

CHAPTER XVII.

Do not, I pray you, think evilly of so holy a man! He has a sore combat against the flesh and the devil!—*The Maid of Honor.*

THE horror-stricken spectators of the catastrophe stood for a minute inert and speechless—stupefied by its suddenness and awful rapidity. Then with one accord they hurried down to the level shore of the torrent, moved by the unanimous idea that they might possibly succeed in rescuing Sigurd's frail corpse from the sharp teeth of the jagged rocks, that, piercing upward through the foam of the roaring rapids, were certain to bruise, tear, and disfigure it beyond all recognition. But even this small satisfaction was denied them. There was no sign of a floating or struggling body anywhere visible. And while they kept an eager lookout the light in the heavens slowly changed. From burning crimson it softened to a tender amethyst hue, as smooth and delicate as the glossy pale tint of the purple clematis—and with it the rosy foam of the fall graduated to varying tints of pink, from pink to tender green, and lastly, it became as a shower of amber wine. Guldmar spoke first in a voice broken by deep emotion.

"'Tis all over with him, poor lad!" he said, and tears glittered thickly in his keen old eyes. "And—though the gods of a surety, know best—this is an end I looked not for! A mournful home-returning shall we have—for how to break the news to Thelma is more than I can tell!"

And he shook his head sorrowfully while returning the warm and sympathizing pressure of Errington's hand.

"You see," he went on, with a wistful look at the grave and compassionate face of his accepted son-in-law—"the boy was no boy of mine, 'tis true—and the winds had more than their share of his wits—yet—we knew him from a baby—and my wife loved him for his sad estate, which he was not to blame for. Thelma, too—he was her first playmate—"

The *bonde* could trust himself to say no more, but turned abruptly away, brushing one hand across his eyes, and was silent for many minutes. The young men, too, were silent—Sigurd's determined suicide had chilled and sickened them. Slowly they returned to the hut to pass the remaining hours of the night—though sleep was of course, after what they had witnessed, impossible. They remained awake, therefore, talking in low tones of the fatal event, and listening to the solemn *sough* of the wind through the pines, that sounded to Errington's ears like a monotonous forest dirge. He thought of the first time he had ever seen the unhappy creature

whose wandering days had just ended—of that scene in the mysterious shell cavern—of the wild words he had then uttered—how strangely they came back to Philip's memory now!

"You have come as a thief in the golden midnight, and the thing you seek is the life of Sigurd! Yes—yes! it is true—the spirit cannot lie! You must kill, you must steal—see how the blood drips, drop by drop from the heart of Sigurd! and the jewel you steal—ah! what a jewel! You shall not find such another in Norway!" Was not the hidden meaning of these incoherent phrases rendered somewhat clear now? though how the poor lad's disordered imagination had been able thus promptly to conjure up with such correctness an idea of Errington's future relations with Thelma was a riddle impossible of explanation. He thought, too, with a sort of generous remorse, of that occasion when Sigurd had visited him on board the yacht to implore him to leave the Alten Fjord. He realized everything—the inchoate desires of the desolate being, who, though intensely capable of loving, felt himself in a dim, sad way, unworthy of love—the struggling passions in him that clamored for utterance—the instinctive dread and jealousy of a rival, while knowing that he was both physically and mentally unfitted to compete with one—all these things passed through Philip's mind, and filled him with a most profound pity for the hidden sufferings, the tortures and inexplicable emotions which had racked Sigurd's darkened soul. And, still busy with these reflections, he turned on his arm as he lay, and whispered softly to his friend who was close by him:

"I say, Lorimer—I feel as if I had been to blame somehow in this affair! If I had never come on the scene, Sigurd would still have been happy in his own way."

Lorimer was silent. After a pause, Errington went on still in the same low tone.

"Poor little fellow! Do you know, I can't imagine anything more utterly distracting than having to see such a woman as Thelma day after day—loving her all the time, and knowing such love to be absolutely hopeless! Why, it was enough to make him crazier than ever!"

Lorimer moved restlessly. "Yes, it must have been hard on him!" he answered, at last, in a gentle, somewhat sad tone. "Perhaps it's as well he's out of it all. Life is infinitely perplexing to many of us. By this time he's no doubt wiser than you or I, Phil—he could tell us the reason why love is such a blessing to some men and such a curse to others!"

Errington made no answer, and they relapsed into silence—silence which was almost unbroken save by an occasional deep sigh from Olaf Guldmar, and a smothered exclamation such as, "Poor lad, poor lad! Who would have thought it?"

