

crowded to excess with its glad and sorrowful, busy and idle, rich and poor millions. England itself floated before her fancy as a green, fertile, embowered island where Shakespeare had lived—and it delighted her to know that her future home, Errington Manor, was situated in Warwickshire, Shakespeare's county. Of the society that awaited her, she had no notion—she was prepared to “keep house” for her husband in a very simple way—to spin his household linen, to spare him all trouble and expense, and to devote herself body and soul to his service. As may be well imagined, the pictures she drew of her future married life, as she sat and spun with Britta on that peaceful afternoon, were widely different to the destined reality that every day approached her more nearly.

Meantime, while the two girls were at home and undisturbed in the quiet farm-house, the mountaineering party, headed by Sigurd, were well on their way toward the great fall of Njedegorze. They had made a toilsome ascent of the hills by the side of the Alten River—they had climbed over craggy boulders and slippery rocks, sometimes wading knee-deep in the stream, or pausing to rest and watch the salmon leap and turn glittering somersaults in the air close above the diamond-clear water—and they had beguiled their fatigue with songs and laughter and the telling of fantastic legends and stories in which Sigurd had shone at his best—indeed, this unhappy being was in a singularly clear and rational frame of mind, disposed, too, to be agreeable even toward Errington. Lorimer, who for reasons of his own had kept a close watch on Sigurd ever since his friend's engagement to Thelma, was surprised and gratified at this change in his former behavior, and encouraged him in it, while Errington himself responded to the dwarf's proffered friendship, and walked beside him, chatting cheerfully during the most part of the excursion to the fall. It was a long and exceedingly difficult journey—and in some parts dangerous—but Sigurd proved himself worthy of the commendations bestowed on him by the *bonde*, and guided them by the easiest and most secure paths, till at last, about seven o'clock in the evening, they heard the rush and roar of the rapids below the fall, and with half an hour's more exertion, came in sight of them, though not as yet of the fall itself. Yet the rapids were grand enough to merit attention—and the whole party stopped to gaze on the whirling wonder of waters that, hissing furiously, circled round and round giddily in wheels of white foam, and then, as though enraged, leaped high over obstructing stones and branches, and rushed onward and downward to the smoother length of the river.

The noise was deafening—they could not hear each other speak unless by shouting at the top of their voices, and even then the sounds were rendered almost indistinct by the riotous uproar. Sigurd, however, who knew all the ins and outs of the place, sprung lightly on autting crag, and, putting both hands to his mouth,

uttered a peculiar, shrill, and far-reaching cry. Clear above the turmoil of the restless waters, that cry was echoed back eight distinct times from the surrounding rocks and hills. Sigurd laughed triumphantly.

“You see!” he exclaimed, as he resumed his leadership of the party, “they all know me! They are obliged to answer me when I call—they dare not disobey!” And his blue eyes flashed with that sudden wild fire that generally foretold some access of his particular mania.

Errington saw this and said soothingly: “Of course not, Sigurd! No one would dream of disobeying you! See how we follow you to-day—we all do exactly what you tell us.”

“We are sheep, Sigurd,” added Lorimer, lazily; “and you are the shepherd.”

Sigurd looked from one to the other half doubtingly, half cunningly. He smiled.

“Yes!” he said. “You will follow me, will you not? Up to the very top of the fall?”

“By all means!” answered Sir Philip, gayly. “Anywhere you choose to go!”

Sigurd seemed satisfied, and lapsing into the calm, composed manner which had distinguished him all day, he led the way as before, and they resumed their march, this time in silence, for conversation was well-nigh impossible. The nearer they came to the yet invisible fall, the more thunderous grew the din—it was as though they approached some vast battle-field where opposing armies were in full action, with all the tumult of cannonade and musketry. The ascent grew steeper and more difficult—at times the high barriers of rocks seemed almost impassable—often they were compelled to climb over confused heaps of huge stones through which the eddying water pushed its way with speed and fury—but Sigurd's precision was never at fault—he leaped crag after crag swiftly and skillfully, always lighting on a sure foothold, and guiding the others to do the same. At last, at a sharp turn of one of these rocky eminences, they perceived an enormous cloud of white vapor rising up like smoke from the earth, and twisting itself as it rose in swaying, serpentine folds, as though some giant spirit-hand were shaking it to and fro like a long flowing veil in the air. Sigurd paused and pointed forward.

