

CHAPTER II.

Bury me not when I am dead—
Lay me not down in the dusty bed ;
I could not bear the life down there,
With the wet worms crawling about my hair!

ERIC MACKAY.

LONG hours passed, and the next day dawned, if the dim twilight that glimmered faintly across the Alten Fjord could be called a dawn. The snow-fall had ceased—the wind had sunk—there was a frost-bound, monotonous calm. The picturesque dwelling of the *bonde* was white in every part, and fringed with long icicles—icicles dropped from its sheltering porch and gabled windows—the deserted dove-cot on the roof was a miniature ice-palace, curiously festooned with thin threads and crested pinnacles of frozen snow. Within the house there was silence—the silence of approaching desolation. In the room where Thelma used to sit and spin, a blazing fire of pine sparkled on the walls, casting ruddy outward flashes through the frost-covered lattice-windows—and here, toward the obscure noon, Olaf Guldmar awoke from his long trance of insensibility. He found himself at home, stretched on his own bed, and looked about him vacantly. In the earnest and watchful countenance that bent above his pillow, he slowly recognized his friend, companion, and servant, Valdemar Svensen, and though returning consciousness brought with it throbs of agonizing pain, he strove to smile, and feebly stretched out his hand. Valdemar grasped it—kissed it—and in spite of his efforts to restrain his emotion, a sigh, that was almost a groan, escaped him. The *bonde* smiled again—then lay quiet for a few moments as though endeavoring to collect his thoughts. Presently he spoke—his voice was faint yet distinct.

“What has happened, Valdemar?” he asked. “How is it that strength has departed from me?”

Svensen dropped on his knees by the bedside. “An accident, my Lord Olaf,” he began, falteringly.

Guldmar’s eyes suddenly lightened. “Ah, I remember!” he said. “The rush down the valley—I remember all!” He paused, then added gently: “And so the end has come, Valdemar?”

Svensen uttered a passionate exclamation of distress.

“Let not my lord say so!” he murmured, appealingly, with the air of a subject entreating favor from a king. “Or, if it must be, let me also travel with thee wherever thou goest!”

Olaf Guldmar’s gaze rested on him with a musing tenderness.

“’Tis a far journey,” he said, simply. “And thou art not summoned.” He raised his arm to test its force—for one second it was uplifted—then it fell powerless at his side. “I am conquered!” he went on with a cheerful air. “The fight is over, Valdemar! Surely I have had a long battle, and the time for rest

and reward is welcome.” He was silent for a little, then continued: “Tell me—how—where didst thou find me? It seems I had a dream, strange and glorious—then came a rushing sound of wheels and clanging bells—and after that, a long, deep silence.”

Speaking in low tones, Valdemar briefly related the events of the past night. How he had heard the reindeer’s gallop down the road, and the quick jangling of the bells on their harness, and had concluded that the *bonde* was returning home at extraordinary speed—how these sounds had suddenly and unaccountably ceased—how, after waiting for some time, and hearing nothing more he had become greatly alarmed, and, taking a pine-torch, had gone out to see what had occurred—how he had found the reindeer standing by the broken sledge in the gully, and how, after some search, he had finally discovered his master, lying half covered by the snow, and grievously injured. How he had lifted him and carried him into the house—

“By my soul!” interrupted the *bonde*, cheerfully, “thou must have found me no light weight, Valdemar! See what a good thing it is to be a man—with iron muscles, and strong limbs, and hardy nerve! By the Hammer of Thor! the glorious gift of strong manhood is never half appreciated! As for me—I am a man no longer!”

He sighed a little, and, passing his sinewy hand across his brow, lay back exhausted. He was racked by bodily torture, but—unflinching old hero as he was—gave no sign of the agonizing pain he suffered. Valdemar Svensen had risen from his knees, and now stood gazing at him with yearning, miserable eyes, his brown, weather-beaten visage heavily marked with lines of grief and despair. He knew that he was utterly powerless—that nothing could save the noble life that was ebbing slowly away before him. His long and varied experience as a sailor, pilot, and traveler in many countries had given him some useful knowledge of medicine and surgery, and if anything was possible to be done, he could do it. But in this case no medical skill would have been availing—the old man’s ribs were crushed in and his spine injured—his death was a question of but a few hours at the utmost, if so long.

