

muttons follow, but not all. Are you off?" this as they rose to take their leave. "Well, Errington, old fellow," and he shook hands warmly, "a pleasant journey to you, and a happy return home! My best regards to your wife. Lorimer, have you settled whether you'll go with me to Italy? I start the day after to-morrow."

Lorimer hesitated, then said: "All right! My mother's delighted at the idea. Yes, Beau, we'll come. Only I hope we sha'n't bore you."

"Bore me! you know me better than that," and he accompanied them out of the smoking-room into the hall, while Errington, a little surprised at this sudden arrangement, observed:

"Why, George, I thought you'd be here when we came back from Norway—to—to welcome Thelma, you know!"

George laughed. "My dear boy, I sha'n't be wanted! Just let me know how everything goes on. You—you see, I'm in duty bound to take my mother out of London in winter."

"Just so!" agreed Lovelace, who had watched him narrowly while he spoke. "Don't grudge the old lady her southern sunshine, Errington! Lorimer wants brushing up a bit too—he looks seedy. Then I shall consider it settled—the day after, to-morrow we meet at Charing Cross—morning tidal express, of course—never go by night services across the Channel if you can help it."

Again they shook hands and parted.

"Best thing that young fellow can do!" thought Lovelace as he returned to the club reading-room. "The sooner he gets out of this, into new scenes, the better; he's breaking his heart over the beautiful Thelma. By Jove! the boy's eyes looked like those of a shot animal whenever her name was mentioned. He's rather badly hit!"

He sat down and began to meditate. "What can I do for him. I wonder?" he thought. "Nothing, I suppose. A love of that sort can't be remedied. It's a pity—a great pity! And I don't know any woman likely to make a counter-impression on him. He'd never put up with an Italian beauty"—he paused in his reflections, and the color flushed his broad, handsome brow, as the dazzling vision of a sweet, piquant face with liquid dark eyes and rippling masses of rich brown hair came flitting before him—"unless he saw Angela," he murmured to himself softly—"and he will not see her—besides, Angela loves me!"

And after this, his meditations seemed to be particularly pleasant, to judge from the expression of his features. Beau was by no means ignorant of the tender passion—he had his own little romance, as beautiful and bright as a summer-day—but he had resolved that London, with its love of gossip, its scandal, and society papers—London, that on account of his popularity as a writer, watched his movements and chronicled his doings in the most authoritative and incorrect manner—London should have no

chance of penetrating into the secret of his private life. And so far he had succeeded, and was likely still to succeed.

Meanwhile, as he still sat in blissful reverie, pretending to read a newspaper, though his thoughts were far away from it, Errington and Lorimer arrived at the Midland Station. Britta was already there with the luggage; she was excited and pleased; her spirits had risen at the prospect of seeing her mistress soon again—possibly, she thought gladly, they might find her at Hull—they might not have to go to Norway at all. The train came up to the platform, the tickets were taken, and Sir Philip, with Britta, entered a first-class compartment, while Lorimer stood outside leaning with folded arms on the carriage-window, talking cheerfully.

"You'll find her all right, Phil, I'm positive," he said. "I think it's very probable she has been compelled to remain at Hull; and even at the worst, Britta can guide you all over Norway, if necessary. Nothing will daunt her."

And he nodded kindly to the little maid who had regained her rosy color and the sparkle of her eyes in the eagerness she felt to rejoin her beloved "Froken." The engine-whistle gave a warning shriek. Philip leaned out and pressed his friend's hand warmly.

"Good-bye, old fellow! I'll write to you in Italy."

"All right—mind you do. And I say—give my love to Thelma!"

Philip smiled and promised. The train began to move—slowly at first, then more quickly, till with clattering uproar and puffing clouds of white steam it rushed forth from the station, winding through the arches like a black snake, till it had twisted itself rapidly out of sight. Lorimer, left alone, looked after it wistfully, with a heavy weight of unuttered love and sorrow at his heart, and as he at last turned away, those haunting words that he had heard under the pines at the Alten Fjord recurred again and again to his memory—the words uttered by the distraught Sigurd—and how true they were, he thought! how desperately, cruelly true!

