KATHARINE FRENSHAM

A Novel

BEATRICE HARRADEN

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

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Title: Katharine Frensham
       A Novel

Author: Beatrice Harraden

Release Date: May 26, 2013 [EBook #42812]

Language: English

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The original text uses either 'aa' or 'ã' (a tilde) for 'å' (a ring); 'ø' is represented by 'ö', and 'ae' by 'æ'. All incidences of 'ã' (a tilde) have been edited to 'å' (a ring).

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UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

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KATHARINE FRENSHAM
A Novel

BEATRICE HARRADEN

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

"Midway the road of our life's term they met,
And one another knew without surprise;
Nor cared that beauty stood in mutual eyes;
Nor at their tardy meeting nursed regret.

To them it was revealed how they had found
The kindred nature and the needed mind,
The mate by long conspiracy designed;
The flower to plant in sanctuary ground."

—GEORGE MEREDITH.

NOTE.

My thanks are due to Herr Sigurd Hals (Christiania) for permission to use from his *Hals-Album* the Norwegian folk-songs: "Aagot's Mountain-song;" "Astri, my Astri;" "Home from the Saeter."

And to Herr Wilhelm Hansen (Copenhagen) for permission to use from his *Danmark's melodie bog* the Danish song, "Thou who hast sorrow in thy heart."

And to Herr Abraham Lundquist (Stockholm) for permission to use from his *Svenska Folkvisor* the Swedish song, "At daytime when I'm working."

BEATRICE HARRADEN.

HAMPSTEAD, *Oct., 1903*.

CONTENTS.

PART I. PAGE

IN ENGLAND 7

PART II.

IN NORWAY 131

PART III.

IN ENGLAND 347

PART I.
IN ENGLAND.

KATHARINE FRENSHAM.

CHAPTER I.

"Do you understand, Alan, my boy?" asked Clifford Thornton.

"No, father, I don't," the boy said in a low voice. "It seems all such a fuss about nothing. Why can't you and mother have it out like any other fellows, and then make it up and be friends? You can't think how easy it is."

"We have been doing that for fifteen years and more—all your lifetime," the man said.

"I never knew it was as bad as that," Alan said.

"We tried to spare you the full knowledge of it," the man answered gently. "But now that you are old enough to know, we are obliged to tell you that we are not, never have been, happy together, and that we do not wish to be together. We spoil each other's lives."

Alan was sitting on the sofa. He stirred a little, and then suddenly, without any warning, burst into tears. Although he admired his mother's personality and bearing, he had never been particularly attached to her; but with that conservative conventionalism characteristic of an English boy, he was mortified, and felt it to be a disgrace that there should be any serious disagreement between his parents.

Clifford Thornton looked at the boy whom he loved and whom he had wounded; and he recognised with a sharp pain of regret that Alan was still too young and too sensitive for the news which had been broken to him. Bitterly the

man reproached himself for his selfishness. And yet he had waited for this moment for fifteen long years—more than that; for he and his wife had discovered at the onset that they were out of sympathy, each having an *aura* hostile to the other. Then the child had come, and these two naturally antipathetic people had thought: "We shall draw nearer to each other because of the child."

But Nature is merciless in many of her ways, and mysterious; and perhaps her greatest and subtlest human mystery is the strife, conscious or unconscious, of one individuality with another individuality. And she gives no balm for it. On the contrary, she gives a sort of morbid remorse, wholly out of proportion to the quality and quantity of mistakes and failings born necessarily of unsuitable companionship.

Clifford Thornton bent over him and put his hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Alan," he said, almost imploringly. "Don't fret like that. We will talk about it another time. Come, pull yourself together. We will go for a ride, and you can try the new cob."

The boy sobbed on as though he had not heard.

"Alan," Clifford Thornton said.

The boy looked up, and stifled his last sob.

"I don't want to go riding," he said. "I want to go and be alone."

He rose from the sofa and dried his eyes. He did not seem ashamed of his tears; he offered no excuses for his sudden outburst of grief.

"I'm awfully upset, father," he said with trembling voice.

"I have done you an injury to-day," his father said, "and I can never forgive myself. I have taken away from you something which I can never give back—that splendid belief of childhood that everything is going on all right."