“Olaf the King!” muttered the *bonde* presently. “True! They make no mistakes yonder—they know each warrior by name and rank—’tis only in this world we are subject to error. This world! By the gods!—’tis but a puff of thistle-down, or a light mist floating from the sunset to the sea!”

He made a vigorous attempt to raise himself from his pillow—though the excruciating anguish caused by his movement made him wince a little and grow paler.

“Wine, Valdemar! Fill the horn cup to the brim and bring it to me—I must have strength to speak—before I depart—on the last great journey.”

Obediently and in haste, Svensen filled the cup he asked for with old *Lacrima Christi*, of which there was always a supply in this far northern abode, and gave it to him, watching him with a sort of superstitious reverence as he drained off its contents and returned it empty.

"Ah! That warms this freezing blood of mine," he said, the luster flashing back into his eyes. "Twill find fresh force to flow a brief while longer. Valdemar—I have little time to spend with thee—I feel death *here*"—and he slightly touched his chest—"cold—cold and heavy. 'Tis nothing—a passing, chilly touch that sweeps away the world! But the warmth of a new, strong life awaits me—a life of never-ending triumph! The doors of Valhalla stand wide open—I heard the trumpet-call last night—I saw the dark-haired Valkyrie! All is well—and my soul is full of rejoicing. Valdemar—there is but one thing now thou hast to do for me—the one great service thou hast sworn to render. *Fulfill thine oath!*"

Valdemar's brown cheek blanched—his lips quivered—he flung up his hands in wild appeal. The picturesque flow of his native speech gained new fervor and eloquence as he spoke.

"Not yet—not yet, my lord!" he cried, passionately. "Wait but a little—there is time. Think for one moment—think! Would it not be well for my lord to sleep the last sleep by the side of his beloved Thelma—the star of the dark mountain—the moonbeam of the night of his life? Would not peace inwrap him there as with a soft garment, and would not his rest be lulled by the placid murmur of the sea? For the days of old time and storm and victory are past—and the dead slumber as stones in the silent pathways—why would my lord depart in haste as though he were wrathful, from the land he has loved?—from the vassal who implores his pardon for pleading against a deed he dares not do!"

"Dares not—dares not!" cried the *bonde*, springing up half erect from his couch, in spite of pain, and looking like some enraged old lion with his tossed, streaming hair and glittering eyes. "Serf as thou art, and coward! Thinkest thou an oath such as thine is but a thread of hair, to be snapped at thy pleasure? Wilt thou brave the wrath of the gods and the teeth of the Wolf of Nastrond? As surely as the seven stars shine on the white brow of Thor, evil shall be upon thee if thou refuseth to perform the vow thou hast sworn! And shall a slave have strength to resist the dying curse of a king?"

The effect of his manner on Valdemar was instantaneous—the superstitious fears of that bronzed sea-wanderer were easily aroused. His head drooped—he stretched out his hands imploringly.

"Let not my lord curse his servant," he faltered. "It was but a tremor of the heart that caused my tongue to speak foolishly. I

am ready—I have sworn—the oath shall be kept to its utmost end!"

Olaf Guldmar's threatening countenance relaxed, and he fell back on his pillows.

"It is well!" he said, feebly, and somewhat indistinctly. "Thy want of will maddened me—I spoke and lived in times that are no more—days of battle—and—glory—that are gone—from men—forever. More wine, Valdemar!—I must keep a grip on this slippery life—and yet—I wander—wander into the—night——"

His voice ceased, and he sank into a swoon—a swoon that was like death. His breathing was scarcely perceptible, and Svensen, alarmed at his appearance, forced some drops of wine between his set lips, and chafed his cold hands with anxious solicitude. Slowly and very gradually he recovered consciousness and intelligence, and presently asked for a pencil and paper to write a few farewell words to his daughter. In the grief and bewilderment of the time, Valdemar entirely forgot to tell him that a letter from Thelma had arrived for him on the previous afternoon while he was away at Talvig—and was even now on the shelf above the chimney, awaiting perusal. Guldmar, ignorant of this, began to write slowly and with firmness, disregarding his rapidly sinking strength. Scarcely had he begun the letter, however, than he looked up meaningfully at Svensen, who stood waiting beside him.