"With the early dawn they were all up and ready for the home-

ward journey—though with very different feelings to those which they had started on their expedition. The morning was dazzlingly bright and clear—and the cataract of Njedegorze rolled down in glittering folds of creamy white and green, uttering its ceaseless psalm of praise to the Creator in a jubilant roar of musical thunder. They paused and looked at it for the last time before leaving—it had assumed for them a new and solemn aspect—it was Sigurd's grave. The *bonde* raised his cap from his rough white hair—instinctively the others followed his example.

"May the gods grant him good rest!" said the old man, reverently. "In the wildest waters they say there is a calm underflow—maybe the lad has found it and is glad to sleep." He paused and stretched his hands forth with an eloquent and touching gesture. "Peace be with him!"

Then, without more words, as though disdaining his own emotion, he turned abruptly away, and began to descend the stony and precipitous hill up which Sigurd had so skillfully guided them the day before. Macfarlane and Duprez followed him close—Macfarlane casting more than once a keen look over the rapids.

"'Tis a pity we couldna find his body," he said in a low tone.

Duprez shrugged his shoulders. Sigurd's death had shocked him considerably by its suddenness, but he was too much of a volatile Frenchman to be morbidly anxious about securing the corpse.

"I think not so at all," he said. "Of what use would it be? To grieve mademoiselle? to make her cry? That would be cruel—I would not assist in it? A dead body is not a sight for ladies—believe me, things are best as they are."

They went on, while Errington and Lorimer lingered yet a moment longer.

"A magnificent sepulcher!" said Lorimer, dreamily eyeing for the last time the sweeping flow of the glittering torrent. "Better than all the monuments ever erected! Upon my life, I would not mind having such a grave myself! Say what you like, Phil, there was something grand in Sigurd's choice of a death. We all of us have to get out of life somehow one day—that's certain—but few of us have the chance of making such a triumphant exit!"

Errington looked at him with a grave smile. "How you talk, George!" he said, half reproachfully. "One would think you envied the end of that unfortunate, half-witted fellow! You've no reason to be tired of your life, I'm sure—all your bright days are before you."

"Are they?" And Lorimer's blue eyes looked slightly melancholy. "Well, I dare say they are! Let's hope so at all events. There need be something before me—there isn't much behind except wasted opportunities. Come on, Phil!"

They resumed their walk, and soon rejoined the others. The

journey back to the Alten Fjord was continued all day with but one or two interruptions for rest and refreshment. It was decided that on reaching home, old Guldmar should proceed a little in advance, in order to see his daughter alone first, and break to her the news of the tragic event that had occurred—so that when, after a long and toilsome journey, they caught sight, at about eight in the evening, of the familiar farm-house through the branches of the trees that surrounded and sheltered it, they all came to a halt.

The young men seated themselves on a pleasant knoll under some tall pines, there to wait a quarter of an hour or so, while the *bonde* went forward to prepare Thelma. On second thoughts, the old man asked Errington to accompany him—a request to which he very readily acceded, and these two, leaving the others to follow at their leisure, went on their way rapidly. They arrived at, and entered the garden—their footsteps made a crunching noise on the pebbly path—but no welcoming face looked forth from any of the windows of the house. The entrance door stood wide open—there was not a living soul to be seen but the kitten asleep in a corner of the porch, and the doves drowsing on the roof in the sunshine. The deserted air of the place was unmistakable, and Guldmar and Errington exchanged looks of wonder not unmixed with alarm.

"Thelma! Thelma!" called the *bonde*, anxiously. There was no response. He entered the house and threw open the kitchen door. There was no fire—and not the slightest sign of any of the usual preparations for supper.

"Britta!" shouted Guldmar. Still no answer. "By the gods!" he exclaimed, turning to the astonished Philip, "this is a strange thing! Where can the girls be? I have never known both of them to be absent from the house at the same time. Go down the shore, my lad, and see if Thelma's boat is missing, while I search the garden."

Errington obeyed—hurrying off on his errand with a heart beating fast from sudden fear and anxiety. For he knew Thelma was not likely to have gone out of her own accord at the very time she would have naturally expected her father and his friends back, and the absence of Britta too, was to say the least of it, extraordinary. He reached the pier very speedily, and saw at a glance that the boat was gone. He hastened back to report this to Guldmar, who was making the whole place resound with his shouts of "Thelma!" and "Britta!" though he shouted altogether in vain.

"Maybe," he said dubiously, on hearing of the missing boat—"Maybe the child has gone on the fjord—'tis often her custom—but, then, where is Britta? Besides, they must have expected us—they would have prepared supper—they would have been watching for our return. No, no! there is something wrong about this—'tis altogether unusual!"

And he looked about him in a bewildered way, while Sir Philip, noting his uneasiness, grew more and more uneasy himself.

"Let me go and search for them, sir," he said, eagerly. "They may be in the woods, or up toward the orchard."

