

her pale lips quivered. "I am sorry," she went on with dreamy pathos, "sorrow for him than for myself, because now I see I am in the way of his happiness." A quiver of agony passed over her face—she fixed her large bright eyes on Lady Winsleigh, who instinctively shrank from the solemn speechless despair of that penetrating gaze.

"Who gave you this letter, Clara?" she asked, calmly.

"I told you before—Miss Vere herself."

"Why did she give it to you?" continued Thelma in a dull, sad voice.

Lady Winsleigh hesitated and stammered a little. "Well, because—because I asked her if the stories about Sir Philip were true. And she begged me to ask him not to visit her so often." Then, with an additional thought of malice, she said softly: "She doesn't wish to wrong you, Thelma—of course, she's not a very good woman, but I think she feels sorry for you."

The girl uttered a smothered cry of anguish, as though she had been stabbed to the heart. She!—to be actually *pitied* by Violet Vere, because she had been unable to keep her husband's love! This idea tortured her very soul—but she was silent.

"I thought you were my friend, Clara?" she said suddenly with a strange wistfulness.

"So I am, Thelma," murmured Lady Winsleigh, a guilty flush coloring her cheeks.

"You have made me very miserable," went on Thelma gravely, and with pathetic simplicity, "and I am sorry indeed that we ever met. I was so happy till I knew you!—and yet I was very fond of you! I am sure you mean everything for the best, but I cannot think it is so. And it is all so dark and desolate now. Why have you taken such pains to make me sad? Why have you so often tried to make me doubt my husband's love? Why have you come to-day so quickly to tell me I have lost it? But for you I might never have known this sorrow—I might have died soon, in happy ignorance, believing in my darling's truth as I believe in God!"

Her voice broke, and a hard sob choked her utterance. For once Lady Winsleigh's conscience smote her—for once she felt ashamed, and dared not offer consolation to the innocent soul she had so wantonly stricken. For a minute or two there was silence, broken only by the monotonous ticking of the clock and the crackling of the fire.

Presently Thelma spoke again. "I will ask you to go away now and leave me, Clara," she said, simply. "When the heart is sorrowful, it is best to be alone. Good-bye!" And she gently held out her hand.

"Poor Thelma!" said Lady Winsleigh, taking it with an affection of tenderness. "What will you do?"

Thelma did not answer; she sat mute and rigid.

"You are thinking unkindly of me just now," continued Clara, softly; "but I felt it was my duty to tell you the worst at once. It's no good living in a delusion! I'm very, very sorry for you, Thelma!"

Thelma remained perfectly silent. Lady Winsleigh moved toward the door, and, as she opened it, looked back at her. The girl might have been a lifeless figure for any movement that could be perceived about her. Her face was white as marble—her eyes were fixed on the sparkling fire—her very hands looked stiff and pallid as wax, as they lay clasped in her lap—the letter—the cruel letter—had fallen at her feet. She seemed as one in a trance of misery, and so Lady Winsleigh left her.

#### CHAPTER IX.

O my lord, O Love,  
I have laid my life at thy feet;  
Have thy will thereof  
For what shall please thee is sweet!

SWINBURNE.

SHE roused herself at last. Unclasping her hands, she pushed back her hair from her brows and sighed heavily. Shivering as with intense cold, she rose from the chair she had so long occupied, and stood upright, mechanically gathering around her her long fur mantle that she had not as yet taken off. Catching sight of the letter where it lay, a gleaming speck of white on the rich dark hues of the carpet, she picked it up and read it through again calmly and comprehensively—then folded it up carefully as though it were something of inestimable value. Her thoughts were a little confused—she could only realize clearly two distinct things—first, that Philip was unhappy—secondly, that she was in the way of his happiness. She did not pause to consider how this change in him had been effected—moreover, she never imagined that the letter he had written could refer to any one but himself. Hers was a nature that accepted facts as they appeared—she never sought for ulterior motives or disguised meanings. True, she could not understand her husband's admiration for Violet Vere, "But then," she thought, "many other men admire her too. And so it is certain there must be something about her that wins love—something I cannot see!"

