

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

the terrible *bonde*, Olaf Guldmar?—and would not the Laplander a useful boy, well known in Talvig—come to some fatal harm by watching, even for a few minutes, the property of an acknowledged pagan? Who could tell? The very reindeer might be possessed by evil spirits—they were certainly much sleeker and finer than the ordinary run of such animals. There was something uncanny in the very look of them! Thus the stupefied, unreasoning Talvig folk muttered, one to another, leaning drowsily out of their half-open doors.

"'Tis a strange thing," said one man, "that a woman as strong in the fear of the Lord as Lovisa Elsland should call for one of the wicked to visit her on her death-bed."

"Strange enough!" answered his neighbor, blinking over his pipe, and knocking down some of the icicles pendent from his roof. "But may be it is to curse him with the undying curse of the godly."

"She's done that all her life," said the first speaker.

"That's true! She's been a faithful servant of the Gospel. All's right with her in the next world—she'll die easily."

"Was it for her the Death-Arch shone?" asked an old woman, suddenly thrusting her head, wrapped in a red woolen hood, out of a low doorway, through which the light of a fire sparkled from the background, sending vivid flashes across the snow.

The man who had spoken last shook his head solemnly.

"The Death-Arch never shone for a Christian yet," he said, gravely. "No! There's something else in the wind. We can't see it—but it will come—it must come! That sign never fails."

And presently, tired of watching the waiting sledge and the passive Laplander, he retreated within his house, shutting his door against the darkness and the bitter wind. His neighbors followed his example, and, save for two or three red glimmers of light here and there, the little village looked as though it had been deserted long ago—a picture of frost-bound silence and solitude.

Meanwhile, in Lovisa Elsland's close and comfortless dwelling, stood Olaf Guldmar. His strong, stately figure, wrapped in furs, seemed almost to fill the little place—he had thrown aside the thick scarf of *wadmel* in which he had been wrapped to the eyes while driving in the teeth of the wind—and he now lifted his fur cap, thus displaying his silvery hair, ruddy features, and open, massive brow. At that moment a woman who was busying herself in putting fresh pine-logs on the smoldering fire, turned and regarded him intently.

"Has she been long thus?" he asked in a low voice.

"Since last night," replied the woman—no other than Mr. Dyceworthy's former servant, Ulrika. "She wakened suddenly, and bade me send for you. To-day she has not spoken."

The *bonde* sighed somewhat impatiently. He approached the

now blazing pine logs, and as he drew off his thick fur driving-gloves and warmed his hands at the cheerful blaze, Ulrika again fixed her dull eyes upon him with something of wonder and reluctant admiration. Presently she trimmed an oil-lamp, and set it, burning dimly, on the table. Then she went to the bed and bent over it. After a pause of several minutes she turned and made a beckoning sign with her finger. Guldmar advanced a little—when a sudden eldritch shriek startled him back, almost curdling the blood in his veins. Out of the deep obscurity, like some gaunt specter rising from the tomb, started a face, wrinkled, cadaverous, and distorted by suffering—a face in which the fierce, fevered eyes glittered with a strange and dreadful brilliancy—the face of Lovisa Elsland, stern, forbidding, and already dark with the shadows of approaching death. She stared vacantly at Guldmar, whose picturesque head was illumined by the ruddy glow of the fire, and feebly shaded her eyes as though she saw something that hurt them. Ulrika raised her on her tumbled pillow, and saying, in cold, unmoved tones: "Speak now, for the time is short," she once more beckoned the *bonde* imperatively.

He approached slowly.

"Lovisa Elsland," he began in distinct tones, addressing himself to that ghastly countenance still partly shaded by one hand, "I am here—Olaf Guldmar. Dost thou know me?"

At the sound of his voice, a strange spasm contorted the withered features of the dying woman.

"So you are come, Olaf Guldmar!" she said. "It is well—for the hand of Death is upon me."

"It is well, indeed, if I can be of service, Lovisa Elsland," responded Guldmar, "though I am but a sorry consoler, holding, as I do, that death is the chief blessing, and in no way to be regretted at any time. Moreover, when the body grows too weak to support the soul, 'tis as well to escape from it with what speed we may."