"Good things may come for others—but for *you*, the heavens are empty!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Honor is an old-world thing, but it smells sweet to those in whose hand it is strong.—OUIDA.

DISAPPOINTMENT upon disappointment awaited Errington at Hull. Unfortunately, neither he nor Britta knew of the existence of the good Norwegian innkeeper, Friedhof, who had assisted Thelma in her flight—and all their persistent and anxious inquiries elicited no news of her. Moreover, there was no boat of any kind leaving immediately for Norway—not even a whaler or fishing-smack. In a week's time—possibly later—there would be a steamer starting for Christiansund, and for this Errington, though almost mad with impatience, was forced to wait. And in the

meantime he roamed about the streets of Hull, looking eagerly at every fair-haired woman who passed him, and always hoping that Thelma herself would suddenly meet him face to face, and put her hands in his. He wrote to Neville and told him to send on any letters that might arrive for him, and by every post he waited anxiously for one from Thelma, but none came. To relieve his mind a little, he scribbled a long letter to her, explaining everything, telling her how ardently he loved and worshiped her—how he was on his way to join her at the Alten Fjord—and ending by the most passionate vows of unchanging love and fidelity. He was somewhat soothed when he had done this—though he did not realize the fact that in all probability he himself might arrive before the letter. The slow, miserable days went on—the week was completed—the steamer for Christiansund started at last, and, after a terrible stormy passage, he and the faithful Britta were landed there.

On arrival, he learned that a vessel bound for the North Cape had left on the previous day—there would not be another for a fortnight. Cursing his ill-luck, he resolved to reach the Alten Fjord by land, and began to make arrangements accordingly. Those who knew the country well endeavored to dissuade him from this desperate project—the further north, the greater danger, they told him—moreover, the weather was, even for Norway, exceptionally trying. Snow lay heavily over all the country he would have to traverse—the only means of conveyance was by carriage or *pulkha*—the latter a sort of sledge used by the Laplanders, made in the form of a boat, and generally drawn by reindeer. The capabilities of the carriage would be exhausted as soon as the snow-covered regions were reached, and to manage a *pulkha* successfully required special skill of no ordinary kind. But the courageous little Britta made short work of all these difficulties—she could drive a *pulkha*—she knew how to manage reindeer—she entertained not the slightest doubt of being able to overcome all the obstacles on the way. At the same time, she frankly told Sir Philip that the journey would be a long one, perhaps occupying several days, that they would have to rest at different farms or *stations* on the road, and put up with hard fare—that the cold would be intense—that often they would find it difficult to get relays of the required reindeer—and that it might perhaps be wiser to wait for the next boat going to the North Cape.

But Errington would hear of no more delays—each hour that passed filled him with fresh anxieties—and once in Norway he could not rest. The idea that Thelma might be ill—dying—or dead—gained on him with redoubled force; and his fears easily communicating themselves to Britta, who was to the full as impatient as he, the two made up their minds, and providing every necessary for the journey they could think of, they started for the

far sunless North, through a white, frozen land, which grew whiter and more silent the further they went, even as the brooding sky above them grew darker and darker. The aurora borealis flashed its brilliant shafts of color against the sable breast of heaven, the tall pines, stripped bare, every branch thick with snow and dropping icicles, stood—pale ghosts of the forest—shedding frozen tears; the moon, more like steel than silver, shone frostily cold, her light seeming to deepen rather than soften the dreariness of the land—and on—on—on—they went, Britta enveloped to the chin in furs, steadily driving the strange elfin-looking steeds with their horned heads casting long distorted shadows on the white ground—and Philip beside her, urging her on with feverish impatience, while he listened to the smooth trot of the reindeer, the tinkle of the bells on their harness, and the hiss of the sledge across the sparkling snow.