“Njedegorze!” he cried.

They all pressed on with some excitement. The ground vibrated beneath their feet with the shock of the falling torrent, and the clash and uproar of the disputing waters rolled in their ears like the grand, sustained bass of some huge cathedral organ. Almost blinded by the spray that dashed its disdainful drops in their faces, deafened by the majestic, loud, and ceaseless eloquence that poured its persuasive force into the splitting hearts of the rocks around

them—breathless with climbing, and well-nigh tired out, they struggled on, and broke into one unanimous shout of delight and triumph when they at last reached the small hut that had been erected for the convenience of travelers who might choose that way to journey to the Alten Fjord—and stood face to face with the magnificent cascade, one of the grandest in Norway. What a sublime spectacle it was!—that tempest of water sweeping sheer down the towering rocks in one straight, broad, unbroken sheet of foam! A myriad rainbows flashed in the torrent and vanished, to reappear again instantly with redoubled luster—while the glory of the evening sunlight glittering on one side of the fall made it gleam like a sparkling shower of molten gold.

“Njedegorze!” cried Sigurd, again, giving a singularly musical pronunciation to the apparently uncouth name. “Come! still a little further—to the top of the fall!”

Olaf Guldmar, however, paid no attention to this invitation. He was already beginning to busy himself with preparations for passing the night comfortably in the hut before mentioned. Stout old Norseman as he was, there were limits to his endurance, and the arduous exertions of the long day had brought fatigue to him as well as to the rest of the party.

Macfarlane was particularly exhausted. His frequent pulls at the whisky flask had been of little or no avail as a support to his aching limbs, and, now he had reached his destination, he threw himself full length on the turf in front of the hut and groaned most dismally.

Lorimer surveyed him amusedly, and stood beside him, the very picture of a cool young Briton whom nothing could possibly decompose.

“Done up—eh, Sandy?” he inquired.

“Done up!” growled Macfarlane. “D’ye think I’m a Norseman or a jumping Frenchy?” This with a look of positive indignation at the lively Duprez, who, if tired, was probably too vain to admit it, for he was strutting about, giving vent to his genuine admiration of the scene before him with the utmost freshness and enthusiasm. “I’m just a plain Scotchman, an’ no such a fule at climbin’ either! Why, man, I’ve been up Goatfell in Arran, an’ Ben Lomond an’ Ben Nevis—there’s a mountain for ye, if ye like! But a brae like this, wi’ a’ the stanes lyin’ helter-skelter, an’ crags that ye can barely hold on to—and a mad chap guidin’ ye on at the speed o’ a leapin’ goat—I tell ye, I haena been used to’t.” Here he drew out his flask and took another extensive pull at it. Then he added, suddenly: “Just look at Errington! He’ll be in a fair way to break his neck if he follows yon wee crazy loon any further.”

At these words Lorimer turned sharply round, and perceived his friend following Sigurd step by step up a narrow footing in the steep ascent of some rough, irregular crags that ran out and formed

a narrow ledge, ending in a sharp point jutting directly over the full fury of the water-fall. He watched the two climbing figures for an instant without any anxiety—then he suddenly remembered that Philip had promised to go with Sigurd “to the top of the fall.” Acting on a rapid impulse which he did not stop to explain to himself, Lorimer at once started off after them—but the ascent was difficult; they were some distance ahead, and though he shouted vociferously, the roar of the cascade rendered his voice inaudible. Gaining on them, however, by slow degrees, he was startled when all at once they disappeared at the summit—and, breathless with his rapid climb, he paused, bewildered. By and by he saw Sigurd creeping cautiously out along the rocky shelf that overhung the tumbling torrent—his gaze grew riveted with a sort of deadly fascination on the spot.