And presently she put aside all other considerations, and only pondered on one thing—how should she remove herself from the path of her husband's pleasure? For she had no doubt but that she was an obstacle to his enjoyment. He had made promises to Violet Vere which he was "ready to fulfill"—he offered her "an honorable position"—he desired her "not to condemn him to death"—he besought her to let his words "carry more weight with her."

"It is because I am here," thought Thelma, wearily. "She would listen to him if I were gone!" She had the strangest notions of wifely duty—odd minglings of the stern Norse customs with the gentler teachings of Christianity—yet in both cases the lines of woman's life were clearly defined in one word—obedience. Most women, receiving an apparent proof of a husband's infidelity, would have made what is termed a "scene"—would have confronted him with rage and tears, and personal abuse—but Thelma was too gentle for this—too gentle to resist what seemed to be Philip's wish and will, and far too proud to stay where it appeared evident she was not wanted. Moreover she could not bear the idea of speaking to him on such a subject as his connection with Violet Vere. The hot color flushed her cheeks with a sort of shame as she thought of it.

Of course, she was weak—of course, she was foolish—we will grant that she was anything the reader chooses to call her. It is much better for a woman nowadays to be defiant rather than yielding—aggressive, not submissive—violent not meek. We all know that! To abuse a husband well all round is the modern method of managing him! But poor, foolish, loving, sensitive Thelma had nothing of the magnificent strength of mind possessed by most wives of to day—she could only realize that Philip—her Philip—was "utterly weary and broken-hearted"—for the sake of another woman—and that other woman actually pitied *her*! She pitied herself too, a little vaguely—her brows ached and throbbed violently—there was a choking sensation in her throat, but she could not weep. Tears would have relieved her tired brain, but no tears fell. She strove to decide on some immediate plan of action. Philip would be home to-morrow. She recoiled at the thought of meeting him, knowing what she knew. Glancing dreamily at her own figure, reflected by the lamplight in the long mirror opposite, she recognized that she was fully attired in outdoor costume—all save her hat, which she had taken off at her first greeting of Lady Winsleigh, and which was still on the table at her side. She looked at the clock—it was five minutes to seven. Eight o'clock was her dinner-hour, and thinking of this, she suddenly rang the bell. Morris immediately answered it.

"I shall not dine at home," she said in her usual gentle voice. "I am going to see some friends this evening. I may not be back till—till late."

"Very well, my lady," and Morris retired without seeing anything remarkable in his mistress's announcement. Thelma drew a long breath of relief as he disappeared, and, steadying her nerves by a strong effort, passed into her own boudoir—the little sanctum specially endeared to her by Philip's frequent presence there. How cosy and comfortable a home-nest it looked! A small fire glowed warmly in the grate, and Britta, whose duty it was to keep this particularly room in order, had lighted the lamp—a rosy globe sup-

ported by a laughing Cupid—and had drawn the velvet curtains close at the window to keep out the fog and chilly air. There were fragrant flowers on the table—Thelma's own favorite lounge was drawn up to the fender in readiness for her—and opposite to it stood the deep, old-fashioned easy-chair in which Philip always sat. She looked round upon all these familiar things with a dreary sense of strangeness and desolation, and the curves of her sweet mouth trembled a little and drooped piteously. But her resolve was taken, and she did not hesitate or weep. She sat down to her desk and wrote a few brief lines to her father; this letter she addressed and stamped ready for posting.

Then for a while she remained apparently lost in painful musings, playing with the pen she held, and uncertain what to do. Presently she drew a sheet of note-paper toward her, and began: "My darling boy." As these words appeared under her hand on the white page, her forced calm nearly gave way—a low cry of intense agony escaped from her lips, and, dropping the pen, she rose and paced the room restlessly, one hand pressed against her heart as though that action could still its rapid beatings. Once more she essayed the hard task she had set herself to fulfill—the task of bidding farewell to the husband in whom her life was centered. Piteous, passionate words came quickly from her overcharged and almost breaking heart—words, tender, touching, full of love, and absolutely free from all reproach. Little did she guess as she wrote that parting letter what desperate misery it would cause to the receiver!