On the very morning after he had left the metropolis *en route* for Norway, that admirably conducted society journal, the "Snake," appeared—and society read the assailing paragraph and rolled it in its rank mouth like a bonbon, enjoying its flavor. It ran as follows:

"We hear on excellent authority that the Norwegian 'beauty,' Lady Bruce-Errington, wife of Sir Philip Bruce-Errington, is about to sue for a divorce on the ground of infidelity. The offending *dama* in the question is an admired actress, well-known to the frequenters of the Brilliant Theater. But there are always two sides to these affairs, and it is rumored that the fair Norwegian (who, before her marriage, we understand, was a great adept in the art of milking reindeer on the shores of her native fjord) has private reasons of her own for desiring the divorce not altogether in keeping with her stated reasons or her apparent reserve. We are, however, always on the side of the fair sex, and, as the faithless husband has made no secret of his new *liaison*, we do not hesitate to at once pronounce in the lady's favor. The case is likely to prove interesting to believers in wedded happiness, combined with the strictest moral and religious sentiments."

Quite by accident this piece of would-be "smartness" was seen by Beau Lovelace. He had a wholesome contempt for the "Snake"—and all its class—he would never have looked at it, or known of the paragraph, had not a friend of his at the Garrick pointed it out to him with half a smile and half a sneer.

"It's a damned lie!" said Beau, briefly.

"That remains to be proved!" answered his friend, and went away laughing.

Beau read it over and over again, his blood firing with honest indignation. Thelma! Thelma—that pure white lily of womanhood—was she to have her stainless life blurred by the trail of such a thing as the "Snake"?—and was Errington's honor to be attained in his absence, and he condemned without a word uttered in his defense?

"Detestable blackguard!" muttered Lovelace, reverting in his mind to the editor of the journal in question. "What's his name, I wonder?" He searched and found it at the top of a column—

"Sole Editor and Proprietor, C. Snawley-Grubbs, to whom all checks and post-office orders should be made payable. The Editor cannot be responsible for the return of rejected MSS."

Beau noted the name and wrote the address of the office in his pocket-book, smiling curiously to himself the while.

An hour later he stood in the office of the "Snake," courteously inquiring for Mr. Snawley-Grubbs. Apparently he had come on horseback, for he held a riding-whip in his hand—the very whip Errington had left with him the previous day. The inky, dirty, towzle-headed boy who presided in solitary grandeur over the "Snake's" dingy premises stared at him inquiringly—visitors of his distinguished appearance and manner being rather uncommon.

"What name, sir, please?"

"Beaufort Lovelace," said the gentleman, with a bland smile. "Here is my card. Ask Mr. Grubbs whether he can see me for a few minutes. If he is engaged—editors generally *are* engaged—tell him I'll wait."

The boy went off in a greater hurry than ever. The name of Lovelace was quite familiar to him—he knew him, not as a distinguished novelist, but as "im who makes such a precious lot of money." And he was breathless with excitement when he reached the small editorial chamber at the top of a dark, narrow flight of stairs wherein sat the autocratic Snawley, smiling suavely over a heap of letters and disordered MSS. He glanced at the card which his ink-smearing attendant presented him.

"Ah, indeed!" he said, condescendingly. "Lovelace—Lovelace? Oh, yes—I suppose it must be the novelist of that name—show him up."

Shown up he was accordingly. He entered the room with a firm tread, and closed the door behind him.

"How do do, my dear sir!" exclaimed Grubbs, warmly. "You are well known to me by reputation! I am charmed—delighted to make the personal acquaintance of one who is—yes—let me say, who is a brother in literature! Sit down, I beg of you!"

And he waved his hand toward a chair, thereby displaying the great rings that glittered on his podgy fingers.

Beau, however, did not seat himself—he only smiled very coldly and contemptuously.

"We can discuss the fraternal nature of our relationship afterward," he said, satirically. "Business first. Pray, sir"—here he drew from his pocket the last number of the "Snake"—"are you the writer of this paragraph?"