"Escape—escape? Where?" asked Lovisa. "From the worm that dieth not? From the devouring flame that is never quenched? From the torturing thirst and heat and darkness of hell, who shall escape!"

"Nay, if that is all the comfort thy creed can give thee," said the *bonde*, with a half smile, "'tis but a poor staff to lean on!"

Lovisa looked at him mockingly. "And is thine so strong a prop to thy pride?" she asked, disdainfully. "Has Odin so endowed thee that thou shouldst boast of him? Listen to me, Olaf Guldmar—I have but little strength remaining, and I must speak briefly. Thy wife—"

"What of her?" said the *bonde*, hastily. "Thou knewest her not."

"I knew her," said Lovisa, steadily, "as the lightning knows the tree it withers—as the sea knows the frail boat it wrecks for sport

on a windy day. Thou haughty Olaf! I knew her well—even as the broken heart knows its destroyer!”

Guldmar looked perplexedly at Ulrika. “Surely she raves again?” he said. Ulrika was silent.

“Rave? Tell him I do not rave!” cried Lovisa, rising in her bed to utter her words with more strength and emphasis. “Maybe I have raved, but that is past! The Lord, who will judge and condemn my soul, bear witness that I speak the truth! Olaf Guldmar, rememberest thou the days when we were young?”

“’Tis long ago, Lovisa,” replied the *bonde*, with brief gentleness.

“Long ago? It seems but yesterday! But yesterday I saw the world all radiant with hope and joy and love—love that to you was a mere pastime—but with *me*—” She shuddered and seemed to lose herself in a maze of dreary recollections. “Love!” she presently muttered—“love is strong as death—jealousy is cruel as the grave—the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame!” Even so! You, Olaf Guldmar, have forgotten what I remember—that once, in that yesterday of youth, you called me fair—once your lips branded mine! Could I forget that kiss? Think you a Norse woman, bred in the shadow of the constant mountains, forgets the first thrill of passion wakened in her soul? Light women of those lands where the sun ever shines on fresh follies may count their loves by the score—but with us of the North, *one* love suffices to fill a lifetime. And was not my life filled? Filled to overflowing with bitterness and misery! For I loved you, proud Olaf!—I loved you—” The *bonde* uttered an exclamation of incredulous astonishment. Lovisa fixed her eyes on him with a dark scorn. “Yes, I loved you—scoffer and unbeliever as you were and are!—accursed of God and man! I loved you in spite of all that was said against you—nay, I would have forsaken my creed for yours, and condemned my soul to the everlasting burning for your sake! I loved you as *she*—that pale, fair, witch-like thing you wedded, could never love—” Her voice died away in a sort of despairing wail, and she paused.

“By my soul!” said the *bonde*, astounded, and stroking his white beard in some embarrassment, “I never knew of this! It is true that in the hot days of youth, mischief is often done unwittingly. But why trouble yourself with these memories, Lovisa? If it be any comfort—believe me, I am sorry harm ever came to you through my thoughtless jesting—”

“It matters not!” and Lovisa regarded him with a strange and awful smile. “I have had my revenge!” She stopped abruptly—then went on—“’Twas a fair bride you chose, Olaf Guldmar—child of an alien from these shores—Thelma, with the treacherous laughter and light of the South in her eyes and smile! And I, who had known love, made friends with hate—” She checked

herself, and looked full at the *bonde* with a fiendish joy sparkling in her eyes. “She whom you wedded—she whom you loved so well—how soon she died! Yes, yes! how soon she died! Bravely, bravely done! And no one ever guessed the truth—no one ever knew I *killed* her!”

Guldmar uttered a sharp cry, and shook himself free from her touch. In the same instant his hand flew to the hilt of the hunting-knife in his girdle.

“*Killed* her! By the gods—”

Ulrika sprung before him. “Shame!” she cried, sternly. “She is dying!”

“Too slowly for me!” exclaimed the *bonde*, furiously.

“Peace—peace!” implored Ulrika. “Let her speak!”