Guldmar shook his head and drew his fuzzy white brows together in a puzzled meditation—suddenly he started and struck his staff forcibly on the ground.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "That old hag Lovisa is at the bottom of this!"

"By Jove!" cried Errington, "I believe you're right! What shall we do?"

At that moment, Lorimer, Duprez, and Macfarlane came on the scene thinking they had kept aloof long enough—and the strange disappearance of the two girls was rapidly explained to them. They listened, astonished and almost incredulous, but agreed with the *bonde* as to Lovisa's probable share in the matter.

"Look here!" said Lorimer, excitedly. "I'm not in the least tired—show me the way to Talvig, where that old screech-owl lives, and I'll go there straight as a gun! Shouldn't wonder if she has not forced away her grandchild, in which case Miss Thelma may have gone after her."

"I'll come with you!" said Errington. "Let's lose no time about it."

But Guldmar shook his head. "'Tis a long way, my lads—and you do not know the road. No—'twill be better we should take the boat and pull over to Bosekop, there we can get a carriage to take two of us at least to Talvig—"

He stopped, interrupted by Macfarlane, who looked particularly shrewd.

"I should certainly advise ye to try Bosekop first," he remarked cautiously. "Mr. Dyceworthy might be able to provide ye with valuable information."

"Dyceworthy!" roared the *bonde*, becoming inflammable at once. "He knows little of me or mine, thank the gods! and I would not by choice step within a mile of his dwelling. What makes you think of him, sir?"

Lorimer laid a hand soothingly on his arm.

"Now, my dear Mr. Guldmar, don't get excited! Mac is right. I dare say Dyceworthy knows as much in his way as the ancient Lovisa. At any rate, it isn't his fault if he does not. Because you see—" Lorimer hesitated and turning to Errington, "You tell him, Phil! you know all about it."

"The fact is," said Errington, while Guldmar gazed from one to the other in speechless amazement, "Thelma hasn't told you because she knew how angry you'd be—but Dyceworthy asked her to marry him. Of course she refused him, and I doubt if he's taken his rejection very resignedly."

The face of the old farmer as he heard these words was a study. Wonder, contempt, pride, and indignation struggled for the mastery on his rugged features.

"Asked—her—to—marry—him!" he repeated, slowly. "By the sword of Odin! Had I known it I would have throttled him!" His eyes blazed and he clinched his hand. "Throttled him, lads! I would! Give me the chance and I'll do it now! I tell you, the mere look of such a man as that is a desecration to my child—liar and hypocrite as he is! May the gods confound him!" He paused—then suddenly bracing himself up, added: "I'll away to Bosekop at once—they've been afraid of me there for no reason—I'll teach them to be afraid of me in earnest! Who'll come with me?"

All eagerly expressed their desire to accompany him with the exception of one—Pierre Duprez—he had disappeared.

"Why, where has he gone?" demanded Lorimer in some surprise.

"I canna tell," replied Macfarlane. "He just slipped away while ye were haverin' about Dyceworthy—he'll maybe join us at the shore."

To the shore they at once betook themselves, and were soon busied in unmooring Guldmar's own rowing-boat, which, as it had not been used for some time, was rather a tedious business—moreover, they noted with concern that the tide was dead against them.

Duprez did not appear—the truth is, that he had taken it into his head to start off for Talvig on foot without waiting for the others. He was fond of an adventure, and here was one that suited him precisely—to rescue distressed damsels from the grasp of persecutors. He was tired, but he managed to find the road—and he trudged on determinedly, humming a song of Beranger's as he walked to keep him cheerful. But he had not gone much more than a mile, when he discerned in the distance a carriage approaching him—and approaching so swiftly that it appeared to swing from side to side of the road at imminent risk of upsetting altogether. There seemed to be one person in it—an excited person too, who lashed the stout little pony and urged it on to fresh exertions with gesticulations and cries. That plump buxom figure—that tumbled brown hair streaming wildly on the breeze—that round rosy face—why! it was Britta! Britta, driving all alone, with the reckless daring of a Norwegian peasant girl accustomed to the swaying, jolting movement of the carriage as well as the rough roads and sharp turnings. Nearer she came and nearer—and Duprez hailed her with a shout of welcome. She saw him, answered his call, and drove still faster—soon she came up beside him, and without answering his amazed questions, she cried breathlessly:

"Jump in—jump in! We must go on as quickly as possible to

Bosekop! Quick—quick! Oh, my poor Froken! The old villain! Wait till I get at him!"

"But, my *lee-tle* child!" expostulated Pierre, climbing up into the queer vehicle, "what is all this? I am in astonishment—I understand not at all! How comes it that you are run away from home and mademoiselle also?"

Britta only waited till he was safely seated, and then lashed the pony with redoubled force. Away they clattered at a break-neck pace, the Frenchman having much ado to prevent himself from being jolted out again on the road.