"The time grows very short," he said, imperatively. "Prepare everything quickly—go! Fear not—I shall live to see thee return—and to bless thee for thy faithful service."

As he uttered these words he smiled; and with one wistful, yearning look at him, Valdemar obediently and instantly departed. He left the house, carrying with him a huge pile of dry brushwood, and with the air of a man strung up to prompt action, rapidly descended the sloping path, thick with hardened snow, that led downward to the fjord. On reaching the shore, he looked anxiously about him. There was nothing in sight but the distant, twinkling lights of Bosekop—the fjord itself was like a black pool—so still that even the faintest murmur of its rippling against the *bonde's* own private pier could be heard—the tide was full up.

Out of the reach of the encroaching waters, high and dry on the beach, was Guldmar's brig, the "*Valkyrie*," transformed by the fingers of the frost into a white ship, fantastically draped with threads of frozen snow and pendant icicles. She was placed on a descending plank, to which she was attached by a chain and rope pulley—so that at any time of the weather or tide she could be moved glidingly downward into deep water—and this was what Valdemar occupied himself in doing. It was a hard task. The chains were stiff with the frost—but, after some patient and arduous striving, they yielded to his efforts, and, with slow clank and much creaking complaint, the vessel slid reluctantly down

and plunged forward, afloat at last. Holding her ropes, Valdemar sprang to the extreme edge of the pier and fastened her there, and then getting on board, he untied and began to hoist the sails. This was a matter of the greatest difficulty, but it was gradually and successfully accomplished; and a strange sight the "Valkyrie" then presented, resting nearly motionless on the black fjord—her stretched and frosted canvas looking like sheeted pearl fringed with silver—her masts white with encrusted snow, and topped with pointed icicles. Leaving her for a moment, Valdemar quickly returned, carrying the pile of dry brushwood he had brought—he descended with this into the hold of the ship, and returned without it. Glancing once more nervously about him, he jumped from the deck to the pier—thence to the shore—and as he did so a long dark wave rolled up and broke at his feet. The capricious wind had suddenly arisen—and a moaning whisper coming from the adjacent hills gave warning of another storm.

Valdemar hurriedly retraced his steps back to the house—his work with the "Valkyrie" had occupied him more than an hour—the *bonde*, his friend and master, might have died during his absence! There was a cold sickness at his heart—his feet seemed heavy as lead, and scarcely able to carry him along quickly enough—to his credulous and visionary mind, the hovering shadow of death seemed everywhere—in every crackling twig he brushed against—in every sigh of the wakening gale that rustled among the bare pines. To his intense relief he found Guldmar lying calmly among his pillows—his eyes well open and clear, and an expression of perfect peace upon his features. He smiled as he saw his servant enter.

"All is in readiness?" he asked.

Valdemar bent his head in silent assent.

The *bonde*'s face lightened with extraordinary rapture.

"I thank thee, old friend!" he said in low but glad accents. "Thou knowest I could not be at peace in any other grave. I have suffered in thine absence—the sufferings of the body that, being yet strong in spite of age, is reluctant to take leave of life. But it is past! I am as one numbed with everlasting frost—and now I feel no pain. And my mind is like a bird that poises for a while over past and present ere soaring into the far future. There are things I must yet say to thee, Valdemar—give me thy close hearing, for my voice is weak."

Svensen drew closer, and stood in the humble attitude of one who waits a command from some supreme chief.

"This letter," went on the old man, giving him a folded paper, "is to the child of my heart, my Thelma. Send it to her—when—I am gone. It will not grieve her, I hope—for, as far as I could find words, I have expressed therein nothing but joy—the joy of a prisoner set free. Tell her, that with all the strength of my perish-

ing body and escaping soul, I blessed her!—her and her husband in whose arms she rests in safety." He raised his trembling hands solemnly. "The gods of my fathers and their attendant spirits have her young life in their glorious keeping!—the joy of love and purity and peace be on her innocent head forever!"

He paused—the wind wailed mournfully round the house and shook the lattice with a sort of stealthy clatter, like a forlorn wanderer striving to creep in to warmth and shelter.