He pointed to it, as he flattened the journal and laid it in front of the editor on his desk. Mr. Snawley-Grubbs glanced at it and smiled unconcernedly.

"No, I am not. But I happen to know it is perfectly correct. I received the information on the highest—the very highest and most credible authority."

"Indeed!" and Beau's lip curled haughtily, while his hand clinched the horsewhip more firmly. "Then allow me to tell you, sir, that it is utterly false in every particular—moreover, that it is a gross libel, published with deliberate intent to injure those whom it presumes to mention—and that, whoever wrote it—you, sir, you alone are responsible for a most mischievous, scandalous, and damnable lie!"

Mr. Grubbs was in nowise disconcerted. Honest indignation honestly expressed always amused him—he was amused now.

"You're unduly excited, Mr. Lovelace," he said with a little laugh. "Permit me to remark that your language is rather extraordinary—quite *too* strong under the circumstances! However, you're a privileged person—genius is always a little mad, or shall we say—eccentric? I suppose you are a friend of Sir Philip Errington, and you naturally feel hurt—yes—yes, I quite understand! But the scourge of the press—the wholesome, purifying scourge, cannot be withheld out of consideration for private or personal feelings. No—no! There's a higher duty—the duty we owe to the public!"

"I tell you again," repeated Lovelace, firmly, "the whole thing is a lie. Will you apologize?"

Mr. Grubbs threw himself back in his chair and laughed aloud.

"Apologize? My dear sir, you must be dreaming! Apologize? Certainly not! I cannot retract the statements I have made—and I firmly believe them to be true. And though there is a saying, 'the greater the truth the greater the libel,' I'm ready, sir, and always have been ready, to sacrifice myself to the cause of truth. Truth, truth forever! Tell the truth and shame the devil! You are at liberty to inform Sir Philip Errington from me, that as it is my object—a laudable and praiseworthy one, too, I think—to show up the awful immorality now reigning in our upper classes, I do not regret in the least the insertion of the paragraph in question. If it only makes him ashamed of his vices, I shall have done a good deed, and served the interests of society at large. At the same time, if he wishes to bring an action for libel—"

And before the startled Grubbs could realize his position, Lovelace closed with him, bent him under, and struck the horsewhip smartly across his back and shoulders. He uttered a yell of pain and fury, and strove vigorously to defend himself, but, owing to his obesity, his muscles were weak and flabby, and he was powerless against the activity and strength of his opponent. Lash after lash descended regularly and mercilessly—his cries, which gradually became like the roarings of a bull of Bashan, were unheard, as the office-boy below, profiting by a few idle moments, had run across the street to buy some chestnuts at a stall he particularly patronized. Beau thrashed on with increasing enjoyment—Grubbs resisted him less and less, till finally he slipped feebly down on the

floor and groveled there, gasping and groaning. Beau gave him one or two more artistic cuts, and stood above him, with the serene, triumphant smile of a successful athlete. Suddenly a loud peal of laughter echoed from the doorway—a woman stood there, richly dressed in silk and fur, with diamonds sparkling in her ears and diamonds clasping the long boa at her throat. It was Violet Vere.

"Why, Snawley!" she cried with cheerful familiarity. "How are you? All broken, and no one to pick up the pieces! Serve you right! Got it at last, eh? Don't get up! You look so comfortable!"

"Bodily assault," gasped Grubbs. "I'll summons—call the police—call," his voice died away in inarticulate gurglings, and raising himself, he sat up on the floor in a sufficiently abject and ludicrous posture, wiping the tears of pain from his eyes. Beau looked at the female intruder and recognized her at once. He saluted her with cold courtesy, and turned again to Grubbs.

"Will you apologize?"

"No—I—I won't!"

Beau made another threatening movement—Miss Vere interposed.

"Stop a bit," she said, regarding him with her insolent eyes, in which lurked, however, an approving smile. "I don't know who you are, but you seem a fighting man! Don't go at him again till I've had a word. I say, Grubbs! you've been hitting at me in your trashy paper."