“Good God!” he muttered under his breath. “Surely Phil will not follow him *there!*”

He watched with strained eyes—and a smothered cry escaped him as Errington’s tall figure, erect and bold, appeared on that narrow and dangerous platform! He never knew how he clambered up the rest of the slippery ascent. A double energy seemed given to his active limbs. He never paused again for one second till he also stood on the platform, without being heard or perceived by either Sigurd or Philip. Their backs were turned to him, and he feared to move or speak, lest a sudden surprised movement on their parts should have the fatal result of precipitating one or both into the fall. He remained, therefore, behind them, silent and motionless—looking, as they looked, at the terrific scene below. From that point, Njedegorze was as a huge boiling caldron, from which arose twisted wreaths and coiling lengths of white vapor, faintly colored with gold and silvery blue. Dispersing in air, these mists took all manner of fantastic forms—ghostly arms seemed to wave and beckon, ghostly hands to unite in prayer—and fluttering creatures in gossamer draperies of green and crimson appeared to rise and float and retire and shrink to nothingness again in the rainbow drift and sweep of whirling foam. Errington gazed unconcernedly down on the seething abyss. He pushed back his cap from his brow, and let the fresh wind play among his dark, clustering curls. His nerves were steady, and he surveyed the giddily twisting wheels of shining water without any corresponding giddiness in his own brain. He had that sincere delight in a sublime natural spectacle which is the heritage of all who possess a poetic and artistic temperament; and though he stood on a frail ledge of rock, from which one false or unwary step might send him to certain destruction, he had not the slightest sense of possible danger in his position. Withdrawing his eyes from the fall, he looked kindly down at Sigurd, who in turn was staring up at him with a wild fixity of regard.

"Well, old boy," he said, cheerfully, "this is a fine sight! Have you had enough of it? Shall we go back?"

Sigurd drew imperceptibly nearer. Lorimer, from his point of vantage behind a huge boulder, drew nearer also.

"Go back?" echoed Sigurd. "Why should we go back?"

"Why, indeed!" laughed Errington, lightly balancing himself on the trembling rocks beneath him. "Except that I should scarcely think this is the best place on which to pass the night! Not enough room, and too much noise! What say you?"

"Oh, brave, brave fool!" cried the dwarf in sudden excitement. "Are you not afraid?"

The young baronet's keen eyes glanced him over with amused wonder.

"What of?" he demanded, coolly. Still nearer came Sigurd—nearer also came the watchful, though almost invisible Lorimer.

"Look down there!" continued Sigurd, in shrill tones, pointing to the foaming gulf. "Look at the *Elf-danz*—see the beautiful spirits with the long pale green hair and glittering wings! See how they beckon, beckon, beckon! They want some one to join them—look how their white arms wave—they throw back their golden veils and smile at us! They call to *you*—you with the strong figure and the proud eyes—why do you not go to them? They will kiss and caress you—they have sweet lips and snow-white bosoms—they will love you and take care of you—they are as fair as Thelma!"

"Are they? I doubt it!" and Errington smiled dreamily as he turned his head again toward the fleecy whirl of white water, and saw at once with an artist's quick eye what his sick-brained companion meant by the *Elf-danz*, in the fantastic twisting, gliding shapes tossed up in the vaporous mist of the fall. "But I'll take your word, Sigurd, without making the elves' personal acquaintance! Come along—this place is bad for you—we'll dance with the green-haired nymphs another time."

And with a light laugh he was about to turn away, when he was surprised by a sudden, strange convulsion of Sigurd's countenance—his blue eyes flashed with an almost phosphorescent luster—his pale skin flushed darkly red, and the veins in his forehead started into swelled and knotted prominence.

"Another time!" he screamed loudly; "no, no! Now—now! Die, robber of Thelma's love! Die—die—die!"