Alan did not seem to hear. He took his cap from the writing-table and turned towards the door. It was evident that he wanted to say something to his father, but that the words would not come. He opened the door slowly and passed out. Clifford Thornton watched him, and watched the door close, and then stood still a moment, waiting, longing, and listening. But when he realised that the boy had indeed gone, he slipped into his study chair and leaned back, his arms folded tightly together, and his thin face drawn into an expression of great pain. The thoughts which passed through his mind kept him chained there, as one paralysed. Not a muscle of his face moved. He might have been a dead man staring at nothing. At last, perhaps half an hour afterwards, the door opened, and Alan came back.

"Father," he said shyly. "It's all right now. Let us go riding, after all."

The strain on the man's face relaxed. Father and son clasped hands.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs Thornton, who had been making a tour in Scotland with her friend, Mrs Stanhope, returned to her home the next day after Clifford Thornton's interview with his boy. The Thorntons lived in Surrey, in a beautiful house standing with fifteen acres of untouched heather around it, not far from Farnham. It was called "Falun" after the place in Dalecarlia, Sweden, where Clifford Thornton's father had been educated at the celebrated School of Mines, since removed to Stockholm.

Mrs Thornton arrived at Farnham about five o'clock. Alan went to meet her at the station, and even during their drive home to "Falun," Mrs Thornton noticed that there was something unusually strained in the boy's manner. She herself was in a state of great mental excitement, having been urged by her friend, Mrs Stanhope, who had always taken an unsympathetic view of Clifford's character, to propose to him an immediate deed of separation.

Marianne Thornton was a beautiful, imperious woman, with an impossible temper and an impracticable temperament; she never had been, and never could have been controlled by any one. But this evening, something tugged at her heart when she saw that her boy, whom she loved in her turbulent way, was in trouble; and when they were alone in her boudoir, she questioned him in her abrupt fashion which so often jarred on her husband consciously and her son unconsciously.

"Father told me yesterday that you were not happy together," he said shyly, as he played with the spoon in his teacup. "It upset me rather. I am awfully sorry about it, mother."

He did not look at her when he spoke, and did not see the sudden flush on her handsome face. She herself had meant to tell Alan. It had never entered her head for one moment that Clifford, who, so she knew in her heart of hearts, had borne with her patiently, would have taken the initiative and opened the subject to the boy in her absence. She was stung beyond bearing.

"Happy!" she said excitedly. "Who could be happy with your father? So he has been speaking to you about me, has he? And what has he been daring to say against me?"

"He never said anything against you," the boy answered, in a low voice. "He only told me you were not happy together."

She arranged the cushions on the sofa angrily, and leaned amongst them angrily.

"Happy!" she said. "I should like to know who could be happy with your

father—a man of no heart, no emotions, selfish beyond words, and unkind beyond belief."

"Oh, mother, that's not true," the boy said, with an indignant outburst. "Father is always good and kind. I never once heard him say an unkind word to you or me. It's all your fault. It's your temper. That's what it is."

His championship of his father aroused all the anger and jealousy in her nature.

She got up from the sofa and turned to him.

"You are just like him," she cried passionately, "just like him. Make your lives together, and find your happiness in each other. I don't want either of you."

She hastened from the room, swept down the stairs, swept through the hall, through the study and flung the door of the laboratory violently open.

Clifford, who was a chemist, was distilling over a flame a substance which represented more than a month's work. Marianne's sudden entry made him jerk the bottom of the flask containing it against the ring of the retort-stand. The flask cracked, and in an instant the whole of the contents blazed off and disappeared.

She did not notice, and would not have cared if she had noticed.

"What have you been saying to the boy?" she asked, in her tempestuous manner.

Clifford moved round, looked at her, and leaned against the bench.

"I have told him that we are not happy, and that we must part," he answered.

Something in his manner, something in his face, in the tone of finality in his voice arrested her. She glanced at him, glanced at the obvious signs of his lost labour, and some words rose to her lips, but she did not speak them. She went towards the door, and there she paused and turned towards him. He was still leaning against the bench, and his whole bearing denoted that of a man who can deal no more with despairing conditions. She knew then that everything was over between them. She retired to her room, and was not seen any more that evening.