"It is a wicked plot!" she then exclaimed, panting with excitement—"a wicked, wicked plot! This afternoon Mr. Dyceworthy's servant came and brought Sir Philip's card. It said that he had met with an accident and had been brought back to Bosekop and that he wished the Froken to come to him at once. Of course, the darling believed it all—and she grew so pale, so pale! And she went straight away in her boat all by herself! Oh, my dear—my dear!"

Britta gasped for breath, and Duprez soothingly placed an arm round her waist, an action which the little maiden seemed not to be aware of. She resumed her story: "Then the Froken had not been gone so very long, and I was watching for her in the garden, when a woman passed by—a friend of my grandmother's. She called out—'Hey, Britta! Do you know they have got your mistress down at Talvig, and they'll burn her for a witch before they sleep!' 'She has gone to Bosekop,' I answered, 'so I know you tell a lie.' 'It is no lie,' said the old woman, 'old Lovisa has her this time for sure.' And she laughed and went away. Well, I did not stop to think twice about it—I started off for Talvig at once—I ran nearly all the way. I found my grandmother alone—I asked her if she had seen the Froken? She screamed and clapped her hands like a madwoman! she said that the Froken was with Mr. Dyceworthy—Mr. Dyceworthy would know what to do with her!"

"*Sapristi!*" ejaculated Duprez. "This is serious!"

Britta glanced anxiously at him, and went on. "Then she tried to shut the doors upon me and beat me—but I escaped. Outside I saw a man I knew with his carriage, and I borrowed it of him and came back as fast as I could—but oh! I am so afraid—my grandmother said such dreadful things!"

"The others have taken a boat to Bosekop," said Duprez, to reassure her. "They may be there by now."

Britta shook her head. "The tide is against them—no! we shall be there first. But," and she looked wistfully at Pierre, "my grandmother said Mr. Dyceworthy had sworn to ruin the Froken. What did she mean, do you think?"

Duprez did not answer—he made a strange grimace and

shrugged his shoulders. Then he seized the whip and lashed the pony.

"Faster, faster, *mon cher!*" he cried to that much-astonished, well-intentioned animal. "It is not a time to sleep, *ma foi!*" Then to Britta—"My little one, you shall see. We shall disturb the good clergyman at his peaceful supper—yes, indeed, be not afraid!"

And with such reassuring remarks he beguiled the rest of the way, which to both of them seemed unusually long, though it was not much past nine when they rattled into the little village called by courtesy a town, and came to a halt within a few paces of the minister's residence. Everything was very quiet—the inhabitants of the place retired to rest early—and the one principal street was absolutely deserted. Duprez alighted.

"Stay you here, Britta," he said lightly, kissing the hand that held the pony's reins, "I will make an examination of the windows of the house. Yes—before knocking at the door! You wait with patience. I will let you know everything!"

And with a sense of pleasurable excitement in his mind, he stole softly along on tiptoe—entered the minister's garden, fragrant with roses and mignonette, and then, attracted by the sound of voices, went up straight to the parlor window. The blind was down, and he could see nothing, but he heard Mr. Dyceworthy's bland persuasive tones, echoing out with a soft sonority, as though he were preaching to some refractory parishioner. He listened attentively.

"Oh, strange, strange!" said Mr. Dyceworthy. "Strange that you will not see how graciously the Lord hath delivered you into my hands! Yea—and no escape is possible! For lo, you yourself, Froken Thelma," Duprez started, "you yourself came hither unto my dwelling, a woman all unprotected, to a man equally unprotected—and who, though an humble minister of saving grace, is not proof against the offered surrender of your charms! Make the best of it, my sweet girl—make the best of it! You can never undo what you have done to-night."

"Coward! coward!" and Thelma's rich low voice caused Pierre to almost leap forward from the place where he stood concealed. "You—you made me come here—you sent me that card—you dared to use the name of my betrothed husband to gain your vile purpose! You have kept me locked in this room all these hours—and do you think you will not be punished? I will let the whole village know of your treachery and falsehood!"

Mr. Dyceworthy laughed gently. "Dear me, dear me!" he remarked, sweetly. "How pretty we look in a passion, to be sure! And we talk of our 'betrothed husband,' do we? Tut! tut! Put that dream out of your mind, my dear girl—Sir Philip Bruce-Erington will have nothing to do with you after your little escapade

of to-night! Your honor is touched—yes, yes! and honor is everything to such a man as he. As for the ‘card’ you talk about, I never sent a card—not I!” Mr. Dyceworthy made this assertion in a tone of injured honesty. “Why should I? No—no! You came here of your own accord—that is certain, and”—here he spoke more slowly and with a certain malicious glee—“I shall have no difficulty in proving it to be so should the young man Errington ask me for an explanation! Now you had better give me a kiss and make the peace! There’s not a soul in the place who will believe anything you say against me; you, a reputed witch, and I, a minister of the gospel. For your father I care nothing, a poor sinful pagan can never injure a servant of the Lord. Come now, let me have that kiss! I have been very patient—I am sure I deserve it!”