Repeating these words like quick gasps of fury, he twisted his meager arms tightly round Errington, and thrust him fiercely with all his might toward the edge of the fall. For one second Philip strove against him—the next, he closed his eyes—Thelma's face smiled on his mind in that darkness as though in white farewell—the surging blood roared in his ears with more thunder than the terrific tumble of the torrent—"God!" he muttered, and then—

then he stood safe on the upper part of the rocky platform with Lorimer's strong hand holding him in a vice-like grasp, and Lorimer's face, pale, but looking cheerfully into his. For a moment he was too bewildered to speak. His friend loosened him and laughed rather forcedly—a slight tremble of his lips was observable under his fair mustache.

"By Jove, Phil," he remarked in his usual nonchalant manner, "that was rather a narrow shave! Fortunate I happened to be there!"

Errington gazed about him confusedly. "Where's Sigurd?" he asked.

"Gone! Ran off like a 'leapin' goat,' as Sandy elegantly describes him. I thought at first he meant to jump over the fall, in which case I should have been compelled to let him have his own way, as my hands were full. But he's taken a safe landward direction."

"Didn't he try to push me over?"

"Exactly! He was quite convinced that the mermaids wanted you. But I considered that Miss Thelma's wishes had a prior claim on my regard."

"Look here, old man," said Errington, suddenly, "don't jest about it! You saved my life!"

"Well!" and Lorimer laughed. "Quite by accident, I assure you."

"Not by accident!" and Philip flushed up, looking very handsome and earnest. "I believe you followed us up here thinking something might happen. Now didn't you?"

"Suppose I did," began Lorimer, but he was interrupted by his friend, who seized his hand and pressed it with a warm, close, affectionate fervor. Their eyes met—and Lorimer blushed as though he had performed some action meriting blame rather than gratitude. "That'll do, old fellow," he said, almost nervously. "As we say in polite society when some one crushes our favorite corn under his heel—don't mention it! You see Sigurd *is* cracked—there's not the slightest doubt about that—and he's hardly accountable for his vagaries. Then I know something about him that perhaps you don't. He loves your Thelma!"

They were making the descent of the rocks together, and Errington stopped short in surprise.

"Loves Thelma! You mean as a brother—"

"Oh, no I don't! I mean that he loves her as brothers often love other people's sisters—his affection is by no means fraternal—if it were only *that*—"

"I see!" and Philip's eyes filled with a look of grave compassion. "Poor fellow! I understand his hatred of me now. Good heavens! how he must suffer! I forgive him with all my heart. But—I say, Thelma has no idea of this!"

"Of course not. And you'd better not tell her. What's the good of making her unhappy?"

"But how did *you* learn it?" inquired Philip, with a look of some curiosity at his friend.

"Oh, I!" and Lorimer laughed carelessly; "I was always an observing sort of fellow—fond of putting two and two together and making four of them when I wasn't too exhausted and the weather wasn't too hot for the process. Sigurd's rather attached to me—indulges me with some specially private ravings now and then, I soon found out his secret, though I believe the poor little chap doesn't understand his own feelings himself."

"Well," said Errington, thoughtfully, "under the circumstances you'd better not mention this affair of the fall to Guldmar. It will only vex him. Sigurd won't try such a prank again."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Lorimer; "but you know enough now to be on your guard with him." He paused and looked up with a misty softness in his frank blue eyes—then went on in a subdued tone—"When I saw you on the edge of that frightful chasm, Phil—" He broke off as if the recollection were too painful, and exclaimed, suddenly: "Good God! if I had lost you!"

Errington clapped one hand on his shoulder

"Well! What if you had?" he asked, almost mirthfully, though there was a suspicious tremble in his ringing voice.

"I should have said with Horatio, 'I am more an antique Roman than a Dane'—and gone after you," laughed Lorimer. "And who knows what a jolly banquet we might not have *been* enjoying in the next world by this time? If I believe in anything at all, I believe in a really agreeable heaven—nectar and ambrosia, and all that sort of thing, and Hebes to wait upon you."

As he spoke they reached the sheltering hut, where Guldmar, Duprez, and Macfarlane were waiting rather impatiently for them.

"Where's Sigurd?" cried the *bonde*.