When she had finished it, she felt quieted—even more composed than before. She folded and sealed it, then put it out of sight and rang for Britta. The little maiden soon appeared, and seemed surprised to see her mistress still in walking costume.

"Have you only just come in, Froken?" she ventured to inquire.

"No, I came home some time ago," returned Thelma, gently. "But I was talking to Lady Winsleigh in the drawing-room, and as I am going out again this evening I shall not require to change my dress. I want you to post this letter for me, Britta."

And she held out the one addressed to her father, Olaf Guldmar. Britta took it, but her mind still revolved the question of her mistress's attire.

"If you are going to spend the evening with friends," she suggested, "would it not be better to change?"

"I have on a velvet gown," said Thelma, with a rather wearied patience. "It is quite dressy enough for where I am going." She paused abruptly, and Britta looked at her inquiringly.

"Are you tired, Froken Thelma?" she asked. "You are so pale!"

"I have a slight headache," Thelma answered. "It is nothing—it will soon pass. I wish you to post that letter at once, Britta."

"Very well, Froken." Britta still hesitated. "Will you be out all the evening?" was her next query.

"Yes."

"Then perhaps you will not mind if I go and see Louise, and take supper with her? She has asked me; and Mr. Briggs"—here Britta laughed—"is coming to see if I can go. He will escort me, he says." And she laughed again.

Thelma forced herself to smile. "You can go, by all means, Britta. But I thought you did not like Lady Winsleigh's French maid?"

"I don't like her much," Britta admitted—"still, she means to be kind and agreeable, I think. And"—here she eyed Thelma with a mysterious and important air—"I want to ask her a question about something very particular."

"Then, go and stay as long as your like, dear," said Thelma, a sudden impulse of affection causing her to caress softly her little maid's ruffled brown curls, "I shall not be back till—till quite late. And when you return from the post, I shall be gone—so—good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" exclaimed Britta, wonderingly. "Why, where are you going? One would think you were starting on a long journey, you speak so strangely, Froken!"

"Do I?" and Thelma smiled kindly. "It is because my head aches, I suppose. But it is not strange to say good-bye, Britta!"

Britta caught her hand. "Where are you going?" she persisted.

"To see some friends," responded Thelma, quietly. "Now do not ask any more questions, Britta, but go and post my letter. I want father to get it as soon as possible, and you will lose the post if you are not very quick."

Thus reminded, Britta hastened off, determining to run all the way, in order to get back before her mistress left the house. Thelma, however, was too quick for her. As soon as Britta had gone, she took the letter she had written to Philip, and slipped it in the pages of a small volume of poems he had lately been reading. It was a new book, entitled "Gladys, the Singer," and its leading *motif* was the old, never-exhausted subject of a woman's too faithful love, betrayal, and despair. As she opened it, her eyes fell by chance on a few lines of hopeless yet musical melancholy, which, like a sad song heard suddenly, made her throat swell with rising yet restrained tears. They ran thus:

"Oh! I can drown, or, like a broken lyre,  
Be thrown to earth, or cast upon a fire—  
I can be made to feel the pangs of death,  
And yet be constant to the quest of breath—  
Our poor pale trick of living through the lies  
We name existence when that 'something' dies  
Which we call Honor. Many and many a way  
Can I be struck or fretted night and day

In some new fashion—or condemn'd the while  
To take for food the semblance of a smile—  
The left-off rapture of a slain caress—"

"Ah!"—she caught her breath sobbingly, "the left-off rapture of a slain caress!" Yes—that would be her portion now if—if she stayed to receive it. But she would not stay! She turned over the volume abstractedly, scarcely conscious of the action—and suddenly, as if the poet-writer of it had been present to probe her soul and make her inmost thoughts public, she read:

"Because I am unlov'd of thee to-day,  
And undesired as sea-weeds in the sea!"