There was a sudden rushing movement in the room, and a slight cry.

“If you touch me!” cried Thelma, “I will kill you! I will! God will help me!”

Again Mr. Dyceworthy laughed sneeringly. “God will help you!” he exclaimed as though in wonder. “As if God ever helped a *Roman!* Froken Thelma, be sensible. By your strange visit to me to-night you have ruined your already damaged character—I say you have ruined it—and if anything remains to be said against you, I can say it—moreover, I will!”

A crash of breaking window-glass followed these words, and before Mr. Dyceworthy could realize what had happened, he was pinioned against his own wall by an active, wiry, excited individual, whose black eyes sparkled with gratified rage, and whose clinched fist was dealing him severe thumps all over his fat body.

“Ha, ha! You will, will you?” cried Duprez, literally dancing up against him and squeezing him as though he were a jelly. “You will tell lies in the service of *le bon Dieu?* No—not quite, not yet!” And still pinioning him with one hand, he dragged at his collar with the other till he succeeded, in spite of the minister’s unwieldy efforts to defend himself, in rolling him down upon the floor, where he knelt upon him in triumph. “*Voilà! Je sais faire la boxe, moi!*” Then turning to Thelma, who stood an amazed spectator of the scene, her flushed cheeks and tear-swollen eyes testifying to the misery of the hours she had passed, he said, “Run, mademoiselle, run! The little Britta is outside, she has a pony-car—she will drive you home. I will stay here till Phil-eep comes. I shall enjoy myself! I will begin—Phil-eep will finish! Then we will return to you.”

Thelma needed no more words, she rushed to the door, threw it open, and vanished like a bird in air. Britta’s joy at seeing her was too great for more than an exclamation of welcome—and the carri-

ole, with the two girls safely in it, was soon on its rapid way back to the farm. Meanwhile, Olaf Guldmar, with Errington and the others, had just landed at Bosekop after a heavy pull across the fjord, and they made straight for Mr. Dyceworthy’s house—the *bonde* working himself up as he walked into a positive volcano of wrath. Finding the street-door open as it had just been left by the escaped Thelma, they entered, and on the threshold of the parlor stopped abruptly, in amazement at the sight that presented itself. Two figures were rolling about on the floor, apparently in a close embrace—one large and cumbrous, the other small and slight. Sometimes they shook each other—sometimes they lay still—sometimes they recommenced rolling. Both were perfectly silent, save that the larger personage seemed to breathe somewhat heavily. Lorimer stepped into the room to secure a better view—then he broke into an irrepressible laugh.

“It’s Duprez,” he cried, for the benefit of the others that stood at the door. “By Jove! How did he get here, I wonder?”

Hearing his name, Duprez looked up from that portion of Mr. Dyceworthy’s form in which he had been burrowing, and smiled radiantly.

“Ah, *cher* Lorimer! Put your knee here, will you? So! that is well—I will rest myself!” And he rose, smoothing his roughened hair with both hands, while Lorimer in obedience to his request, kept one knee artistically pressed on the recumbent figure of the minister. “Ah! and there is our Phil-eep, and Sandy, and Monsieur Guldmar! But I do not think,” here he beamed all over, “there is much more to be done! He is one bruise, I assure you! He will not preach for many Sundays—it is bad to be so fat—he will be so exceedingly suffering!”

Errington could not forbear smiling at Pierre’s equanimity.

“But what has happened?” he asked. “Is Thelma here?”

“She *was* here,” answered Duprez. “The religious had decoyed her here by means of some false writing—supposed to be from you. He kept her locked up here the whole afternoon. When I came he was making love and frightening her—I am pleased I was in time. But”—and he smiled again—“he is well beaten!”

Sir Philip strode up to the fallen Dyceworthy, his face darkening with wrath.

“Let him go, Lorimer,” he said, sternly—then, as the reverend gentleman slowly struggled to his feet, moaning with pain, he demanded, “What have you to say for yourself, sir? Be thankful if I do not give you the horsewhipping you deserve, you scoundrel!”

“Let me get at him!” vociferated Guldmar at this juncture, struggling to free himself from the close grasp of the prudent Macfarlane. “I have longed for such a chance! Let me get at him!”

But Lorimer assisted to restrain him from springing forward—and the old man chafed and swore by his gods in vain.

Mr. Dyceworthy meanwhile meekly raised his eyes, and folded his hands with a sort of pious resignation.