"Here, Valdemar," continued the *bonde*, presently, in fainter accents, at the same time handing him another paper. "Here are some scrawled lines—they are plainly set forth and signed—which make thee master of this poor place and all that it contains."

A low, choked sob broke from Valdemar's broad breast—he covered his face with his hands.

"Of what avail?" he murmured, brokenly. "When my lord departs, I am alone and friendless!"

The *bonde* regarded him with kindly pity.

"Tears from thee, stout heart?" he inquired, with a sort of grave wonder. "Weep for life, Valdemar—not for death! Alone and friendless? Not while the gods are in heaven! Cheer thee—thou art strong and in vigorous prime of manhood—why should not bright days come for thee—" He broke off with a gasp—a sudden access of pain convulsed him and rendered his breathing difficult. By sheer force of will he mastered the cruel agony, though great drops of sweat stood on his brow when he at last found voice to continue:

"I thought all suffering was past," he said with a heroic smile. "This foolish flesh and blood of mine dies hard! But, as I was saying to thee, Valdemar—the farm is thine, and all it holds—save some few trifles I have set down to be given to my child. There is little worth in what I leave thee—the soil is hard and ungrateful—the harvest uncertain, and the cattle few. Even the reindeer—didst thou say they were injured by their fall last night?—I—I forget—"

"No harm has come to them," said Svensen hastily, seeing that the very effort of thinking was becoming too much for the old man. "They are safe and unhurt. Trouble not about these things!"

A strange, unearthly radiance transfigured Guldmar's visage.

"Trouble is departing swiftly from me," he murmured. "Trouble and I shall know each other no more!" His voice died away inarticulately, and he was silent a little space. Suddenly, and with a rush of vigor that seemed superhuman, he raised himself nearly erect, and pointed outward with a commanding gesture.

"Bear me hence!" he cried in ringing tones. "Hence to the mountains and the sea!"

With a sort of mechanical, swift obedience, Valdemar threw open the door—the wind rushed coldly into the house, bringing with it large feathery flakes of snow. A hand-sledge stood outside the porch—it was always there during the winter, being much used for visiting the outlying grounds of the farm—and to this Valdemar prepared to carry the *bonde* in his herculean arms. But, on being lifted from his couch, the old man, filled with strange, almost delirious force, declared himself able to stand—and, though suffering deadly anguish at every step, did in truth manage to reach and enter the sledge, strongly supported by Valdemar. There, however, he fainted—and his faithful servant, covering his insensible form with furs, thought he was dead. But there was now no time for hesitation—dead or living, Olaf Guldmar's will was law to his vassal—an oath had been made and must be kept. To propel the sledge down the fjord was an easy matter—how the rest of his duty was accomplished he never knew.

He was conscious of staggering blindly onward, weighted with a heavy, helpless burden—he felt the slippery pier beneath his feet, the driving snow and the icy wind on his face—but he was as one in a dream, realizing nothing plainly, till with a wild start he seemed to awake—and lo! he stood on the glassy deck of the "Valkyrie" with the body of his "King" stretched senseless before him! Had he brought him there? He could not remember what he had done during the past few mad minutes—the earth and sky whirled dizzily around him—he could grasp nothing tangible in thought or memory. But there, most certainly, Olaf Guldmar lay—his pallid face upturned, his hair and beard as white as the snow that clung to the masts of his vessel—his hand clinched on the fur garment that inwrapped him as with a robe of royalty.

Dropping on his knees beside him, Valdemar felt his heart—it still throbbed fitfully and feebly.

As he knelt and wept unrestrainedly, a soft change, a delicate transparency, swept over the dark bosom of the sky. Pale pink streaks glittered on the dusky horizon—darts of light began to climb upward into the clouds, and to plunge downward into the water—the radiance spread, and gradually formed into a broad band of deep crimson, which burned with a fixed and intense glow—topaz-like rays flickered and streamed about it, as though uncertain what fantastic shape they should take to best display their brilliancy. This tremulous hesitation of varying color did not last long; the whole jewel-like mass swept together, expanding and contracting with extraordinary swiftness for a few seconds—then, suddenly and clearly defined in the sky, a kingly crown blazed forth—a crown of perfect shape, its five points distinctly and separately outlined and flashing as with a million rubies and diamonds. The red luster warmly tinged the pale features of the dying man, and startled Valdemar, who sprung to his feet and gazed at that mystic

aureola with a cry of wonder. At the same moment Olaf Guldmar stirred, and began to speak drowsily without opening his eyes.