"Gone for a ramble on his own account," answered Errington, readily. "You know his fancies!"

"I wish his fancies would leave him," grumbled Guldmar. "He promised to light a fire and spread the meal—and now, who knows whether he has wandered?"

"Never mind, sir," said Lorimer. "Engage me as a kitchen boy. I can light a fire, and can also sit beside it when it is properly kindled. More I cannot promise. As the housemaids say when they object to assist the cook—it would be *beneath* me."

"Cook!" cried Duprez, catching at this word. "I can cook! Give me anything to broil. I will broil it! You have coffee—I will make it!" And in the twinkling of an eye he had divested himself of his coat, turned up his cuffs, and manufactured the cap

of a *chef* out of a newspaper which he stuck jauntily on his head. "Behold me, *messieurs, à votre service!*"

His liveliness was infectious; they all set to work with a will, and in a few moments a crackling wood-fire blazed cheerily on the ground, and the gypsy preparations for the *al-fresco* supper went on apace amid peals of laughter. Soon the fragrance of steaming coffee arose and mingled itself with the resinous odors of the surrounding pine-trees—while Macfarlane distinguished himself by catching a fine salmon trout in a quiet nook of the rushing river, and this Duprez cooked in a style that would have done honor to a *cordon bleu*. They made an excellent meal, and sung songs in turn and told stories—Olaf Guldmar, in particular, related eerie legends of the *Dovre-fjelde*, and many a striking history of ancient origin, full of terror and superstition—concerning witches, devils, and spirits both good and evil who are still believed to have their abode on the Norwegian hills—for, as the *bonde* remarked with a smile, "when civilization has driven these unearthly beings from every other refuge in the world, they will always be sure of a welcome in Norway."

It was eleven o'clock when they at last retired within the hut to rest for the night, and the errant Sigurd had not returned. The sun shone brilliantly, but there was no window to the small shed, and light and air came only through the door, which was left wide open. The tired travelers lay down on their spread-out rugs and blankets, and wishing each other a cheerful "good-night," were soon fast asleep. Errington was rather restless, and lay awake for some little time, listening to the stormy discourse of the fall; but at last his eyelids yielded to the heaviness that oppressed them, and he sunk into a light slumber.

Meanwhile the imperial sun rode majestically downward to the edge of the horizon—and the sky blushed into the pale tint of a wild rose, that deepened softly and steadily with an ever-increasing fiery brilliance as the minutes glided noiselessly on to the enchanted midnight hour. A wind began to rustle mysteriously among the pines—then gradually growing wrathful, strove to whistle a loud defiance to the roar of the tumbling waters. Through the little nooks and crannies of the roughly constructed cabin where the travelers slept, it uttered small wild shrieks of warning or dismay—and, suddenly, as though touched by an invisible hand, Sir Philip awoke. A crimson glare streaming through the open door dazzled his drowsy eyes—was it a forest on fire? He started up in dreamy alarm—then he remembered where he was. Realizing that there must be an exceptionally fine sky to cast so ruddy a reflection on the ground, he threw on his cloak and went outside.

What a wondrous, almost unearthly scene greeted him! His first impulse was to shout aloud in sheer ecstasy—his next to stand

silent in reverential awe. The great fall was no longer a sweeping flow of white foam—it had changed to a sparkling shower of rubies, as though some great geni, tired of his treasures, were flinging them away by giant handfuls in the most reckless waste and lavish abundance. From the bottom of the cascade a crimson vapor arose, like smoke from flame, and the whirling rapids, deeply red for the most part, darkened here and there into an olive-green flecked with gold, while the spray, tossed high over interrupting rocks and boulders, glittered as it fell like small fragments of broken opal. The sky was of one dense uniform rose-color from west to east—soft and shimmering as a broad satin pavilion freshly unrolled—the sun was invisible, hidden behind the adjacent mountains, but his rays touched some peaks in the distance, on which white wreaths of snow lay, bringing them into near and sparkling prominence.

