

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

I never had beheld so goodly a man. Lord, Lord! That he should be *dead!*

In a few words Svensen related all that had happened, with the exception of the fire-burial in the fjord.

But Ulrika immediately asked: "Is his body still in the house?"

Svensen looked at her darkly. "Hast thou never heard, Ulrika," he said, solemnly, "that the bodies of men who follow Olaf Guldmar's creed disappear as soon as the life departs from them? It is a mystery—strange and terrible! But this is true—my master's sailing-ship has gone, and his body with it—and I know not where!"

Ulrika surveyed him steadily with a slow, incredulous smile. After a pause, she said:

"Fidelity in a servant is good, Valdemar Svensen! I know you well—I also know that a pagan shrinks from Christian burial! Enough said—I will ask no more—but if Olaf Guldmar's ship has gone, and he with it, I warn you, the village will wonder."

"I cannot help it," said Svensen, with cold brevity. "I have spoken truth—he has gone! I saw him die—and then vanish. Believe it or not as you will, I care not!"

And he drove on in silence. Ulrika was silent too.

As they neared their destination, she began to think of Thelma the beautiful, proud girl whom she remembered best as standing on a little green-tufted hillock, with a cluster of pansies in her hand, and Sigurd—Sigurd clinging fondly to her white skirts, with a wealth of passionate devotion in his upturned, melancholy, blue eyes. Ulrika had seen her but once since then—and that was on the occasion when, at the threat of Lovisa Elslund, and the command of the Rev. Mr. Dyceworthy, she had given her Sir Philip Errington's card, with the false message written on it that had decoyed her for a time into the wily minister's power. She felt a thrill of shame as she remembered the part she had played in that cruel trick—and reverting once more to the memory of Sigurd, whose tragic end at the Fall of Njedegorze she had learned through Valdemar, she resolved to make amends now that she had the chance, and to do her best for Thelma in her suffering and trouble.

"For who knows," mused Ulrika, "whether it is not the Lord's hand that is extended toward me—and that in the ministering to the wants of her whom I wronged, and whom my son so greatly loved, I may not thereby cancel the past sin, and work out my own redemption!"

And her dull eyes brightened with hope, and her heart warmed—she began to feel almost humane and sympathetic—and was so eager to commence her office of nurse and consoler to Thelma that she jumped out of the sledge almost before it had stopped at the farm gate. Disregarding Valdemar's assistance, she clambered

sturdily over the drifted heaps of slippery snow that blocked the deserted pathways, and made for the house—Valdemar following her as soon as he had safely fastened up the sledge, which was not his own, he having in emergency borrowed it from a neighbor. As they approached, a sound came floating to meet them—a sound which made them pause and look at each other in surprise and anxiety. Some one was singing—a voice full and clear, though with a strange, uncertain quiver in it, rippled out in wild strains of minor melody on the snow-laden air. For one moment Ulrika listened doubtfully, and then without more delay ran hastily forward and entered the house. Thelma was there—sitting at the lattice window which she had thrown wide open to the icy blast—she had taken off her cloak and hat, and her hair, unbound, fell about her in a great, glittering tangle of gold—her hands were busy manipulating an imaginary spinning-wheel—her eyes were brilliant as jewels, but full of pain, terror, and pathos. She smiled a piteous smile as she became hazily conscious that there were others in the room—but she went on with her song—a mournful, Norwegian ditty—till a sudden break in her voice caused her to put her hand to her throat and look up perplexedly.

"That song pleases you?" she asked softly. "I am very glad! Has Sigurd come home? He wanders so much, poor boy! Father, dear, you must tell him how wrong it is not to love Philip. Every one loves Philip—and I—I love him too, but he must never know that." She paused and sighed. "That is my secret—the only one I have!" And she drooped her fair head forlornly.

Moved by intense pity, such as she had never felt in all her life before, Ulrika went up and tried to draw her gently from the window.

"Lord help us, I believe she is light-headed for want of food!" she thought.

Such indeed was the fact—Thelma had been several days on her journey from Hull, and during that time had eaten so little that her strength had entirely given way. The provisions on board the "Black Polly" were extremely limited, and consisted of nothing but dried fish, hard bread, and weak tea without milk or sugar—and in her condition of heath, her system had rebelled against this daily untempting bill of fare. Ulrika's simple but sustaining beverage seemed more than delicious to her palate—she drained it to the last drop, and, as she returned the cup, a faint color came back to her cheeks and lips.

"Thank you," she said, feebly. "You are very good to me!" And she slept. Ulrika watched her musingly and tenderly—wondering what secret trouble weighed on the girl's mind. When Valdemar Svensen presently looked in, she made him a warning sign—and, hushing his footsteps, he went away again. She followed him out into the kitchen, where he had deposited his load

of pine-wood, and began to talk to him in low tones. He listened—the expression of grief and fear deepening on his countenance as he heard.