“Strike, Olaf Guldmar!” said Lovisa, in a deep voice, harsh, but all untremulous,—“Strike, pagan, with whom the law of blood is supreme—strike to the very center of my heart—I do not fear you! I killed her, I say—and therein I, the servant of the Lord, was justified! Think you that the Most High hath not commanded His elect to utterly destroy and trample under foot their enemies?—and is not vengeance mine as well as thine, accursed slave of Odin?”

A spasm of pain here interrupted her—she struggled violently for breath—and Ulrika supported her. Guldmar stood motionless, white with restrained fury, his eyes blazing. Recovering by slow degrees, Lovisa once more spoke—her voice was weaker, and sounded a long way off.

“Yea, the Lord hath been on my side!” she said, and the hideous blasphemy rattled in her throat as it was uttered. “Listen—and hear how He delivered mine enemy into my hands. I watched her always—I followed her many and many a time, though she never saw me. I knew her favorite path across the mountains—it led past a rocky chasm. On the edge of that chasm there was a broad, flat stone, and there she would sit often, reading, or watching the fishing-boats on the fjord, and listening to the prattle of her child. I used to dream of that stone, and wonder if I could loosen it! It was strongly embedded in the earth—but each day I went to it—each day I moved it! Little by little I worked—till a mere touch would have sent it hurling downward—yet it looked as firm as ever.”

Guldmar uttered a fierce ejaculation of anguish—he put one hand to his throat as though he were stifling. Lovisa, watching him, smiled vindictively, and continued:

“When I had done all I could do, I lay in wait for her, hoping and praying. My hour came at last! It was a bright sunny morning—a little bird had been twittering above the very place—as it flew away, *she* approached—a book was in her hand—her child followed her at some little distance off. Fortune favored me—a cluster of pansies had opened their blossoms a few inches below

the stone—she saw them—and, light as a bird, sprung on it and reached forward to gather them— Ah !”—and the wretched woman clapped her hands and broke into malignant laughter—“I can hear her quick shriek now—the crash of stones and the crackle of branches as she fell down—down to her death! Presently the child came running—it was too young to understand—it sat down patiently waiting for its mother. How I longed to kill it! but it sung to itself like the bird that had flown away, and I could not! But *she* was gone—*she* was silent forever—the Lord be praised for all His mercies! Was she smiling, Olaf Guldmar, when you found her—*dead*?”

A strange solemnity shadowed the *bonde's* features. He turned his eyes upon her steadily.

“Blessing and honor be to the gods of my fathers!” he said: “I found her—*living*!”

The change that came over Lovisa's face at these words was inexpressibly awful—she grew livid, and her lips twitched convulsively.

“Living—living!” she gasped.

“Living!” repeated Guldmar, sternly. “Vile hag! Your purpose was frustrated! Your crime destroyed her beauty and shortened her days—but she lived—lived for ten sweet, bitter years, hidden away from all eyes save mine—mine that never grew tired of looking in her patient, heavenly face! Ten years I held her as one holds a jewel—and, when she died, her death was but a falling asleep in these fond arms—”

Lovisa raised herself with a sharp cry, and wrung her hands together.

“Ten years—ten years!” she moaned. “I thought her dead—and she lived on—beloved and loving all the while. Oh, God, God! why hast Thou made a mockery of Thy servant!” She rocked herself to and fro—then looked up with an evil smile. “Nay, but she *suffered*! That was best. It is worse to suffer than to die. Thank God, she *suffered*!”

“Ay, she *suffered*!” said Guldmar, fiercely, scarce able to restrain himself from seizing upon the miserable old woman and shaking the sinking life out of her—“and had I but guessed who caused her sufferings, by the sword of Odin, I would have—”

Ulrika laid her hand on his suddenly upraised arm.