Yes!—that was the "because" of everything that swayed her sorrowful spirit—"because" she was "unlov'd and undesired."

She hesitated no longer, but shut the book with her farewell letter inside it, and put it back in its former place on the little table beside Philip's arm-chair. Then she considered how she should distinguish it by some mark that should attract her husband's attention toward it. Loosening from her neck a thin gold chain on which was suspended a small diamond cross with the names "Philip" and "Thelma" engraved at the back, she twisted it round the little book, and left it so that the sparkle of the jewels should be seen distinctly on the cover. Now was there anything more to be done? She divested herself of all her valuable ornaments, keeping only her wedding-ring and its companion circlet of brilliants—she emptied her purse of all money save that which was absolutely necessary for her journey—then she put on her hat, and began to fasten her long cloak slowly, for her fingers were icy cold and trembled very strangely. Stay—there was her husband's portrait—she might take that, she thought, with a sort of touching timidity. It was a miniature on ivory—and had been painted expressly for her. She placed it inside her dress, against her bosom.

"He has been too good to me," she murmured; "and I have been too happy—happier than I deserved to be. Excess of happiness must always end in sorrow."

Shelooked dreamily at Philip's empty chair. In fancy she could see his familiar figure seated there, and she sighed as she thought of the face she loved so well—the passion of his eyes—the tenderness of his smile. Softly she kissed the place where his head had rested—then turned resolutely away.

She was giving up everything, she thought, to another woman—but then, that other woman, however incredible it seemed, was the one Philip loved best—his own written words were a proof of this. There was no choice, therefore, his pleasure was her first consideration—everything must yield to that, so she imagined—her own life was nothing, in her estimation, compared to his desire. Such devotion as hers was of course absurd—it amounted to weak self-immolation, and would certainly be accounted as supremely

foolish by most women who have husbands, and who, when they swear to "obey," mean to break the vow at every convenient opportunity; but Thelma could not alter her strange nature, and, with her, obedience meant the extreme letter of the law of utter submission.

Leaving the room she had so lately called her own, she passed into the entrance hall. Morris was not there, and she did not summon him. She opened the street-door for herself, and shutting it quietly behind her, she stood alone in the cold street, where the fog had now grown so dense that the lamp-posts were scarcely visible. She walked on for a few paces rather bewildered and chilled by the piercing bitterness of the air—then, rallying her forces, she hailed a passing cab, and told the man to take her to Charing-Cross Station. She was not familiar with London—and Charing-Cross was the only great railway terminus she could just then think of.

Arrived there, the glare of the electric light, the jostling passengers rushing to and from the trains, the shouts and wrangling of porters and cabmen confused her not a little—and the bold looks of admiration bestowed on her freely by the male loungers sauntering near the doors of the restaurant and hotel, made her shrink and tremble for shame. She had never traveled entirely alone before—and she began to be frightened at the pandemonium of sights and noises that surged around her. Yet she never once thought of returning—she never dreamed of going to any of her London friends, lest on hearing of her trouble they might reproach Philip—and this Thelma would not have endured. For the same reason, she had said nothing to Britta.

In her then condition, it seemed to her that only one course lay open for her to follow—and that was to go quietly home—home to the Alten Fjord. No one would be to blame for her departure but herself, she thought—and Philip would be free. Thus she reasoned—if, indeed, she reasoned at all. But there was such a frozen stillness in her soul; her senses were so numbed with pain, that as yet she scarcely realized either what had happened or what she herself was doing. She was as one walking in sleep—the awakening, bitter as death, was still to come.

Presently a great rush of people began to stream toward her from one of the platforms, and trucks of luggage, heralded by shouts of "Out of the way, there!" and "By'r leave!" came trundling rapidly along—the tidal train from the Continent had just arrived.

Dismayed at the increasing confusion and uproar, Thelma addressed herself to an official with a gold band round his hat.

"Can you tell me," she asked, timidly, "where I shall take a ticket for Hull?"

The man glanced at the fair, anxious face, and smiled good-humoredly.