Grubbs still sat on the floor groaning.

"You must eat those words," went on the Vere calmly. "Eat 'em up with sauce for dinner. The 'admired actress well known at the Brilliant,' has nothing to do with the Bruce-Errington man—not she! He's a duffer—a regular stiff one—no go about him anyhow. And what the deuce do you mean by calling me an offending *dama*? Keep your oaths to yourself, will you?"

Beau Lovelace was amused. Grubbs turned his watering eyes from one to the other in wretched perplexity. He made an effort to stand up and succeeded.

"I'll have you arrested, sir!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist at Beau, and quivering with passion, "on a charge of bodily assault—shameful bodily assault, sir!"

"All right!" returned Beau, coolly. "If I were fined a hundred pounds for it, I should think it cheap for the luxury of thrashing such a hound!"

Grubbs quaked at the determined attitude and threatening eye of his assailant, and turned for relief to Miss Vere, whose smile, however, was not sympathetic.

"You'd better cave in!" she remarked, airily. "You've got the worst of it, you know!"

She had long been on confidential terms with the "Snake" proprietor, and she spoke to him now with the candor of an old friend.

"Dear me, what do you expect of me!" he almost whimpered. "I'm not to blame! The paragraph was inserted without my knowledge by my sub-editor—he's away just now, and—there!—why," he cried with sudden defiance, "why don't you ask Sir Francis Lennox about it? He wrote the whole thing."

"Well, he's dead," said Miss Vere with the utmost coolness. "So it wouldn't be much use asking *him*. *He* can't answer—you'll have to answer for him."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Mr. Grubbs. "He can't be dead!"

"Oh, yes, he can, and he *is*," retorted Violet. "And a good job too! He was knocked over by a train at Charing-Cross. You'll see it in to-day's paper, if you take the trouble to look. And mind you contradict all that stuff about me in your next number—do you hear? I'm going to America with a duke next month, and I can't afford to have my reputation injured. And I won't be called a '*dama*' for any penny-a-liner living." She paused, and again broke out laughing: "Poor old Snawley! You do look so sore! Ta-ta!" And she moved toward the door. Lovelace, always courteous, opened it for her. She raised her hard, bright eyes, and smiled.

"Thanks! Hope I shall see you again some day!"

"You are very good!" responded Beau, gravely.

Either his tone, which was one of chill indifference, or something in his look, irritated her suddenly—for a rush of hot color crimsoned her face, and she bit her lips vexedly as she descended the office-stairs.

Meanwhile, Lovelace, left alone again with Mr. Grubbs, reiterated his demand for an apology. Grubbs made a rush for the door, as soon as Miss Vere had gone, with the full intention of summoning the police, but Beau coolly placed his back against it with resolute firmness, and flourished his whip defiantly.

"Come, sir, none of this nonsense!" he said, sternly. "I don't mean to leave this spot till I have satisfaction. If Sir Francis Lennox wrote that scandalous paragraph the greater rascal he, and the more shame to you for inserting it. You, who make it your business to know all the dirty alleys and dark corners of life, must have known *his* character pretty thoroughly. There's not the slightest excuse for you. Will you apologize—and retract every word of that paragraph in your next issue?"

Grubbs, breathless with rage and fear, glared at him, but made no answer.

"Very well," he said, sullenly. "Write what you want put in—I'll attend to it—I don't mind obliging Miss Vere. But all the same, I'll have you arrested!"

Beau laughed. "Do so by all means!" he said, gayly. "I'll leave my address with you!" He wrote rapidly a few lines on a piece of paper to the following effect:

"We have to entirely contradict a statement we made last week respecting a supposed forthcoming divorce case, in which Sir Philip Bruce-Errington was seriously implicated. There was no truth whatever in the statement, and we herewith apologize most humbly and heartily for having inadvertently given credence to a rumor which is now proved to be utterly false and without the slightest shadow of a foundation."

He handed this to Grubbs.