Father and son took their dinner in silence, and no reference was made to Mrs Thornton's absence. It was tacitly understood by them both that she was in one of her tempers, which were, alas! part and parcel of the "Falun" everyday life.

Clifford and the boy played a game of billiards, and then both father and son went to develop some photographs in the dark room, which adjoined the laboratory. They were not happy; but like two criminals, they felt a certain amount of easement in being together.

At last Alan went to bed, and his father shut himself up in his laboratory and tried to work out some structural formulæ in connection with certain experimental data he had obtained. But his mental serenity had been disturbed

by his wife's return, and he was disheartened by the loss of the result of his work. That was only one of the many times when Marianne had burst into the laboratory and spoilt his experiments, and he was annoyed with himself for not having remembered to turn the key and thus secure himself from an unwelcome intrusion. He struggled some time with conflicting thoughts, but eventually came into his study and drew his chair up to the fire; for it was a cold September night. He sat there staring at the fire, and his mind wandered back to his happy student days under Bayer in Munich, and Hofmann in Berlin, when everything seemed possible to him because his mind was free from harassment. He glanced at Hofmann's portrait, which was hanging over the mantelpiece, and he heard once more the man's genial voice, and felt the charm of his genial presence. A thrill of pleasure and enthusiasm passed through him. For three years he had studied with Hofmann, and had finally become his private assistant, only leaving him to take over the Professorship of Chemistry at Aberystwith College, a post which he held for two years. Then his father, a mining engineer, died, leaving him a considerable fortune; and he was thus able to devote himself entirely to research work, his subjects being the study of stereo-isomeric compounds, and syntheses amongst the vegetable alkaloids. It was during his last year at Berlin that he had met and married Marianne Dacre, the beautiful daughter of a widowed Englishwoman keeping an English boarding-house in the German capital. When his father died, they settled down with their little son at "Falun," and from that moment until this very evening, happiness had been a stranger to the home. Yet the man was made for happiness. He would have been glad enough to love and be loved. But he had, of his own free will, chosen badly, and he had to pay the penalty. And he paid it with all the chivalry and kindness which were part of his nature. But the moment had come when he realised that he had paid enough, and as he sat there, half-musing, half-dozing, he said:

"I have paid enough. I can and will pay no more."

And suddenly he fell asleep from sheer mental exhaustion, and he dreamed. He dreamed that he was telling his wife all his locked inmost thoughts of her. He had kept them controlled so long and so sternly, that now they came tumbling out with reckless abandonment.

"You have never known me for what I am," he said passionately. "You have spoiled my life, my spirit, and ruined my best talents. I tell you I had talents before you came and trampled on them. Listen to me. If ever a man has been spiritually murdered, it is I. But now the barrier of silence has broken down, and I dare to tell you what in my inmost heart I really think of you. I dare to tell you that I despise your paltry mind and petty temperament; that your atmosphere is an insult to me, and that I long and thirst and am starved to be free from the

pressure of your daily presence. You have been merciless to me with your uncontrolled rages, your insane jealousies of me, my work, my ambitions, and my friends. I can bear it all no longer. The day on which we go our own ways, will be the day of my re-birth. And that day shall be to-morrow—now—even now. No, no, don't begin to argue with me, Marianne. There is nothing you can say to me either about yourself or the boy that could alter my determination. We have delayed too long already, and the precious years are passing. Sixteen wasted years—oh, the hopeless folly of them, and leading to what? No, no, I'll listen to no more arguments—there is no sense in this continued penance. We must and shall part to-morrow; no, no—now—this moment—ah, at last, at last—freedom at last!"

He awoke and looked around his quiet study.

"Ah," he said, "it was a dream. I am glad, in spite of everything, that it was a dream. I am glad that I did not say those things to her in reality. The look of pain and astonishment on her face would have haunted me all my life."

He shuddered.

"It was horrible," he said. "Poor Marianne, poor Marianne! You must not know the truth which kills. Poor Marianne! We must pick up the bits to-morrow—somehow."

Then he turned down the lights, and went upstairs. His wife's door was open, and he heard her voice calling him.