“Darkness—darkness!” muttered Lovisa, hoarsely—“and the white, white faces of dead things! There—there they lie!—all still, at the foot of the black chasm—their mouths move without sound—what—what are they saying? I cannot hear—ask them to speak louder—louder! Ah!” and she uttered a terrified scream that made the rafters ring. “They move!—they stretch out their hands—cold, cold hands!—they are drawing me down to them—down—down—to that darkness! Hold me—hold me! don't let me

go to them—Lord, Lord be merciful to me—let me live—live—” Suddenly she drew back in deadly horror, gesticulating with her tremulous lean hands as though to shut away the sight of some loathsome thing unveiled to her view. “Who is it”—she asked in an awful, shuddering whisper—“who is it that says there is no hell? *I see it!*” Still retreating backward, backward—the clammy dews of death darkening her affrighted countenance—she turned her glazing eyes for the last time on Guldmar. Her lips twitched into a smile of dreadful mockery. “May—thy gods—reward thee—Olaf Guldmar—even—as mine—are—rewarding—*me!*”

And with these words, her head dropped heavily on her breast. Ulrika laid her back on her pillow, a corpse. The stern, cruel smile froze slowly on her dead features—gradually she became, as it were, a sort of ancient cenotaph, carved to resemble old age combined with unrepenting evil—the straggling white hair that rested on her wrinkled forehead looking merely like snow fallen on sculptured stone.

“Good Lord, have mercy on her soul!” murmured Ulrika, piously, as she closed the upward staring eyes and crossed the withered hands.

“Good Devil, claim thine own!” said Guldmar, with proudly lifted arm and quivering, disdainful lips. “Thou foolish woman! Thinkest thou thy Lord makes place for murderers in His heaven! If so, 'tis well I am not bound there! Only the just can tread the pathway to Valhalla—'tis a better creed!”

Ulrika looked at his superb, erect figure and lofty head, and a strange, anxious expression flitted across her dull countenance.

“Nay, *bonde*, we do not believe that the Lord accepteth murderers, without they repent themselves of their backslidings—but if with penitence they turn to Him, even at the eleventh hour, happily they may be numbered among the elect.”

Guldmar's eyes flashed. “I know not thy creed, woman, nor care to learn it! But, all the same, thou art deceived in thy vain imaginings. The Eternal Justice cannot err—call that Justice Christ or Odin as thou wilt. I tell you, the soul of the innocent bird that perishes in the drifting snow, is near and dear to its Creator—but the tainted soul that had yonder vile body for its tenement was but a flame of the Evil One, and, accursed from the beginning, it must return to him from whom it came. A heaven for such as she? Nay—rather the lowest circle of the furthest and fiercest everlasting fires—and thither do I commend her! Farewell!”

Rapidly muffling himself up in his wraps he strode out of the house. He sprung into his sledge, throwing a generous gratuity to the small Laplander who had taken charge of it, and who now ventured to inquire:

“Has the good Lovisa left us?”

Guldmar burst into a hard laugh. "Good! By my soul! The folks of Talvig take up murderers for saints, and criminals for guides! 'Tis a wild world! Yes—she has gone—where all such blessed ones go—to—heaven!" He shook his clinched fist in the air—then hastily gathering up the reins, prepared to start.

The Lapp, after the manner of his race, was easily frightened, and cowered back, terrified at the *bonde's* menacing gesture and fierce tone—but quickly bethinking himself of the liberal fee he clutched in his palm, he volunteered a warning to this kingly old man with the streaming white hair and beard, and the keen eyes that were already fixed on the dark sweep of the rough, uneven road winding toward the Alten Fjord.

"There is a storm coming, Jarl Guldmar!" he stammered.

Guldmar turned his head. "Why call me *Jarl*?" he demanded, half angrily. "'Tis a name I wear not."

He touched the reindeer lightly with his long whip—the sensitive beasts started and sprang forward.

Once more the Lapp exclaimed, with increased excitement and uncouth gestures:

"Storm is coming!—wide—dark—deep! See how the sky stoops with the hidden snow!"

He pointed to the north, and there, low on the horizon, was a lurid red gleam like a smoldering fire, while just above it a greenish blackness of cloud hung heavy and motionless. Toward the central part of the heavens two or three stars shone with frosty brightness, and through a few fleecy ribbons of grayish mist glimmered the uncertain promise of a faint moon.

Guldmar smiled slightly. "Storm coming?" he answered, almost gayly. "That is well! Storm and I are old friends, my lad! Good-night!"

