said, devoutly; then turning to his daughter, he bade her good-night, and laid his hands on her golden head in silent but fervent blessing. “Child,” he said, tremulously, “in the new joys that await thee, never forget how thy father loves thee!”

Then, not trusting himself to say more, he strode into the house and betook himself to slumber. Thelma followed his example, and the old farm-house was soon wrapped in the peace and stillness of the strange night—a night of glittering sunshine. Sigurd

alone was wakeful—he lay at the foot of one of the tallest pine-trees, and stared persistently at the radiant sky through the network of dark branches. Now and then he smiled as though he saw some beatific vision—sometimes he plucked fitfully at the soft long moss on which he had made his couch, and sometimes he broke into a low, crooning song. God alone knew the broken ideas, the dim fancies, the half-born desires, that glimmered like pale ghosts in the desert of his brain—God alone, in the great Hereafter, could solve the problem of his sorrows and throw light on his soul's darkness.

It was past six in the morning when he arose, and smoothing back his tangled locks, went to Thelma's window and sat down beneath it, in mute expectancy. He had not long to wait—at the expiration of ten or fifteen minutes, the little lattice was thrown wide open, and the girl's face, fresh as a rose, framed in a shower of amber locks, smiled down upon him.

“I am coming, Sigurd!” she cried, softly and joyously. “How lovely the morning is! Stay for me there! I shall not be long.”

And she disappeared, leaving her window open. Sigurd heard her singing little scraps of song to herself, as she moved about in the interior of her room. He listened, as though his soul were drawn out of him by her voice—but presently the rich notes ceased, and there was a sudden silence. Sigurd knew or guessed the reason of that hush—Thelma was at her prayers. Instinctively the poor forlorn lad folded his wasted hands—most piteously and most imploringly he raised his bewildered eyes to the blue and golden glory of the sky. His conception of God was indefinable; his dreams of heaven, chaotic minglings of fairy-land with Valhalla—but he somehow felt that wherever Thelma's holy aspirations turned, there the angels must be listening.

Presently she came out of the house, looking radiant as the morning itself—her luxuriant hair was thrown back over her shoulders and fell loosely about her in thick curls, simply confined by a knot of blue ribbon. She carried a large osier basket, capacious, and gracefully shaped.

“Now, Sigurd,” she called, sweetly, “I am ready! Where shall we go?”

Sigurd hastened to her side, happy and smiling.

“Across there,” he said, pointing toward the direction of Bosekop. “There is a stream under the trees that laughs to itself all day—you know it, mistress? And the poppies are in the field as you go—and by the banks there are the heartsease flowers—we can not have too many of *them*! Shall we go?”

“Wherever you like, dear,” answered Thelma, tenderly, looking down from her stately height on the poor stunted creature at her side, who held her dress as though he were a child clinging to her as his sole means of guidance. “All the land is pleasant to-day.”

They left the farm and its boundaries. A few men were at work on one of Guldmar's fields, and these looked up—half in awe, half in fear—as Thelma and her fantastic servitor passed along.

"'Tis a fine wench!" said one man, resting on his spade, and following with his eyes the erect, graceful figure of his employer's daughter.

"Maybe, maybe!" said another, gruffly: "but a fine wench is a snare of the devil! Do ye mind what Lovisa Elsland told us?"

"Ay, ay," answered the first speaker, "Lovisa knows—Lovisa is the wisest woman we have in these parts—that's true! The girl's a witch, for sure!"

And they resumed their work in gloomy silence. Not one of them would have willingly labored on Olaf Guldmar's land had not the wages he offered been above the usual rate of hire—and times were bad in Norway. But otherwise, the superstitious fear of him was so great that his fields might have gone untilled and his crops ungathered—however, as matters stood, none of them could deny that he was a good paymaster, and just in his dealings with those whom he employed.

Thelma and Sigurd took their way in silence across a perfumed stretch of meadow-land—the one naturally fertile spot in that somewhat barren district. Plenty of flowers blossomed at their feet, but they did not pause to gather these, for Sigurd was anxious to get to the stream where the purple pansies grew. They soon reached it—it was a silvery clear ribbon of water that unrolled itself in bright folds through green, transparent tunnels of fern and waving grass—leaping now and then with a swift dash over a smooth block of stone or jagged rock—but for the most part gliding softly, with a happy, self-satisfied murmur, as though it were some drowsy spirit dreaming joyous dreams. Here nodded the grave, purple-leaved pansies—legendary consolers of the heart—their little, quaint, expressive physiognomies turned in every direction up to the sky, as though absorbing the sunlight—down to the ground, with an almost severe air of meditation, or curled sideways on their stems in a sort of sly reflectiveness.