The whole landscape was transformed—the tall trees rustling and swaying in the now boisterous wind took all flickering tints of color on their trunks and leaves—the gray stones and pebbles turned to lumps of gold and heaps of diamonds, and on the other side of the rapids, a large tuft of heather in a cleft of the rocks glowed with extraordinary vividness and warmth like a suddenly kindled fire. A troop of witches dancing wildly on the sward—a ring of fairies—kelpies tripping from crag to crag—a sudden chorus of sweet voiced water-nymphs—nothing unreal or fantastical would have surprised Errington at that moment. Indeed, he almost expected something of the kind—the scene was so eminently fitted for it.

“Positively, I must wake Lorimer,” he thought to himself. “He oughtn’t to miss such a gorgeous spectacle as this.”

He moved a little more in position to view the fall. What was that small dark object running swiftly yet steadily along on the highest summit of those jutting crags? He rubbed his eyes amazedly—was it—could it be *Sigurd*? He watched it for a moment—then uttered a loud cry as he saw it pause on the very ledge of rock from which but a short while since he himself had been so nearly precipitated. The figure was now distinctly visible, outlined in black against the flaming crimson of the sky—it stood upright and waved its arms with a frantic gesture. There was no mistaking it—it was *Sigurd*!

Without another second’s hesitation Errington hurried back to the hut and awoke, with clamorous alarm, the rest of the party. His brief explanation sufficed—they all hurried forth in startled excitement. *Sigurd* still occupied his hazardous position, and as they looked at him he seemed to dance wildly nearer the extreme edge of the rocky platform. Old Guldmar turned pale. “The gods preserve him!” he muttered in his beard—then turning, he began resolutely to make the ascent of the rocks with long, rapid

strides—the young men followed him eager and almost breathless, each and all bent upon saving *Sigurd* from the danger in which he stood, and trying by different ways to get more quickly near the unfortunate lad and call, or draw him back by force from his point of imminent deadly peril. They were more than half-way up, when a piercing cry rang clearly above the thunderous din of the fall—a cry that made them pause for a moment.

*Sigurd* caught sight of the figures advancing to his rescue, and was waving them back with eloquent gestures of anger and defiance. His small misshapen body was alive with wrath—it seemed as though he were some dwarf king ruling over the glittering crimson torrent, and grimly forbidding strangers to enter on the boundaries of his magic territory. They, however, pressed on with renewed haste—and they had nearly reached the summit when another shrill cry echoed over the sunset-colored foam.

Once more they paused—they were in full view of the distraught *Sigurd*, and he turned his head toward them, shaking back his long fair hair with his old favorite gesture and laughing in apparent glee. Then he suddenly raised his arms, and, clasping his hands together, poised himself as though he were some winged thing about to fly.

“*Sigurd*! *Sigurd*!” shouted Guldmar, his strong voice trembling with anguish. “Come back! come back to *Thelma*!”

At the sound of that beloved name, the unhappy creature seemed to hesitate, and, profiting by that instant of irresolution, Errington and Lorimer rushed forward—Too late! *Sigurd* saw them coming, and glided with stealthy caution to the very brink of the torrent, where there was scarcely any foothold—there he looked back at his would-be rescuers with an air of mystery and cunning, and broke into a loud derisive laugh.

Then still with clasped hands and smiling face—unheeding the shout of horror that broke from those who beheld him—he leaped, and fell! Down, down into the roaring abyss! For one half second—one lightning flash—his twisted figure, like a slight black speck, was seen against the wide roseate glory of the tumbling cascade—then—it disappeared, engulfed and lost forever! Gone—with all his wild poet fancies and wandering dreams—gone, with his unspoken love and unguessed sorrows—gone where dark things shall be made light—and where the broken or tangled chain of the soul’s intelligence shall be mended and made perfect by the tender hands of the All-Wise and the All-Loving One, whose ways are too gloriously vast for our finite comprehension.

“Gone, mistress!” as he would have said to the innocent cause of his heart’s anguish. “Gone where I shall grow straight and strong and brave! Mistress, if you meet me in *Valhalla*, you will love me!”