Once more he touched his horned steeds, and with a jingle-jangle of musical bells and a scudding, slippery hissing across the hard snow, the sledge sped off with fairy-like rapidity, and in a few moments its one little guiding lantern disappeared in the darkness like a suddenly extinguished candle.

The Lapp stood pondering and gazing after it with the *bonde's* money in his palm, till the cold began to penetrate even his thick skin-clothing and his fat little body, well anointed with whale-oil though it was—and becoming speedily conscious of this, he scampered with extraordinary agility, considering the dimensions of his snow-shoes, into the hut where he had his dwelling, relating to all who chose to hear, the news of old Lovisa Elsland's death, and the accounts of his brief interview with the dreaded but generous pagan.

Meanwhile the wind rose to a tearing, thunderous gale, and the night, already so dark, darkened yet more visibly. Olaf Guldmar, driving swiftly homeward, caught the first furious gust of the

storm that came rushing onward from the North Cape, and as it swooped sideways against his light sledge, he was nearly hurled from his seat by the sudden violence of the shock. He settled himself more firmly, encouraging with a cheery word the startled reindeer, who stopped short—stretching out their necks and sniffing the air, their hairy sides heaving with the strain of trotting against the blast, and the smoke of their breath streaming upward in the frosty air like white vapor. The way lay now through a narrow defile bordered with tall pines—and as the terrified animals, recovering, shook the tinkling bells on their harness, and once more resumed their journey, the road was comparatively sheltered, and the wind seemed to sink as suddenly as it rose. There was a hush—an almost ominous silence.

The sledge glided more slowly between the even lines of upright giant trees, crowned with icicles and draped in snow. The *bonde* involuntarily loosened the reins of his elfin steeds, and again returned to those painful and solemn musings, from which the stinging blow of the tempest had for a moment roused him. The proud heart of the old man ached bitterly. What! All these years had passed, and he, the descendant of a hundred Vikings, had been cheated of justice! He had seen his wife—the treasured darling of his days, suffering—dying, inch by inch, year by year, with all her radiant beauty withered—and he had never known her destroyer! Her fall from the edge of the chasm had been deemed by them both an accident, and yet—this wretched Lovisa Elsland—mad with misplaced, disappointed passion, jealousy, and revenge—had lived on to the extreme of life, triumphant and unsuspected.

"Rose of my heart!" he whispered, tenderly apostrophizing the memory of his wife—that lost jewel of love, whose fair body lay enshrined in the king's tomb by the fjord, "wrongfully done to death as thou wert, and brief time as we had for loving; in spite of thy differing creed, I feel that I shall meet thee soon! Yes—in the world beyond the stars, they will bring thee to me in Valhalla; wheresoever thou art, thou wilt not refuse to come! The gods themselves cannot unfasten the ties of love between us!"

As he half thought, half uttered these words, the reindeer again stopped abruptly, rearing their antlered heads and panting heavily. Hark! what was that? A clear, far-reaching note of music seemingly awakened from the waters of the fjord and rising upward, upward, with bell-like distinctness! Guldmar leaned from his motionless sledge and listened in awe—it was the same sound he had before heard as he stood by Lovisa Elsland's death-bed—and was in truth nothing but a strong current of wind blowing through the arched and honeycombed rocks by the sea, toward the higher land—creating the same effect as though one should breathe forcibly through a pipelike instrument of dried and hollow reeds—and being rendered more resonant by the intense cold, it bore a striking

similarity to the full blast of a war-trumpet. For the worshiper of Odin it had a significant and supernatural meaning—and drawing the knife from his girdle and kissing the hilt, "If Death is near me," he said, in a loud voice, "I bid it welcome! The gods know that I am ready!"