"Dawn on the sea!" he murmured. "The white waves gleam and sparkle beneath the prow, and the ship makes swift way through the waters! It is dawn in my heart—the dawn of love for thee and me, my Thelma—fear not! The rose of passion is a hardy flower that can bloom in the north as well as in the south, believe me! Thelma—Thelma!"

He suddenly opened his eyes, and realizing his surroundings, raised himself half erect.

"Set sail!" he cried, pointing with a majestic motion of his arm to the diadem glittering in the sky. "Why do we linger? The wind favors us, and the tide sweeps forward—forward! See how the lights beckon from the harbor!" He bent his brows and looked angrily at Svensen. "Do what thou hast to do!" and his tones were sharp and imperious. "I must press on!"

An expression of terror, pain, and pity passed over the sailor's countenance—for one instant he hesitated—the next, he descended into the hold of the vessel. He was absent for a very little space—but when he returned his eyes were wild as though he had been engaged in some dark and criminal deed. Olaf Guldmar was still gazing at the brilliancy in the heavens, which seemed to increase in size and luster as the wind rose higher. Svensen took his hand—it was icy cold, and damp with the dews of death.

"Let me go with thee!" he implored, in broken accents. "I fear nothing! Why should I not venture also on the last voyage?"

Guldmar made a faint but decided sign of rejection.

"The Viking sails alone to the grave of his fathers!" he said, with a serene and proud smile. "Alone—alone! Neither wife, nor child, nor vassal may have place with him in his ship—even so have the gods willed it. Farewell, Valdemar! Loosen the ropes and let me go!—thou servest me ill—hasten—hasten—I am weary of waiting—"

His head fell back—that mysterious shadow which darkens the face of the dying a moment before dissolution, was on him now.

Just then a strange, suffocating odor began to permeate the air—little wreaths of pale smoke made their slow way through the boards of the deck—and a fierce gust of wind, blowing seaward from the mountains, swayed the "Valkyrie" uneasily to and fro. Slowly, and with evident reluctance, Svensen commenced the work of detaching her from the pier—feeling instinctively all the while that his master's dying eyes were fixed upon him. When but one slender rope remained to be cast off, he knelt by the old man's side and whispered tremblingly that all was done. At the same moment a small, stealthy tongue of red flame curled upward through the deck from the hold, and Guldmar, observing this, smiled.

"I see thou hast redeemed thine oath," he said, gratefully press-

ing Svensen's hand. "'Tis the last act of thine allegiance—may the gods reward thy faithfulness! Peace be with thee!—we shall meet hereafter. Already the light shines from the Rainbow Bridge—there—there are the golden peaks of the hills and the stretch of the wide sea! Go, Valdemar!—delay no longer, for my soul is impatient—it burns, it struggles to be free! Go!—and—farewell!"

Stricken to the heart, and full of anguish—yet serf-like in his submission and resignation to the inevitable—Svensen kissed his master's hand for the last time. Then, with a sort of fierce sobbing groan, wrung from the very depths of his despairing grief, he turned resolutely away, and sprung off the vessel. Standing at the extreme edge of the pier, he let slip the last rope that bound her—her sails filled and bulged outward—her cordage creaked, she shuddered on the water—lurched a little—then paused.

In that brief moment a loud triumphant cry rang through the air. Olaf Guldmar leaped upright on the deck as though lifted by some invisible hand, and confronted his terrified servant, who gazed at him in fascinated amazement and awe. His white hair gleamed like spun silver—his face was transfigured, and wore a strange, rapt look of pale yet splendid majesty—the dark furs that clung about him trailed in regal folds to his feet.

"Hark!" he cried, and his voice vibrated with deep and mellow clearness. "Hark to the thunder of the galloping hoofs!—see—see the glitter of the shield and spear! She comes—ah! Thelma! Thelma!" He raised his arms as though in ecstasy. "Glory!—joy!—victory!"