"You've come to the wrong station, miss," he said. "You want the Midland line."

"The Midland?" Thelma felt more bewildered than ever.

"Yes—the *Midland*," he repeated, rather testily. "It's a good way from here—you'd better take a cab."

She moved away—but started and drew herself back into a shadowed corner, coloring deeply as the sound of a rich, mellifluous voice, which she instantly recognized, smote suddenly on her ears.

"And as I before remarked, my good fellow," the voice was saying, "I am not a disciple of the semi-obscure. If a man has a thought which is worth declaring, let him declare it with a free and noble utterance—don't let him wrap it up in multifarious parcels of dreary verbosity! There's too much of that kind of thing going on nowadays—in England, at least. There's a kind of imitation of art which isn't art at all—a morbid, bilious, bad imitation. You only get close to the real goddess in Italy. I wish I could persuade you to come and pass the winter with me there!"

It was Beau Lovelace who spoke, and he was talking to George Lorimer. The two had met in Paris—Lovelace was on his way to London, where a matter of business summoned him for a few days, and Lorimer, somewhat tired of the French capital, decided to return with him. And here they were—just arrived at Charing-Cross—and they walked across the station arm in arm, little imagining who watched them from behind the shelter of one of the waiting-room doors, with a yearning sorrow in her grave blue eyes. They stopped almost opposite to her to light their cigars; she saw Lorimer's face quite distinctly, and heard his answer to Lovelace.

"Well, I'll see what I can do about it, Beau! You know my mother always likes to get away from London in winter—but whether we ought to inflict ourselves upon you—you being a literary man too—"

"Nonsense, you won't interfere in the least with the flow of inky inspiration," laughed Beau. "And as for your mother, I'm in love with her, as you are aware! I admire her almost as much as I do Lady Bruce-Errington—and that's saying a great deal! By the bye, if Phil can get through his share of this country's business, he might do worse than bring his beautiful Thelma to the Lake of Como for awhile. I'll ask him!"

And having lighted their Havanas successfully, they walked on and soon disappeared. For one instant Thelma felt strongly inclined to run after them like a little forlorn child that had lost its way, and, unburdening herself of all her miseries to the sympathetic George, entreat, with tears, to be taken back to that husband who did not want her any more. But she soon overcame this emotion, and calling to mind the instructions of the official

personage whose advice she had sought, she hurried out of the huge, brilliantly lighted station, and taking a hansom, was driven, as she requested, to the Midland. Here the rather gloomy aspect of the place oppressed her as much as the garish bustle of Charing-Cross had bewildered her—but she was somewhat relieved when she learned that a train for Hull would start in ten minutes. Hurrying to the ticket-office, she found there before her a kindly-faced woman with a baby in her arms, who was just taking a third-class ticket to Hull, and as she felt lonely and timid, Thelma at once decided to travel third-class also, and if possible in the same compartment with this cheerful matron, who, as soon as she had secured her ticket, walked away to the train, hushing her infant in her arms as she went. Thelma followed her at a little distance—and as soon as she saw her enter a third-class carriage, she hastened her steps and entered also, quite thankful to have secured some companionship for the long, cold journey. The woman glanced at her a little curiously—it was strange to see so lovely and young a creature traveling all alone at night, and she asked, kindly :

“Be you goin’ fur, miss?”

Thelma smiled—it was pleasant to be spoken to, she thought.

“Yes,” she answered. “All the way to Hull.”

“’Tis a cold night for a journey,” continued her companion.

“Yes, indeed,” answered Thelma. “It must be cold for your little baby.”

And unconsciously her voice softened and her eyes grew sad as she looked across at the sleeping infant.

“Oh, he’s as warm as toast!” laughed the mother, cheerily. “He gets the best of everything, he do. It’s yourself that’s looking cold, my dear—in spite of your warm cloak. Will ye have this shawl?”

And she offered Thelma a homely gray woolen wrap with much kindly earnestness of manner.