"I have been set upon and cruelly abused," he said, mournfully, "And there is no part of me without ache and soreness!" He sighed deeply. "But I am punished rightly for yielding unto carnal temptation put before me in the form of the maiden who came hither unto me with delusive entrancements——"

He stopped, shrinking back in alarm from the suddenly raised fist of the young baronet.

"You'd better be careful!" remarked Philip, coolly, with dangerously flashing eyes; "there are four of us here, remember!"

Mr. Dyceworthy coughed, and resumed an air of outraged dignity.

"Truly, I am aware of it!" he said; "and it surpriseth me not at all that the number of the ungodly outweigheth that of the righteous! Alas! 'why do the heathen rage so furiously together?' Why, indeed! Except that 'in their hearts they imagine a vain thing!' I pardon you, Sir Philip, I freely pardon you! And you also, sir," turning gravely to Duprez, who received his forgiveness with a cheerful and delighted bow. "You can indeed injure—and you *have* injured this poor body of mine—but you can not touch the *soul*! No, nor can you hinder that freedom of speech—here his malignant smile was truly diabolical—" which is my glory, and which shall forever be uplifted against all manner of evil-doers, whether they be fair women and witches, or misguided pagans——"

Again he paused, rather astonished at Errington's scornful laugh.

"You low fellow!" said the baronet. "From Yorkshire, are you? Well, I happen to know a good many people in that part of the world—and I have some influence there, too. Now, understand me—I'll have you hounded out of the place! You shall find it too hot to hold you—that I swear! Remember! I'm a man of my word! And if you dare to mention the name of Miss Guldmar disrespectfully, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

Mr. Dyceworthy blinked feebly, and drew out his handkerchief.

"I trust, Sir Philip," he said, mildly, "you will reconsider your words! It would ill beseem you to strive to do me harm in the parish where my ministrations are welcome, as appealing to that portion of the people who follow the godly Luther. Oh, yes!"—and he smiled cheerfully—"you will reconsider your words. In the meantime—I—I"—he stammered slightly—"I apologize! I meant naught but good to the maiden—but I have been misunderstood, as is ever the case with the servants of the Lord. Let us say no more about it! I forgive!—let us all forgive! I will even extend my pardon to the pagan yonder——"

But the "pagan" at that moment broke loose from the friendly grasp in which he had been hitherto held, and strode up to the minister, who recoiled like a beaten cur from the look of that fine old face flushed with just indignation, and those clear blue eyes fiery as the flash of steel.

"Pagan, you call me!" he cried. "I thank the gods for it—I am proud of the title! I would rather be the veriest savage that ever knelt in untutored worship to the great forces of Nature, than such a *thing* as you—a slinking, unclean animal, crawling coward-like between earth and sky, and daring to call itself a *Christian*! Faugh! Were I the Christ, I should sicken at sight of you!"

Dyceworthy made no reply, but his little eyes glittered evilly.

Errington, not desiring any further prolongation of the scene, managed to draw the irate *bonde* away, saying in a low tone:

"We've had enough of this, sir! Let us get home to Thelma."

"I was about to suggest a move," added Lorimer. "We are only wasting time here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Duprez, radiantly—"and Monsieur Dyceworthy will be glad to be in bed! He will be very stiff to-morrow, I am sure! Here is a lady who will attend him."

This with a courteous salute to the wooden-faced Ulrika, who suddenly confronted them in the little passage. She seemed surprised to see them, and spoke in a monotonous dreamy tone, as though she walked in her sleep.

"The girl has gone?" she added, slowly.

Duprez nodded briskly. "She has gone! And let me tell you, madame, that if it had not been for you, she would not have come here at all. You took that card to her?"

Ulrika frowned. "I was compelled," she said. "*She* made me take it. I promised." She turned her dull eyes slowly on Guldmar. "It was Lovisa's fault. Ask Lovisa about it." She paused, and moistened her dry lips with her tongue. "Where is your crazy lad?" she asked, almost anxiously. "Did he come with you?"

"He is dead!" answered Guldmar, with grave coldness.

"Dead!" And to their utter amazement, she threw up her arms and burst into a fit of wild laughter. "Dead! Thank God! Thank God! Dead! And through no fault of mine! The Lord be praised! He was only fit for death—never mind how he died—it is enough that he is dead—dead! I shall see him no more—he cannot curse me again!—the Lord be thanked for all His mercies!"

And her laughter ceased—she threw her apron over her head and broke into a passion of weeping.

"The woman must be crazy!" exclaimed the *bonde*, thoroughly mystified—then placing his arm through Errington's, he said impatiently: "You're right, my lad! We've had enough of this."

Let us shake the dust of this accursed place off our feet and get home. I'm tired out!"