Sigurd was among them at once—they were his friends—his playmates, his favorites—and he gathered them quickly yet tenderly, murmuring as he did so: "Yes, you must all die; but death does not hurt; no! life hurts, but not death! See! as I pluck you, you all grow wings and fly away—away to other meadows, and bloom again." He paused, and a puzzled look came into his eyes. He turned toward Thelma, who had seated herself on a little knoll just above the stream: "Tell me, mistress," he said, "do the flowers go to heaven?"

She smiled. "I think so, dear Sigurd," she said; "I hope so! I am almost sure they do."

Sigurd nodded with an air of satisfaction.

"That is right," he observed. "It would never do to leave them behind, you know! They would be missed, and we should have to come down again and fetch them——" A crackling among the branches of some trees startled him—he looked round, and uttered a peculiar cry like the cry of a wild animal, and exclaimed: "Spies, spies! Ha! ha! secret, wicked faces that are afraid to show themselves! Come out! Mistress, mistress! make them come out!"

Thelma rose, surprised at his gesticulations, and came toward him; to her utter astonishment she found herself confronted by old Lovisa Elsland and the Rev. Mr. Dyceworthy's servant, Ulrika. On both women's faces there was a curious expression of mingled fear, triumph, and malevolence. Lovisa was the first to break silence.

"At last!" she croaked, in a sort of slow monotonous tone. "At last, Thelma Guldmar, the Lord has delivered you into my hands!"

Thelma drew Sigurd close to her, and slipped one arm round him.

"Poor soul!" she said, softly, with sweet, pitying eyes fixed fearlessly on the old hag's withered, evil visage. "You must be tired, wandering about on the hills as you do! If you are her friend," she added, addressing Ulrika, "why do you not make her rest at home and keep warm? She is so old and feeble!"

"Feeble!" shrieked Lovisa; "feeble!" And she seemed choking with passion. "If I had my fingers at your throat, you should then see if I am feeble! I——" Ulrika pulled her by the arm, and whispered something which had the effect of calming her a little. "Well," she said, "you speak then! I can wait!"

Ulrika cleared her husky voice, and fixed her dull eyes on the girl's radiant countenance.

"You must go away," she said, coldly and briefly. "You and your father, and this creature," and she pointed contemptuously to the staring Sigurd. "Do you understand? You must leave the Alten Fjord! The people are tired of you—tired of bad harvests, ill-luck, sickness, and continued poverty. You are the cause of all our miseries—and we have resolved you shall not stay among us. Go quickly—take the blight and pestilence of your presence elsewhere! Go! or if you will not——"

"We shall burn, burn, burn, and utterly destroy!" interrupted Lovisa, with a sort of eldritch shriek. "The strong pine rafters of Olaf Guldmar's dwelling shall be kindled into flame to light the hills with crimson, far and near! Not a plank shall be spared!—not a vestige of his pride be left——"

"Stop!" said Thelma, quietly. "What do you mean? You must both be very mad or very wicked! You want us to go away—you threaten to set fire to our home—why? We have done you no harm. Tell me, poor soul!" and she turned with queenly forbearance to Lovisa, "is it for Britta's sake that you would burn the house she lives in? That is not wise! You cursed me the other day—and why? What have I done that you should hate me?"

The old woman regarded her with steadfast, cruel eyes.

"You are your mother's child!" she said. "I hated her—I hate you! You are a witch!—the village knows it—Mr. Dyceworthy knows it! Mr. Dyceworthy says we shall be justified in the Lord's sight for wreaking evil upon you! Evil, evil be on those of evil deeds!"

"Then shall the evil fall on Mr. Dyceworthy," said the girl calmly. "He is wicked in himself—and doubly wicked to encourage *you* in wickedness. He is ignorant and false—why do you believe in such a man?"

"He is a saint—a saint!" cried Lovisa, wildly. "And shall the daughter of Satan withstand his power?" And she clapped her hands in a sort of fierce ecstasy.