“I am quite warm, thank you,” said Thelma, gently, accepting the shawl, however, to please her fellow-traveler. “It is a headache I have which makes me look pale. And I am very, very tired!”

And she smoothed her ruffled hair, and sitting up erect, endeavored to smile. Her companion eyed her pale face compassionately, and taking up her sleeping baby from the shawl on which she had laid it while ministering to Thelma’s needs began to rock it slowly to and fro. Thelma, meanwhile, became sensible of the rapid movement of the train.

“We have left London?” she asked with an air of surprise.

“Nearly half an hour ago, my dear.” Then, after a pause, during which she had watched Thelma very closely, she said :

“I think you’re married, aren’t you, dearie?”

“Yes,” Thelma answered, a slight tinge of color warming her fair pale cheeks.

“Your husband, may be, will meet you at Hull?”

“No—he is in London,” said Thelma, simply. “I am going to see my father.”

This answer satisfied her humble friend, who, noticing her extreme fatigue and the effort it cost her to speak, forbore to ask any more questions, but good-naturedly recommended her to try and sleep. She slept soundly herself for the greater part of the journey; but Thelma was now feverishly wide awake, and her eyeballs ached and burned as though there were fire behind them.

Gradually her nerves began to be wound up to an extreme tension of excitement—she forgot all her troubles in listening with painful intentness to the rush and roar of the train through the darkness. The lights of passing stations and signal-posts gleamed like scattered and flying stars—there was the frequent shriek of the engine-whistle—the serpent-hiss of escaping steam. She peered through the window—all was blackness; there seemed to be no earth, no sky—only a sable chaos, through which the train flew like a flame-mouthed demon. Always that rush and roar! She began to feel as if she could stand it no longer. She must escape from that continuous, confusing sound—it maddened her brain. Nothing was easier; she would open the carriage-door and get out! Surely she could manage to jump off the step, even though the train was in motion!

Danger! She smiled at that idea—there was no danger; and, if there was, it did not much matter. Nothing mattered now—now that she had lost her husband’s love! She glanced at the woman opposite, who slept profoundly—the baby had slipped a little from its mother’s arms, and lay with its tiny face turned toward Thelma. It was a pretty creature, with soft cheeks and a sweet little mouth. She looked at it with a vague, wild smile. Again, again that rush and roar surged like a storm in her ears and distracted her mind. She rose suddenly and seized the handle of the carriage door. Another instant and she would have sprung to certain death—when suddenly the sleeping baby woke, and, opening its mild blue eyes, gazed at her.

She met its glance as one fascinated, and almost unconsciously her fingers dropped from the door-handle. The little baby still looked at her in dream-like, meditative fashion—its mother slept profoundly. She bent lower and lower over the child. With a beating heart she ventured to touch the small, pink hand that lay outside its wrappings like a softly curved rose-leaf. With a sort of elf-like confidence and contentment the feeble, wee fingers closed and curved round hers—and held her fast! Weak as a silken thread, yet stronger in its persuasive force than a grasp of iron, that soft, ligat pressure controlled and restrained her. Very

gradually the mists of her mind cleared—the rattling, thunderous dash of the train grew less dreadful, less monotonous, less painful to her sense of hearing. Her bosom heaved convulsively, and all suddenly her eyes filled with tears—merciful tears, which at first welled up slowly, and were hot as fire, but which soon began to fall faster and faster in large, bright drops down her pale cheeks. Seeing that its mother still slept, she took the baby gently into her own fair arms, and rocked it to and fro with many a sobbing murmur of tenderness; the little thing smiled drowsily and soon fell asleep again, all unconscious that its timely look and innocent touch had saved poor Thelma's life and reason.

She, meanwhile, wept on softly, till her tired brain and heart were somewhat relieved of their heavy burden—the entanglement of her thoughts became unraveled—and, though keenly aware of the blank desolation of her life, she was able to raise herself in spirit to the Giver of all love and consolation, and to pray humbly for that patience and resignation which now alone could serve her needs. And she communed with herself and God in silence, as the train rushed on northward. Her fellow-traveler woke up as they were nearing their destination, and, seeing her holding the baby, was profuse in her thanks for this kindness. And when they at last reached Hull, about half an hour after midnight, the good woman was exceedingly anxious to know if she could be of any service—but Thelma gently, yet firmly, refused all her offers of assistance.