"Insert that word for word, at the head of your paragraphs," he said, "and you'll hear no more of me, unless you give me fresh provocation. And I advise you to think twice before you have me arrested—for I'll defend my own case, and—ruin you! I'm rather a dangerous customer to have much to do with! However, you've got my card—you know where to find me if you want me. Only you'd better send after me to-night if you do—to-morrow I may be absent."

Not a soul regretted Sir Francis—not even the Vere, whom he had kept and surrounded with every luxury for five years. Only one person, a fair, weary-faced woman away in Germany, shed a few tears over the lawyer's letter that announced his death to her—and this was the deserted wife who had once loved him. Lady Winsleigh had heard the news—she shuddered and turned very pale when her husband gently and almost pityingly told her of the sudden and unprepared end that had overtaken her quondam admirer—but she said nothing. She was presiding at the breakfast-table for the first time in many years; she looked somewhat sad and listless, yet lovelier so than in all the usual pride and assertive arrogance of her beauty. Lord Winsleigh read aloud the brief account of the accident in the paper—she listened dreamily—still mute. He watched her with yearning eyes.

"An awful death for such a man, Clara!" he said at last in a low tone.

She dared not look up—she was trembling nervously. How dreadful it was, she thought, to be thankful that a man was dead!—to feel a relief at his being no longer in this world! Presently her husband spoke again more reservedly.

"No doubt you are greatly shocked and grieved," he said. "I should not have told you so suddenly—pardon me."

"I am not grieved," she murmured, unsteadily. "It sounds horrible to say so—but I—I am afraid I am glad!"

"Clara!"

She rose and came tremblingly toward him. She knelt at his feet, though he strove to prevent her—she raised her large, dark eyes, full of dull agony, to his.

"I've been a wicked woman, Harry," she said, with a strange, imploring thrill of passion in her voice. "I am down—down in

the dust before you! Look at me—don't forgive me—I won't ask that—you *can't* forgive me—but *pity* me!"

He took her hands and laid them round his neck—he drew her gently, soothingly—closer, closer, till he pressed her to his heart.

"Down in the dust are you?" he whispered, brokenly. "My poor wife! God forbid that I should keep you there!"

BOOK III.

THE LAND OF THE LONG SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

They have the night, who had, like us, the day—
We, whom day binds, shall have the night as they—
We, from the fetters of the light unbound,
Healed of our wound of living, shall sleep sound!

SWINBURNE.

NIGHT on the Alten Fjord—the long, long, changeless night of winter. The sharp snow-covered crests of the mountains rose in white appeal against the darkness of the sky—the wild north wind tore through the leafless branches of the pine-forests bringing with it driving pellets of stinging hail. Joyless and songless the whole landscape lay as though frozen into sculptured stone. The sun slept, and the fjord, black with brooding shadows, seemed silently to ask—where? Where was the great king of Light—the glorious god of the golden hair and ruddy countenance—the glittering warrior with the flaming shield and spear invincible? Where had he found his rest? By what strange enchantment had he fallen into so deep and long a drowsiness! The wind, that had rioted across the mountains, rooting up great trees in its shrieking career northward, grew hushed as it approached the Alten Fjord—there a weird stillness reigned, broken only by the sullen and monotonous plash of the invisible waves upon the scarcely visible shore.

On this particular afternoon the appearance of the "Death-Arch," as they called that special form of the aurora, had impressed the Tavig folk greatly. Some of them were at their doors, and, regardless of the piercing cold occupied themselves in staring languidly at a reindeer sledge which stood outside one of the more distant huts, evidently waiting for some person within. The hoofs of the animals made no impression on the hardened snow—now and again they gently shook the tinkling bells on their harness, but otherwise were very patient. The sledge was in charge of a youthful Laplander—a hideous, stunted specimen of humanity, who appeared to be literally sewed up from head to foot in skins.

This *cortège* was evidently an object of curiosity—the onlookers eyed it askance, and with a sort of fear. For did it not belong to