Thelma glanced at her pityingly and smiled. "A saint! Poor thing, how little you know him!" she said. "And it is a pity you should hate me, for I have done you no wrong. I would do good to all if I knew how. Tell me, can I comfort you, or make your life more cheerful? It must be hard to be so old and all alone!"

"Your death would comfort me!" returned Lovisa, grimly. "Why do you keep Britta from me?"

"I do not keep her," Thelma answered. "She stays with me because she is happy. Why do you grudge her her happiness? And as for burning my father's house, surely you would not do so wicked and foolish a thing!—but still, you must do as you choose, for it is not possible that we shall leave the Alden Fjord to please you."

Here Ulrika started forward angrily. "You defy us!" she cried. "You will not go?" And in her excitement she seized Thelma's arm roughly.

This action was too much for Sigurd; he considered it an attack on the person of his beloved mistress, and he resented it at once in his own fashion. Throwing himself on Ulrika with sudden ferocity, he pushed and beat her back as though he were a wolf-hound struggling with refractory prey; and though the ancient Lovisa rushed to the rescue, and Thelma imploringly called upon her zealous champion to desist, all remonstrances were unavailing, till Sigurd had reduced his enemy to the most abject and whimpering terror.

"A demon—a demon!" she sobbed and moaned, as the valiant dwarf at last released her from his clutches; and, tossing his long, fair locks over his misshapen shoulders, laughed loudly and triumphantly with delight at his victory. "Lovisa! Lovisa Elsland! this is your doing; you brought this upon me! I may die now, and you will not care! Oh, Lord, Lord, have mercy—"

Suddenly she stopped; her eyes dilated—her face grew gray with the sickening pallor of fear. Slowly she raised her hand and pointed to Sigurd—his fantastic dress had become disordered in

the affray, and his jacket was torn open, and on his bare chest a long red scar in the shape of a cross was distinctly visible. "That scar!" she muttered. "How did he get that scar?"

Lovisa stared at her in impatient derision. Thelma was too surprised to answer immediately, and Sigurd took it upon himself to furnish what he considered a crushing reply.

"Odin's mark!" he said, patting the scar with much elation. "No wonder you are afraid of it! Everybody knows it—birds, flowers, trees and stars! Even you—you are afraid!"

And he laughed again, and snapped his fingers in her face. The woman shuddered violently. Step by step she drew near to the wondering Thelma, and spoke in low and trembling accents, without a trace of her former anger.

"They say you are wicked," she said, slowly, "and that the devil has your soul already, before you are dead! But I am not afraid of you. No; I will forgive you, and pray for you, if you will tell me—" She paused, and then continued, as with a strong effort. "Yes—tell me *who* is this Sigurd?"

"Sigurd is a foundling," answered Thelma simply. "He was floating about in the fjord in a basket, and my father saved him. He was quite a baby. He had this scar on his chest then. He has lived with us ever since."

Ulrika looked at her searchingly—then bent her head—whether in gratitude or despair it was difficult to say,

"Lovisa Elsland," she said, monotonously, "I am going home. I cannot help you any longer! I am tired—ill." Here she suddenly broke down, and, throwing up her arms with a wild gesture, she cried: "Oh, God, God! oh, God!" and burst into a stormy passion of sobs and tears.

Thelma, touched by her utter misery, would have offered consolation, but Lovisa repelled her with a fierce gesture.

"Go!" said the old woman, harshly. "You have cast your spells upon her—I am witness of your work! And shall you escape just punishment? No; not while there is a God in heaven, and I, Lovisa Elsland, live to perform His bidding! Go—white devil that you are!—go and carry misfortune upon misfortune to your fine gentleman-lover! Ah!" and she chuckled maliciously as the girl recoiled from her, her proud face growing suddenly paler, "have I touched you there? Lie in his breast, and it shall be as though a serpent stung him—kiss his lips, and your touch shall be poison—live in doubt, and die in misery! Go! and may all evil follow you!"

She raised her staff and waved it majestically, as though she drew a circle in the air—Thelma smiled pityingly, but deigned no answer to her wild ravings.

"Come, Sigurd!" she said, simply, "let us return home. It is growing late—father will wonder where we are."