They left the minister's dwelling and made straight for the shore, and were soon well on their journey back to the farm across the fjord. This time the tide was with them—the evening was magnificent, and the coolness of the breeze, the fresh lapping of the water against the boat, and the brilliant tranquillity of the landscape soon calmed their over-excited feelings. Thelma was waiting for them under the porch as usual, looking a trifle paler than her wont, after all the worry and fright and suspense she had undergone—but the caresses of her father and lover soon brought back the rosy warmth on her fair face and restored the luster to her eyes. Nothing was said about Sigurd's fate just then—when she asked for her faithful servitor, she was told he had "gone wandering as usual," and it was not till Errington and his friends returned to their yacht that old Guldmar, left alone with his daughter, broke the sad news to her very gently. But the shock, so unexpected and terrible, was almost too much for her already overwrought nerves—and such tears were shed for Sigurd as Sigurd himself might have noted with gratitude. Sigurd—the loving, devoted Sigurd—gone forever! Sigurd—her playmate—her servant—her worshiper—dead! Ah, how tenderly she mourned him!—how regretfully she thought of his wild words! "Mistress, you are killing poor Sigurd!" Wistfully she wondered if, in her absorbing love for Philip, she had neglected the poor crazed lad—his face, in all its pale piteous appeal, haunted her, and her grief for his loss was the greatest she had ever known since the day on which she had seen her mother sink into the last long sleep. Britta, too, wept and would not be comforted—she had been fond of Sigurd in her own impetuous little way—and it was some time before either she or her mistress could calm themselves sufficiently to retire to rest. And long after Thelma was sleeping, with tears still wet on her cheeks, her father sat alone under his porch, lost in melancholy meditation. Now and then he ruffled his white hair impatiently with his hand—his daughter's adventure in Mr. Dyceworthy's house had vexed his proud spirit. He knew well enough that the minister's apology meant nothing—that the whole village would be set talking against Thelma, more even than before—that there was no possibility of preventing scandal so long as Dyceworthy was there to start it. He thought and thought and puzzled himself with probabilities—till at last, when he finally rose to enter his dwelling for the night, he muttered, half aloud, "If it must be, it must! And the sooner the better now, I think, for the child's sake."

The next morning Sir Philip arrived unusually early, and remained shut up with the *bonde*, in private conversation for more than an hour. At the expiration of that time Thelma was called

and taken into their confidence. The result of their mysterious discussion was not immediately evident—though for the next few days the farm-house lost its former tranquillity, and became a scene of bustle and excitement. Moreover, to the astonishment of the Bosekop folk, the sailing brig known as the "Valkyrie," belonging to Olaf Guldmar, which had been hauled up high and dry on the shore for many months, was suddenly seen afloat on the fjord, and Valdemar Svensen, Errington's pilot, appeared to be busily engaged upon her decks, putting everything in ship-shape order. It was no use asking *him* any questions—he was not the man to gratify impertinent curiosity. By and by a rumor got about in the village—Lovisa had gained her point in one particular—the Guldmars were going away—going to leave the Alten Fjord!

At first the report was received with incredulity—but gained ground, as people began to notice that several packages were being taken in boats from the farm-house to both the "Eulalie" and the "Valkyrie." These preparations excited a great deal of interest and inquisitiveness—but no one dared ask for information as to what was about to happen. The Rev. Mr. Dyceworthy was confined to his bed "from a severe cold"—as he said—and therefore was unable to perform his favorite mission of spy; so that when, one brilliant morning, Bosekop was startled by the steam-whistle of the "Eulalie" blowing furiously, and echoing far and wide across the surrounding rocky islands, several of the lounging inhabitants paused on the shore or sauntered down to the rickety pier to see what was the cause of the clamor. Even the long-suffering minister crawled out of bed and applied his fat, meek visage to his window, from whence he could command an almost uninterrupted view of the glittering water. Great was his amazement and discomfiture to see the magnificent yacht moving majestically out of the fjord, with Guldmar's brig in tow behind her, and the English flag fluttering gayly from her middle mast, as she courtesied her farewell to the dark mountains and glided swiftly over the little hissing waves. Had Mr. Dyceworthy been possessed of a field-glass he might have been able to discern on her deck the figure of a tall, fair girl, who, drawing her crimson hood over her rich hair, stood gazing with wistful, dreamy blue eyes at the fast-receding shores of the Alten Fjord—eyes that smiled and yet were tearful.

"Are you sorry, Thelma?" asked Errington, gently, as he passed one arm tenderly round her. "Sorry to trust your life to me?"

She laid her little hand in playful reproach against his lips.

"Sorry! you foolish boy! I am glad and grateful! But it is saying good-bye to one's old life, is it not? The dear old home!—and poor Sigurd!"

Her voice trembled, and bright tears fell.