“Will she die?” he asked, anxiously.

“Let us hope not,” returned Ulrika. “But there is no doubt she is very ill, and will be worse. What has brought her here, I wonder? Do you know?”

Valdemar shook his head.

“Where is her husband?” went on Ulrika. “He ought to be here. How could he have let her make such a journey at such a time! Why did he not come with her? There must be something wrong!”

Svensen looked, as he felt, completely perplexed and despairing. He could think of no reason for Thelma’s unexpected appearance at the Alten Fjord—he had forgotten all about the letter that had come from her to her father—the letter which was still in the house, unopened.

“Well, well! It is very strange!” Ulrika sighed, resignedly. “But it is the Lord’s will—and we must do our best for her, that’s all.” And she began to enumerate a list of things she wanted from Bosekop for her patient’s sustenance and comfort. “You must fetch all these,” she said, “as soon as the day is fairly advanced.” She glanced at the clock—it was just four in the morning. “And at the same time, you had better call at the doctor’s house.”

“He’s away,” interrupted Valdemar. “Gone to Christiania.”

“Very well,” said Ulrika, composedly. “Then we must do without him. Doctors are never much use, any way—may be the Lord will help me instead.”

And she returned to Thelma, who slept still, though her face was now feverishly flushed and her breathing hurried and irregular.

The hours of the new day—day, though seeming night—passed on, and it was verging toward ten o’clock when she awoke, raving deliriously. Her father, Sigurd, Philip, the events of her life in London, the fatigues of her journey, were all jumbled fantastically together in her brains—she talked and sung incessantly, and, like some wild bird suddenly caged, refused to be quieted. Ulrika was all alone with her—Valdemar having gone to execute his commissions in Bosekop—and she had enough to do to make her remain in bed. For she became suddenly possessed by a strong desire to go sailing on the fjord—and occasionally it took all Ulrika’s strength to hold and keep her from springing to the window, whose white, frosted panes seemed to have some fatal attraction for her wandering eyes.

She spoke of things strange and new to her attendant’s ears—frequently she pronounced the names of Violet Vere and Lady Winsleigh with an accent of horror—then she would talk of George

Lorimer and Pierre Duprez—and she would call for Britta often, sometimes endearingly—sometimes impatiently. The picture of her home in Warwickshire seemed to haunt her—she spoke of its great green trees, its roses, its smooth, sloping lawns—then she would begin to smile and sing again in such a weak, pitiful fashion that Ulrika—her stern nature utterly melted at the sight of such innocent helpless distraction and sorrow—could do nothing but fold the suffering creature in her arms, and rock her to and fro soothingly on her breast, the tears running down her cheeks the while.

And after long hours of bewilderment and anguish, Errington’s child, a boy, was born—dead. With a regretful heart, Ulrika laid out the tiny corpse—the withered blossom of a promised new delight, a miniature form so fair and perfect that it seemed sheer cruelty on the part of nature to deny it breath and motion. Thelma’s mind still wandered—she was hardly conscious of anything—and Ulrika was almost glad that this was so. Her anxiety was very great—she could not disguise from herself that Thelma’s life was in danger—and both she and Valdemar wrote to Sir Philip Errington, preparing him for the worst, and urging him to come at once—little aware that the very night the lifeless child was born, was the same on which he had started from Hull for Christiansund, after his enforced waiting for the required steamer. There was nothing more to be done now, thought Ulrika, piously, but to trust in the Lord and hope for the best. And Valdemar Svensen made with his own hands a tiny coffin for the body of the little dead boy who was to have brought such pride and satisfaction to his parents, and one day rowed it across the fjord to that secret cave where Thelma’s mother lay enshrined in stone. There he left it, feeling sure he had done well.

Ulrika asked him no questions—she was entirely absorbed in the duties that devolved upon her, and with an ungrudging devotion strange to see in her, watched and tended Thelma incessantly, scarcely allowing herself a minute’s space for rest or food. The idea that her present ministrations to save her soul in the sight of the Lord had grown upon her, and was now rooted firmly in her mind; she never gave way to fatigue or inattention—every moan, every restless movement of the suffering girl obtained her instant and tender solicitude, and when she prayed now, it was not for herself but for Thelma.

“Spare her, good Lord!” she would implore in the hyperbolical language she had drawn from her study of the Scriptures. “As the lily among thorns, so is she among the daughters! Cut her not off root and branch from the land of the living, for her countenance is comely, and as a bunch of myrrh which hath a powerful sweetness, even so must she surely be to the heart of her husband! Stretch forth Thy right hand, O, Lord, and scatter healing, for the gates of death shall not prevail against Thy power!”