He waited as though expecting some answer—but there was a brief, absolute silence. Then, with a wild shriek and riotous uproar, the circling tempest—before uncertain and vacillating in its wrath—pounced, eagle-like, downward and grasped the mountains in its talons—the strong pines rocked backward and forward as though bent by herculean hands, crashing their frosted branches madly together: the massive clouds in the sky opened and let fall their burden of snow. Down came the large fleecy flakes, twisting dizzily round and round in a white waltz to the whirl of the wind—faster—faster—heavier and thicker, till there seemed no clear space in the air. Guldmar urged on the reindeer, more anxious for their safety than his own. The poor beasts were fatigued, and the blinding snow confused them, but they struggled on patiently, encouraged by their master's voice and the consciousness that they were nearing home. The storm increased in fury, and a fierce gust of frozen sleet struck the sledge like a strong hammer-stroke, as it advanced through the rapidly deepening snow-drifts—its guiding lantern was extinguished. Guldmar did not stop to relight it—he knew he was approaching his farm, and he trusted to the instinct and sagacity of his steeds.

There was indeed but a short distance to go—the narrow wooden defile opened out on two roads, one leading direct to Bosekop—the other, steep and tortuous, winding down to the shore of the fjord—this latter passed the *bonde's* gate. Once out of the shadow of the pines, the way would be more distinctly seen—the very reindeer seemed to be conscious of this, for they trotted more steadily, shaking their bells in even and rhythmical measure. As they neared the end of the long dark vista, a sudden bright-blue glare quivered and sprung wave-like across the snow—a fantastic storm-aurora that flashed and played among the feathery falling flakes of white till they looked like knots and clusters of sparkling jewels. The extreme point of the close defile was reached at last, and here the landscape opened up wide, rocky and desolate—a weird picture—with the heavy clouds above repeatedly stabbed through and through by the needle-pointed beams of the aurora borealis and the blank whiteness of the ground below. Just as the heads of the reindeer were turned into the homeward road, half of the aurora suddenly faded, leaving the other half still beating out its azure brilliance against the horizon. At the same instant, with abrupt swiftness, a dark shadow—so dark as to seem almost palpable—descended and fell directly in front of the advancing sledge—a sort of mist that appeared to block the way.

Guldmar leaned forward and gazed with eager, straining eyes into that drooping gloom—a shadow?—a mere vapor, with the Northern Lights glimmering through its murky folds? Ah, no—no! For him it was something very different—a heavenly phantasm, beautiful and grand, with solemn meaning! He saw a maiden, majestically tall, of earnest visage and imperial mien—her long, black hair streamed loose upon the wind—in one hand she held a shining shield, in the other a lifted spear! On her white brow rested a glittering helmet—her bosom heaved beneath a corslet of pale gold—she fixed her divine, dark eyes full upon his face and smiled! With a cry of wonder and ecstasy the old man fell back in his sledge—the reins dropped from his hands—"The Valkyrie! the Valkyrie!" he exclaimed.

A mere breathing space, and the shadow vanished—the aurora came out again in unbroken splendor, and the reindeer, feeling no restraint upon them, and terrified by something in the air, or the ceaseless glitter of the lights in the sky, started off precipitately at full gallop. The long reins trailed loosely over their backs, lashing their sides as they ran. Guldmar, recovering from his momentary awe and bewilderment, strove to seize them, but in vain. He called, he shouted—the frightened animals were utterly beyond control, and dashed madly down the steep road, swinging the sledge from side to side, and entangling themselves more and more with the loose reins, till, irritated beyond endurance, confused and blinded by the flash of the aurora and the dizzy whirl of the swiftly falling snow, they made straight for a steep bank—and before the *bonde* had time to realize the situation and jump from the sledge—crash! down they went with a discordant jangle of bells, their hoofs splitting a thin, sharp shelf of ice as they leaped forward—dragging the light vehicle after them, and twisting it over and over till it was a mere wreck—and throwing out its occupant head foremost against a jagged stone.

Then more scared than ever, they strove to clamber out of the gully into which they had recklessly sprung, but, foiled in these attempts, they kicked, plunged, and reared—trampling heedlessly over the human form lying helpless among the shattered fragments of the sledge—till tired out at last, they stood motionless, panting with terror. Their antlered heads cast fantastic patterns on the snow in the varying rose and azure radiance that rippled from the waving ribbons of the aurora—and close to them, his slowly-trickling life-blood staining the white ground—his hair and beard glittering in the light like frosted silver—his eyes fast closed as though he slept—lay Olaf Guldmar unconscious—dying. The spear of the Valkyrie had fallen!