They parted in the most friendly manner—Thelma kissing the child, through whose unconscious means, as she now owned to herself, she had escaped a terrible death—and then she went directly to a quiet hotel she knew of, which was kept by a native of Christiania, a man who had formerly been acquainted with her father. At first, when this worthy individual saw a lady arrive, alone, young, richly dressed, and without luggage, he was inclined to be suspicious; but as soon as she addressed him in Norwegian, and told him who she was, he greeted her with the utmost deference and humility.

"The daughter of Jarl Guldmar," he said, continuing to speak in his own tongue, "honors my house by entering it!"

Thelma smiled a little. "The days of the great Jarls are past, Friedhof," she replied, somewhat sadly, "and my father is content to be what he is—a simple *bonde*."

Friedhof shook his head quite obstinately. "A Jarl is always a Jarl," he declared, "Nothing can alter a man's birth and nature. And the last time I saw Valdemar Svensen—he who lives with your father now—he was careful always to speak of the *Jarl*, and seldom or never did he mention him in any other fashion. And now, noble Froken, in what manner can I serve you?"

Thelma told him briefly that she was going to see her father on

business, and that she was desirous of starting for Norway the next day as early as possible.

Friedhof held up his hands in amazement. "Ah! most surely you forget," he exclaimed, using the picturesque expressions of his native speech, "that this is the sleeping time of the sun! Even at the Hardanger Fjord it is dark and silent—the falling streams freeze with cold on their way; and if it is so at the Hardanger, what will it be at the Alten? And there is no passenger ship going to Christiania or Bergen for a fortnight!"

Thelma clasped her hands in dismay. "But I *must* go!" she cried, impatiently; "I must, indeed, good Friedhof! I cannot stay here! Surely, surely there is some vessel that would take me—some fishing-boat—what does it matter how I travel, so long as I get away?"

The landlord looked at her rather wonderingly. "Nay, if it is indeed so urgent, noble Froken," he replied, "do not trouble, for there is a means of making the journey. But for *you*, and in such bitter weather, it seems a cruelty to speak of. A steam cargo-boat leaves here for Hammerfest and the North Cape tomorrow—it will pass the Alten Fjord. No doubt you could go with that, if you so choose—but there will be no warmth or comfort, and there are heavy storms on the North Sea. I know the captain; and 'tis true he takes his wife with him, so there will be a woman on board—yet—"

Thelma interrupted him. She pressed two sovereigns into his hand.

"Say no more, Friedhof," she said, eagerly. "You will take me to see this captain—you will tell him I must go with him. My father will thank you for this kindness to me, even better than I can."

"It does not seem to me a kindness at all," returned Friedhof with frank bluntness. "I would be loath to sail the seas myself in such weather. And I thought you were so grandly married, Froken Guldmar—though I forget your wedded name—how comes it that your husband is not with you?"

"He is very busy in London," answered Thelma. "He knows where I am going. Do not be at all anxious, Friedhof—I shall make the journey very well, and I am not afraid of storm or wild seas."

Friedhof still looked dubious, but finally yielded to her entreaties and agreed to arrange her passage for her in the morning.

She stayed at his hotel that night, and with the very early dawn accompanied him on board the ship he had mentioned. It was a small, awkwardly built craft, with an ugly, crooked black funnel out of which the steam was hissing and spitting with quite an unnecessary degree of violence—the decks were wet and dirty, and the whole vessel was pervaded with a sickening smell of whale-

oil. The captain, a gruff, red-faced fellow, looked rather surlily at his unexpected passenger, but was soon mollified by her gentle manner, and the readiness with which she paid the money he demanded for taking her.

"You won't be very warm," he said, eying her from head to foot—"but I can lend you a rug to sleep in."