Time passed on, and yet there was no news from Sir Philip. One night, sitting beside her exhausted patient, Ulrika fancied she saw a change on the wan face—a softer, more peaceful look than had been there for many days. Half in fear half in hope, she watched. Thelma seemed to sleep—but presently her large blue eyes opened with a calm yet wondering expression in their clear depths. She turned slightly on her pillows, and smiled faintly.

"Have I been ill?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear," returned Ulrika softly, overjoyed, yet afraid at the girl's returning intelligence. "Very ill. But you feel better now, don't you?"

Thelma sighed, and raising her little wasted hand, examined it curiously. Her wedding and betrothal rings were so loose on her finger that they would have fallen off had they been held downward. She seemed surprised at this, but made no remark. For some time she remained quiet—steadfastly gazing at Ulrika, and evidently trying to make out who she was. Presently she spoke again.

"Remember everything now," she said, slowly. "I am at home, at the Alten Fjord—and I know how I came—and also *why* I came." Her lips quivered. "And I shall see my father no more, for he has gone—and I am all—all alone in the world!" She paused—then added: "Do you think I am dying? If so, I am very glad!"

"Hush, my dear!" said Ulrika. "You mustn't talk in that way. Your husband is coming presently—" she broke off suddenly, startled at the look of utter despair in Thelma's eyes.

"You are wrong," she replied, wearily. "He will not come—he cannot! He does not want me any more!"

And two large tears rolled slowly down her pale cheeks. Ulrika wondered, but forbore to pursue the subject further, fearing to excite or distress her, and contented herself for the present with attending to her patient's bodily needs. She went to the fire and began to pour out some nourishing soup, which she always had there in readiness—and, while she was thus engaged, Thelma's brain cleared more and more—till with touching directness, and a new hope flushing her face, she asked, softly and beseechingly, for her child. "I forgot!" she said, simply and sweetly. "Of course I am not alone any more. Do give me my baby—I am much better—nearly well—and I should like to kiss it."

Ulrika stood mute, taken aback by this demand. She dared not tell her the truth—she feared its effect on the sensitive mind that had so lately regained its balance. But while she hesitated, Thelma instinctively guessed all she strove to hide.

"It is dead!" she cried. "Dead!—and I never knew!"

And, burying her golden head in her pillows, she broke into a passion of convulsive sobbing. Ulrika grew positively desperate at the sound—what *was* she to do? Everything seemed to go

against her—she was inclined to cry herself. She embraced the broken-hearted girl, and tried to soothe her, but in vain. The long delirium and subsequent weakness—combined with the secret trouble on her mind—had deprived poor Thelma of all resisting power, and she wept on and on in Ulrika's arms till nature was exhausted, and she could weep no longer. Then she lay motionless, with closed eyes, utterly drained in body and spirit, scarcely breathing, and, save for a shivering moan that now and then escaped her, she seemed almost insensible. Ulrika watched her with darkening, meditative brows—she listened to the rush of the storm-wind without. It was past eleven o'clock at night. She began to count on her fingers—it was the sixteenth day since the birth of the child—sixteen days exactly since she had written to Sir Philip Errington, informing him of his wife's danger—and the danger was not yet past. Thinking over all that had happened, and the apparent hopelessness of the case, she suddenly took a strange idea into her head. Retiring to a distant corner, she dropped on her knees.

"Oh, Lord God Almighty!" she said in a fierce whisper, "behold, I have been Thy servant until now! I have wrestled with Thee in prayer till I am past all patience! If Thou wilt not hear my petition, why callest Thou Thyself good? Is it good to crush the already fallen? Is it good to have no mercy on the sorrowful? Wilt Thou condemn the innocent without reason? If so, Thou art not the Holy One I imagined! Send forth Thy power *now*—now, while there is time! Rescue her that is lying under the shadow of death—for how has she offended Thee that she should die? Delay no longer, or how shall I put my trust in Thee? Send help speedily from Thine everlasting habitations—or, behold! I do forsake Thee—and my soul shall seek elsewhere for Eternal Justice!"

As she finished this extraordinary, half-threatening and entirely blasphemous petition, the boisterous gale roared wildly round the house, joining in chorus with the stormy dash of waves upon the coast—a chorus that seemed to Ulrika's ears like the sound of fiendish and derisive laughter.

She stood listening—a trifle scared—yet with a sort of fanatical defiance written on her face, and she waited in sullen patience evidently expecting an immediate answer to her outrageous prayer. She felt somewhat like a demagogue of the people, who boldly menaces an all-powerful sovereign, even while in dread of instant execution. There was a sharp patter of sleet on the window—she glanced nervously at Thelma, who, perfectly still on her couch, looked more like a white, recumbent statue than a living woman. The wind shook the doors, and whistled shrilly through the crevices—then, as though tired of its own wrath, surged away in hoarse murmurs over the tops of the creaking pines toward the fjord, and there was a short, impressive silence.