"Yes, yes," agreed Sigurd, seizing the basket full of the pansies he had plucked. "The sunshine is slipping away, and we cannot live with shadows! These are not real women, mistress; they are dreams—black dreams. I have often fought with dreams, and I know how to make them afraid! See how the one weeps because she knows me—and the other is just going to fall into a grave. I can hear the clods thrown on her head—thump—thump! It does not take long to bury a dream! Come, mistress, let us follow the sunshine!"

And, taking the hand she extended toward him, he turned away, looking back once, however, to call out loudly:

"Good-bye, bad dreams!"

As they disappeared behind the trees, Lovisa turned angrily to the still sobbing Ulrika.

"What is this folly?" she exclaimed, striking her staff fiercely into the ground. "Art mad or bewitched?"

Ulrika looked up—her plain face swollen and stained with weeping.

"Oh, Lord, have mercy upon me! Oh, Lord, forgive me!" she moaned. "I did not know it—how *could* I know?"

Lovisa grew so impatient that she seized her by the shoulder and shook her violently.

"Know what?" she cried; "know what?"

"Sigurd is my son!" said Ulrika, with a sort of solemn resignation—then, with a sudden gesture, she threw her hand above her head, crying: "My son, my son! The child I thought I had killed! The Lord be praised I did not murder him!"

Lovisa Elsland seemed stupefied with surprise. "Is this the truth?" she asked at last, slowly and incredulously.

"The truth, the truth!" cried Ulrika, passionately. "It is always the truth that comes to light! He is my child, I tell you! I gave him that scar!" She paused, shuddering, and continued in a lower tone, "I tried to kill him with a knife, but when the blood flowed, it sickened me, and I could not! He was an infant abortion—the evil fruit of an evil deed—and I threw him out to the waves—as I told you long ago. You have had good use of my confession, Lovisa Elsland; you have held me in your power by means of my secret, but now——"

The old woman interrupted her with a low laugh of contempt and malice.

"As the parents are, so are the children!" she said, scornfully. "Your lover must have been a fine man, Ulrika, if the son is like his father!"

Ulrika glared at her vengefully, then drew herself up with an air of defiance.

"I care nothing for your taunts, Elsland!" she said. "You can do me no harm! All is over between us! I will help in no

mischief against the Guldmars. Whatever their faults, they saved—my child!"

"Is that so great a blessing?" asked Lovisa, ironically.

"It makes your threats useless," answered Ulrika. "You can not call me *murderess* again!"

"Coward and fool!" shrieked Lovisa. "Was it *your* intent that the child should live? Were you not glad to think it dead? And cannot I spread the story of your infamy through all the villages where you are known? Is not the wretched boy himself a living witness of the attempt you made to kill him? Does not that scar speak against you? Would not Olaf Guldmar relate the story of the child's rescue to any one that asked him? Would you like all Bosekop to know of your intrigue with an escaped criminal, who was afterward caught and hung? The virtuous Ulrika—the zealous servant of the Gospel—the pious, praying Ulrika!" and the old woman trembled with rage and excitement. "Out of my power? Never, never! As long as there is breath in my body I will hold you down! *Not a murderess, you say——*"

"No," said Ulrika, very calmly, with a keen look, "I am *not*—but you *are!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

Il n'y a personne qui ait eu autant à souffrir a votre sujet que moi depuis ma naissance! aussi je vous supplie à deux genoux et au nom de Dieu, d'avoir pitié de moi!—*Old Breton Ballad.*

In a few more days Thelma's engagement to Sir Philip Bruce-Errington was the talk of the neighborhood. The news spread gradually, having been, in the first place, started by Britta, whose triumph in her mistress's happiness was charming to witness. It reached the astonished and reluctant ears of the Rev. Mr. Dyce-worthy, whose rage was so great that it destroyed his appetite for twenty-four hours. But the general impression in the neighborhood, where superstition maintained so strong a hold on the primitive and prejudiced minds of the people, was that the reckless young Englishman would rue the day on which he wedded "the white witch of the Alten Fjord."

Guldmar was regarded with more suspicion than ever as having used some secret and diabolical influence to promote the match; and the whole party were, as it seemed, tabooed, and looked upon as given up to the most unholy practices.

Needless to say, the opinions of the villagers had no effect whatever on the good spirits of those who were thus unfavorably criticised, and it would have been difficult to find a merrier group than that assembled one fine morning in front of Guldmar's house, all equipped from top to toe for some evidently unusually lengthy