Thelma smiled and thanked him. He called to his wife, a thin, overworked-looking creature, who put up her head from a window in the cabin, at his summons.

"Here's a lady going with us," he announced. "Look after her, will you?" The woman nodded. Then, once more addressing himself to Thelma, he said: "We shall have nasty weather and a wicked sea!"

"I do not mind!" she answered quietly, and turning to Friedhof, who had come to see her off, she shook hands with him warmly and thanked him for the trouble he had taken in her behalf. The good landlord bade her farewell somewhat reluctantly—he had a presentiment that there was something wrong with the beautiful, golden-haired daughter of the *Jarl*—and that perhaps he ought to have prevented her making this uncomfortable and possibly perilous voyage. But it was too late now—and at a little before seven o'clock, the vessel—which rejoiced in the name of the "Black Polly"—left the harbor, and steamed fussily down the Humber in the teeth of a sudden storm of sleet and snow.

## CHAPTER X.

What of her glass without her? The blank gray  
There, where the pool is blind of the moon's face—  
Her dress without her? The tossed empty space  
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away!

DANTE G. ROSSETTI.

"GOOD God!" cried Errington, impatiently. "What's the matter? Speak out!"

He had just arrived home. He had barely set foot within his own door, and full of lover-like ardor and eagerness was about to hasten to his wife's room, when his old servant Morris stood in his way trembling and pale-faced, looking helplessly from him to Neville, who was as much astonished as Sir Philip at the man's woe-begone appearance.

"Something has happened," he stammered faintly at last. "Her ladyship—"

Philip started—his heart beat quickly and then seemed to grow still with a horrible sensation of fear.

"What of her?" he demanded in low, hoarse tones. "Is she ill?"

Morris threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Sir Philip, my dear master!" cried the poor old man, "I do

not know whether she is ill or well—I cannot guess! My lady went out last night at a little before eight o'clock—and—and she has never come home at all! We cannot tell what has become of her! She has gone!"

And tears of distress and anxiety filled his eyes. Philip stood mute. He could not understand it. All color fled from his face—he seemed as though he had received a sudden blow on the head which had stunned him.

"Gone!" he said, mechanically. "Thelma—my wife—gone! Why should she go?"

And he stared fixedly at Neville, who laid one hand soothingly on his arm.

"Perhaps she is with friends," he suggested. "She may be at Lady Winsleigh's or Mrs. Lorimer's."

"No, no!" interrupted Morris. "Britta, who stayed up all night for her, has since been to every house that my lady visits, and no one has seen or heard of her!"

"Where is Britta?" demanded Philip, suddenly.

"She has gone away to Lady Winsleigh's," answered Morris. "She says it is there the mischief has been done; I don't know what she means!"

Philip shook off his secretary's sympathetic touch, and strode through the rooms to Thelma's boudoir. He put aside the velvet curtains of the *portière* with a noiseless hand—somehow he felt as if, in spite of all he had just heard, she *must* be there as usual to welcome him with that serene sweet smile which was the sunshine of his life. The empty, desolate air of the room smote him with a sense of bitter pain—only the plaintive warble of her pet thrush, who was singing to himself most mournfully in his gilded cage, broke the heavy silence. He looked about him vacantly. All sorts of dark forebodings crowded on his mind. She must have met with some accident, he thought with a shudder, for that she would depart from him in this sudden way on her own accord and for no reason whatsoever seemed to him incredible—impossible.

"What have I done that she should leave me?" he asked, half aloud and wonderingly.

Everything that had seemed to him of worth a few hours ago became valueless in this moment of time. What cared he now for the business of Parliament—for distinction or honors among men? Nothing—less than nothing! Without her, the world was empty—its ambitions, its pride, its good, its evil, seemed but the dreariest and most foolish trifles!

"Not even a message!" he thought. "No hint of where she meant to go—no word of explanation for me? Surely I must be dreaming—my Thelma would never have deserted me!"

A sort of sob rose in his throat, and he pressed his hand strongly over his eyes to keep down the womanish drops that threatened to