"Clifford, Clifford!" she cried, as though in some great danger.

He hastened his steps, and found Marianne standing in the middle of the room, her hair dishevelled, her eyes transfixed, and her face bearing the same expression of pain and astonishment which he had seen in his dreams.

"Good God!" he cried. "What is it, Marianne?"

"Clifford," she sobbed, "I dreamed that you had been telling me you hated and despised me, that I was an insult to your life and talents, that I had ruined your life, murdered your spirit, and crushed out all the best in you. Tell me, tell me, it was only a dream. I know we have not been happy, but—but—it could not have been as bad as that. Tell me, it was only a dream—but, oh, Clifford, it was so vivid, so penetrating that I cannot believe it was a dream. I heard your voice—your real voice; tell me—tell me——"

"It was only a dream," he said excitedly, "nothing but a dream. You must not look like that. I cannot bear you to look like that. It is more than I can bear. You must forget about it, and we will begin all over again to-morrow. I never said those things to you—thank Heaven, I never said them to you—it was only a dream—your dream—and my dream."

He could have bitten his tongue out after he had said those last words.

"Your dream?" she cried, with a ring of despair in her voice.

"Marianne," he said, gathering himself, and all the best in himself, together for victory over his temperament and hers—"oh, Marianne, we are not to be held responsible for our dreams. You know how it is with our restless, wayward fancies: one little passing discord in real life becomes magnified and expanded into an immense orchestra of discordant strains in that dream-life over which we seem to have no control. Don't you understand—can't you understand?"

"You dreamed it," she said slowly, "and it was so vivid to you that it broke through all barriers and reached me in my dream. It must have been born of your inmost thoughts, bred up and strengthened through these long years of our misunderstandings, until it reached its full maturity. We should indeed each have gone a separate way long ago. But it is not too late even now."

"Not too late to find the key to each other even now," he said. "Let us try to do it. Where others have failed, let us make a triumph. It is not our hearts which are at war, Marianne: our hearts mean well to each other. It is our temperaments which cause all the strife."

"We can make no triumph," she answered. "I have ruined your life, murdered your spirit, crushed out the best in you."

"It was a dream," he cried passionately. "Let it go the way of all dreams."

She shook her head.

"We must part to-morrow," she said, "and to-morrow will be the day of your re-birth."

"You stab me with your words," he said, as he passed, with head bowed, to the door.

"And you stab me with your dreams," she replied.

"We are both very unhappy," he said, as he paused on the threshold.

"Yes," she said, "very unhappy."

And she closed her door.

He stood alone on the landing. There was not a sound to be heard within the house or without. It was a still September night, so that even the branches of the trees were not moved in music. The harvest moon shone in coldly. The world seemed lonely to that lonely man.

"What a failure I have made of everything," he said to himself—"even of my silence."

He longed for some kind word, for some arresting glance of sympathy; but life could yield nothing to him in his moment of need. He thought of his boy whom he loved with all his heart, and he remembered only that he had deliberately made the lad suffer. He forgot all the years of intimate companionship which they two had enjoyed together, all the secret

understanding so precious to both of them. These memories, which might have comforted him, and eloquently too, were silent; and because he was gentle and generous-hearted, he had to pay the uttermost price for the emotions which were the finest in his nature. He remembered only that he had wounded Marianne, hurt her to the quick, and that if he got his liberty—after fifteen years of bondage—he would be even as a released prisoner to whom the sweets of freedom had become distasteful.

He went mechanically down the stairs, let himself out of the hall-door, and stole round to the stables. Bully, the bull-terrier, knew his master's footstep, and, as a welcome, beat his tail against his kennel. Jinny, the brown mare, was asleep at the time; but she woke up and neighed softly when she heard her master's voice, and was eager enough to be saddled for a midnight ride. It was not the first time that she had been called upon to sacrifice her own slumbers to his restlessness. Many a time she and he had ridden out into the darkness and the tempest and the moonlight of the night.

When he came back again, it was nearly five o'clock. Worn out in body and spirit, he flung himself on his bed, fell asleep, and only awoke to the sound of some commotion in the house, and cries of "Father, father." He sprang up, opened the door, and found Alan outside.