"Sigurd is happy," said Errington, gravely, taking the hand that caressed him and reverently kissing it. "Believe me, love—if he had lived, some cruel misery might have befallen him—it is better as it is!"

Thelma did not answer for a minute or two—then she said suddenly:

"Philip, do you remember where I saw you first?"

"Perfectly!" he answered, looking fondly into the sweet upturned face. "Outside a wonderful cavern, which I afterward explored."

She started and seemed surprised. "You went inside?—you saw—?"

"Everything!"—and Philip related his adventure of that morning and his first interview with Sigurd. She listened attentively—then she whispered softly:

"My mother sleeps there, you know—yesterday I went to take her some flowers for the last time. Father came with me—we asked her blessing. And I think she will give it, Philip—she must know how good you are and how happy I am."

He stroked her silky hair tenderly and was silent. The "Eulalie" had reached the outward bend of the Alten Fjord, and the station of Bosekop was rapidly disappearing. Olaf Guldmar and the others came on deck to take their last look of it.

"I shall see the old place again, I doubt not, long before you do, Thelma, child," said the stout old *bonde*, viewing, with a keen fond glance, the stretch of the vanishing scenery. "Though when once you are safe married at Christiania, Valdemar Svensen and I will have a fine toss on the seas in the 'Valkyrie'—and I shall grow young again in the storm and drift of the foam and the dark wild waves! Yes—a wandering life suits me—and I am not sorry to have a taste of it once more. There's nothing like it—nothing like a broad ocean and a sweeping wind!"

And he lifted his cap and drew himself erect, inhaling the air like an old warrior scenting battle. The others listened, amused at his enthusiasm—and, meanwhile, the Alten Fjord altogether disappeared, and the "Eulalie" was soon plunging in a rougher sea. They were bound for Christiania, where it was decided Thelma's marriage should at once take place—after which Sir Philip would leave his yacht at the disposal of his friends, for them to return in it to England. He himself intended to start directly for Germany with his bride, a trip in which Britta was to accompany them as Thelma's maid. Olaf Guldmar, as he had just stated, proposed making a voyage in the "Valkyrie" as soon as he should get her properly manned and fitted, which he meant to do at Christiania.

Such were their plans, and meanwhile they were all together on the "Eulalie"—a happy and sociable party—Errington having re-

signed his cabin to the use of his fair betrothed and her little maid, whose delight at the novel change in her life, and her escape from the persecution of her grandmother, was extreme. Onward they sailed—past the grand Lofoden Islands and all the magnificent scenery extending thence to Christiansund, while the inhabitants of Bosekop looked in vain for their return to the Alten Fjord.

The short summer there was beginning to draw to a close—some of the birds took their departure from the coast—the dull routine of the place went on as usual, rendered even duller by the absence of the "witch" element of discord—a circumstance that had kept the superstitious villagers more or less on a lively tension of religious and resentful excitement—and by and by the rightful minister of Bosekop came back to his duties and released the Rev. Charles Dyceworthy, who straightway returned to his loving flock in Yorkshire. It was difficult to ascertain whether the aged Lovisa was satisfied or wrathful at the departure of the Guldmars with her granddaughter Britta in their company—she kept herself almost buried in her hut at Talvig, and saw no one but Ulrika, who seemed to grow more respectably staid than ever, and who, as a prominent member of the Lutheran congregation, distinguished herself greatly by her godly bearing and uncompromising gloom.

Little by little, the gossips ceased to talk about the disappearance of the "white witch" and her father—little by little they ceased to speculate as to whether the rich Englishman, Sir Philip Errington, really meant to marry her—a consummation of things which none of them seemed to think likely—the absence of their hated neighbors was felt by them as a relief, while the rumored fate of the crazy Sigurd was of course looked upon as evidence of fresh crime on the part of the "pagan," who was accused of having, in some way or other, caused the unfortunate lad's death. And the old farm-house on the pine-covered knoll was shut up and silent—its doors and windows safely barred against the wind and rain—and only the doves, left to forage for themselves, crooned upon its roof all day, or strutting on the deserted paths, ruffled their plumage in melancholy meditation, as though wondering at the absence of the fair ruling spirit of the place, whose smile had been brighter than the sunshine. The villagers avoided it as though it were haunted—the roses drooped and died untended—and by degrees the old homestead grew to look like a quaint little picture of forgotten joys, with its deserted porch and fading flowers.

Meanwhile, a thrill of amazement, incredulity, disappointment, indignation, and horror rushed like a violent electric shock through the upper circles of London society, arousing the deepest disgust in the breasts of match-making matrons, and seriously ruffling the pretty feathers of certain bird-like beauties who had just begun to try their wings, and who "had expectations." The cause of the sensation was very simple. It was an announcement