Ulrika still waited—almost holding her breath in expectation of some divine manifestation. The brief stillness grew unbearable—Hush! What was that? Jingle—jangle—jingle—jangle! Bells! Sledge-bells tinkling musically and merrily—and approaching swiftly, nearer—nearer! Now the sharp trotting of hoofs on the hard snow—then a sudden slackening of speed—the little metallic chimes rang slower and yet more slowly, till with a decisive and melodious clash they stopped!

Ulrika's heart beat thickly—her face flushed—she advanced to Thelma's bedside, hoping, fearing—she knew not what. There was a tread of firm, yet hurried, footsteps without—a murmur of subdued voices—a half-suppressed exclamation of surprise and relief from Valdemar—and then the door of the room was hastily thrown open, and a man's tall figure, draped in what seemed to be a garment of frozen snow-flakes, stood on the threshold. The noise startled Thelma—she opened her beautiful, tired, blue eyes. Ah! what a divine rapture—what a dazzling wonder and joy flashed into them, giving them back their old luster of sunlight sparkling on azure sea! She sprang up in her bed and stretched out her arms.

"Philip!" she cried, sobbingly. "Philip! oh, my darling! Try—try to love me again!—just a little!—before I die!"

As she spoke she was clasped to his breast—folded to his heart in that strong, jealous, passionate embrace with which we who love would fain shield our nearest and dearest from even the shadow of evil—his lips closed on hers—and in the sacred stillness that followed, Ulrika slipped from the room, leaving husband and wife alone together.

CHAPTER IV.

I have led her home, my love, my only friend;
There is none like her, none!
And never yet so warmly ran my blood
And sweetly on and on,
Calming itself to the long-wished-for end,
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

TENNYSON.

BRITTA was in the kitchen dragging off her snow-wet cloak and fur mufflers, and crying heartily all the while. The stalwart Svensen stood looking at her in perplexity, now and then uttering a word of vague sympathy and consolation, to which she paid not the slightest heed. The poor girl was tired out, and half numb with the piercing cold—the excitement, which had kept her up for days and days, had yielded to the nervous exhaustion which was its natural result—and she kept on weeping without exactly knowing why she wept. Throughout the long and fatiguing journey she had maintained unflinching energy and perseverance

—undaunted by storm, sleet, and darkness, she had driven steadily over long miles of trackless snow—her instinct had guided her by the shortest and quickest routes—she seemed to know every station and village on the way—she always managed to obtain relays of reindeer just when they were needed—in short, Errington would hardly have been able to reach the Alten Fjord without her.

He had never realized to its full extent her strong, indomitable, devoted character, till he saw her hour after hour seated beside him in the *pulkha*, her hands tightly gripping the reins of the horned animals, whose ways she understood and perfectly controlled—her bright, bird-like eyes fixed with watchful eagerness on the bewildering white landscape that opened out incessantly before her. Her common sense was never at fault—she forgot nothing—and with gentle but respectful firmness she would insist on Sir Philip's taking proper intervals of rest and refreshment at the different farms they passed on their road, though he, eager to press on, chafed and fretted at every little delay. They were welcomed all along their route with true Norse hospitality, though the good country-folk who entertained them could not refrain from astonishment at the idea of their having undertaken such a journey at such a season, and appeared to doubt the possibility of their reaching their destination at all. And now that they had reached it in safety, Britta's strength gave way. Valdemar Svensen had hastily blurted out the news of the *bonde's* death even while she and Sir Philip were alighting from their sledge—and in the same breath had told them of Thelma's dangerous illness. What wonder, then, that Britta sobbed hysterically, and refused to be comforted—what wonder that she turned upon Ulrika as that personage approached, in a burst of unreasoning anger.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she cried, "to think that the Froken should be so ill—almost dying! and have nobody but *you* to attend to her!"

This, with a vindictive toss of the brown curls. Ulrika winced at her words—she was hurt, but she answered, gently:

"I have done my best," she said with a sort of grave pathos. "I have been with her night and day; had she been a daughter of my own blood, I know not how I could have served her with more tenderness. And, surely, it has been a sore and anxious time with me also—for I, too, have learned to love her!"

Her set mouth quivered—and Britta, seeing her emotion, was ashamed of her first hasty speech. She made an act of contrition at once by putting her arms round Ulrika's neck and kissing her—a proceeding which so much astonished that devout servant of Luther that her dull eyes filled with tears.

"Forgive me!" said the impetuous little maiden. "I was very rude and very unkind! But if you love the Froken, you will understand how I feel—how I wish I could have helped to take care