And, like a noble tree struck down by lightning, he fell—dead! Even as he fell, the "Valkyrie" plunged forward, driven forcibly by a swooping gust of wind, and scudded out of the fjord like a wild bird flying before a tempest—and, while she thus fled, a sheet of flame burst through her sides and blazed upward, mingling a lurid, smoky glow with the clear crimson radiance of the still brilliant and crown-like aurora. Following the current, she made swift way across the dark water in the direction of the island of Seiland, and presently became a wondrous ship of fire! Fire flashed from her masts—fire folded up her spars and sails in a devouring embrace—fire that leaped and played and sent forth a million showering sparks hissing into the waves beneath.

With beating heart and straining eyes, Valdemar Svensen crouched on the pier-head, watching, in mute agony, the burning vessel. He had fulfilled his oath!—that strange vow that had so sternly bound him—a vow that was the outcome of his peculiar traditions and a pagan creed.

Long ago, in the days of his youth—full of enthusiasm for the worship of Odin and the past splendors of the race of the great Norse warriors—he had chosen to recognize in Olaf Guldmar a

true descendant of kings, who was by blood and birth, though not in power, himself a king—and tracing his legendary history back to old and half-forgotten sources, he had proved, satisfactorily, to his own mind, that he, Svensen, must lawfully, and according to old feudal system, be this king's serf or vassal. And, growing more and more convinced of this in his dreamy and imaginative mind—he had sworn a sort of mystic friendship and allegiance, which Guldmar had accepted, imposing on him, however, only one absolute command. This was that he should be given the "crimson shroud" and sea-tomb of his warlike ancestors—for the idea that his body might be touched by strange hands, shut in a close coffin, and laid in the earth to molder away to wormy corruption, had been the one fantastic dread of the sturdy old pagan's life. And he had taken advantage of Svensen's devotion and obedience to impress on him the paramount importance of his solitary behest.

"Let no hypocritical prayers be chanted over my dumb corpse," he had said. "My blood would ooze from me at every pore were I touched by the fingers of a Lutheran! Save this goodly body that has served me so well from the inferior dust—let the bright fire wither it, and the glad sea drown it—and my soul, beholding its end afar off, shall rejoice and be satisfied. Swear by the wrath and thunder of the gods!—swear by the unfinching Hammer of Thor—swear by the gates of Valhalla, and in the name of Odin!—and having sworn, the curse of all these be upon thee if thou fail to keep thy vow!"

And Valdemar had sworn. Now that the oath was kept—now that his promised obedience had been carried out to the extremest letter, he was as one stupefied. Shivering, yet regardless of the snow that began to fall thickly, he kept his post, staring, staring in drear fascination across the fjord, where the "Valkyrie" drifted, now a mass of flame blown fiercely by the wind, and gleaming red through the flaky snowstorm.

The aurora borealis faded by gradual degrees, and the blazing ship was more than ever distinctly visible. She was seen from the shore of Bosekop by a group of the inhabitants, who, rubbing their dull eyes, could not decide whether what they beheld was fire, or a new phase of the capricious, ever-changing Northern Lights—the rapidly descending snow rendering their vision bewildered and uncertain. Any way, they thought very little about it—they had had excitement of another kind in the arrival of Ulrika from Talvig, bringing accounts of the godly Lovisa Elsland's death.

Moreover, an English steam cargo-boat, bound for the North Cape, had, just an hour previously, touched at their harbor, to land a passenger—a mysterious woman closely veiled, who immediately on arrival had hired a sledge, and had bidden the driver to take her to the house of Olaf Guldmar, an eight miles' journey

through the drifted snow. All this was intensely interesting to the good, stupid, gossiping fisher-folk of Bosekop—so much so, indeed, that they scarcely paid any heed to the spectacle of the fiery ship swaying suggestively on the heaving water and drifting rapidly away—away toward the frosted peaks of Seiland.

Further and further she receded—the flames around her waving like banners in a battle—further and further still—till Valdemar Svensen, from his station on the pier, began to lose sight of her blazing timbers—and, starting from his reverie, he ran rapidly from the shore, up through the garden paths to the farm-house, in order to gain the summit, and from that point of vantage watch the last glimmering spark of the Viking's burial. As he reached the house, he stopped short, and uttered a wild exclamation. There—under the porch hung with sparkling icicles—stood Thelma!—Thelma—her face pale and weary, yet smiling faintly—Thelma with the glint of her wondrous gold hair escaping from under her hat and glittering on the folds of her dark mantle.

"I have come home, Valdemar!" said the sweet, rich, penetrating voice. "Where is my father?"

As a man distraught, or in some dreadful dream, Valdemar approached her—the strangeness of his look and manner filled her with sudden fear—he caught her hand and pointed to the dark fjord—to the spot where gleamed a lurid, waving wreath of flames.

"Froken Thelma—he is *there!*" he gasped in choked, hoarse tones. "*There*—where the gods have called him!"

With a faint shriek of terror, Thelma's blue eyes turned toward the shadowy water—as she looked, a long up-twisting snake of fire appeared to leap from the perishing "Valkyrie"—a snake that twined its glittering coils rapidly round and round on the wind, and as rapidly sunk—down—down—to one glimmering spark which glowed redly like a floating lamp for a brief space and was then quenched forever! The ship had vanished! Thelma needed no explanation; she knew her father's creed—she understood all. Breaking loose from Valdemar's grasp, she rushed a few steps forward with arms outstretched in the bitter, snowy air.

"Father! father!" she cried aloud and sobbingly, "wait for me!—it is I—Thelma!—I am coming—Father!"

The white world around her grew black—and shuddering like a shot bird, she fell senseless.

Instantly Valdemar raised her from the ground, and holding her tenderly and reverently in his strong arms, carried her, as though she were a child, into the house. The clouds darkened—the snow-storm thickened—the mountain-peaks, stern giants, frowned through their sleety veils at the arctic desolation of the land below them—and over the charred and sunken corpse of the departed servant of Odin sounded the solemn *De Profundis* of the sea.

CHAPTER III.

"The body is the storm:
The soul the star beyond it, in the deep
Of Nature's calm. And, yonder, on the steep
The Sun of Faith, quiescent, round, and warm!"

LATE on that same night, the pious Ulrika was engaged in prayer. Prayer with her was a sort of fanatical wrestling of the body as well as of the soul. She was never contented unless by means of groans and contortions she could manage to work up by degrees into a condition of hysteria resembling a mild epileptic attack, in which state alone she considered herself worthy to approach the Deity. On this occasion she had some difficulty to attain the desired result—her soul, as she herself expressed it, was "dry"—and her thoughts wandered, though she pinched her neck and arms with the hard resoluteness of a sworn flagellant, and groaned: "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner!" with indefatigable earnestness. She was considerably startled in the midst of these energetic devotions by a sudden jangling of sledge-bells, and a loud knocking—a knocking which threatened to break down the door of the small and humble house she inhabited. Hastily donning the coarse gown and bodice she had recently taken off in order to administer chastisement to her own flesh more thoroughly, she unfastened her bolts and bars, and, lifting the latch, was confronted by Valdemar Svensen, who, nearly breathless with swift driving through the snow-storm, cried out in quick gasps:

"Come with me—come! She is dying!"

"God help the man!" exclaimed Ulrika startled. "*Who* is dying?"

"She—the Froken Thelma—Lady Errington—she is all alone up there," and he pointed distractedly in the direction from whence he had come. "I can get no one in Bosekop—the women are cowards all—all afraid to go near her," and he wrung his hands in passionate distress.

Ulrika pulled a thick shawl from the nail where it hung and wrapped it round her.

"I am ready," she said, and without more delay, stepped into the waiting sledge while Valdemar, with an exclamation of gratitude and relief, took his place beside her. "But how is it?" she asked, as the reindeer started off at full speed, "how is it that the *bonde's* daughter is again at the Alten Fjord?"

"I know not," answered Svensen, despairingly. "I would have given my life not to have told her of her father's death."

"Death!" cried Ulrika. "Olaf Guldmar *dead!* Impossible! Only last night I saw him in the pride of his strength—and thought