"Father," he cried. "Mother——"

Clifford Thornton saw the look of alarm on his boy's face, and rushed to Marianne's room. The door stood open. Marianne was leaning back in the arm-chair—dead.

CHAPTER III.

There was, of course, an inquest, and then poor Marianne Thornton was laid to rest in the little Surrey churchyard five miles from "Falun." The verdict was death from sudden failure of the heart's action, due probably to some shock, the exact nature of which was unknown.

"She must have had some shock, some great fright," Dr Aldborough deposed. "The expression on her face was that of excessive alarm. It may have been a dream—I have met with three such curious instances in my experience. Moreover, it was known to us all that Mrs Thornton was suffering from valvular disease of the heart. She had only lately been consulting a new heart-specialist."

"It was a dream," Clifford Thornton stated, "and she called to me, and I found her with that same expression of alarm on her face, and I tried to calm her and failed. And feeling heavy of heart, I saddled my horse and went riding."

"And the nature of the dream?" he was asked.

He shook his head.

"I do not know," he said. "I only know it was a dream."

He had made up his mind to keep that secret, chiefly for Alan's sake. He felt that he had already injured the boy, and no word of his should now add to the heavy burden of hastened knowledge.

"If I began to speak of it," he said to himself, "I should go on to tell him that I had killed her—and in time he would believe it—even as I do."

That was the torturing thought which at once began to assail him, although he fought it with all the weapons of reason and common-sense. He fought it even at the side of the grave, his impenetrable face showing no sign of the mental torture which he was enduring unhelped by any one. But when they came back to "Falun" after the funeral, he put his hands on Alan's shoulders and said sorrowfully:

"Alan, I would give my right hand, and the sight of my eyes, and the strength of my brain, if only I could unsay what I said to you the other day about your mother."

"Oh, father," the boy answered, in a paroxysm of grief, "perhaps we did not love her enough."

He broke off there, and they did not speak together further, both being of painfully reserved natures; but each wrung the other's hand silently, in token of closer friendship, and throughout that sad day they did not leave each other's side. The doctor called in during the afternoon, and found them in the study sitting close together and trying to interest themselves in a new book on architecture, which was Alan's beloved subject, and for which he had undoubted talent. They looked so desolate and pathetic that Dr Aldborough, who had always been attracted to this reserved man and his son, was concerned for their welfare. He offered no un-timely word of comfort or cheer, but he said to them:

"Come out with me. It is a splendid afternoon. I have to drive over to Midhurst, and the air will do you both good. You will sleep better. And Alan shall handle the greys, whilst we smoke."

The boy brightened up at once.

"Let us go, father," he said, a little eagerly.

"You go," his father answered. "I think I shall stay here."

"Then I shall stay," Alan said. "I couldn't be without you."

"In that case we will both go," Professor Thornton answered, smiling; and so they went off, thankful really for the break in that long day.

When they came back that evening, they were a little more cheerful in spite of themselves, and Alan went to bed and slept, and Clifford wrote to his old Danish governess, Miss Knudsgaard, telling her of his wife's sudden death, and

asking her to come over. Then he sat thinking of his dead wife and of all the circumstances of their married life. He recalled to himself how bitterness of spirit and tenderness of intention had been ever at war within him. He had no sooner recovered from an attack of bitterness, than he was assailed by prolonged paroxysms of self-reproach, which tore him to shreds even more ruthlessly than his feelings of self-commiseration. He recalled all the petty strain and stress of trifling tragedies which had been steadily impairing his mental serenity. He hardened himself when he thought of that.

"This tragedy has happened," he said, "and through no fault of mine. I must not let it spoil the rest of my life. I am forty-three. What cannot a man still do and be at forty-three? I will battle with it until I conquer it. It shall not crush me. No, it shall not."

He rose from his chair with a grim determination in his manner.

"Do you hear what I say?" he said, as though to a vast audience. "It shall not crush me."

Then his eyes lighted on a box of his wife's letters and papers which had been found in her room. He opened the box and took out some of the papers. A few of them were receipted accounts. Several of them were letters evidently written on that last night, gummed down, and stamped ready for the post. One was to her intimate friend, Julia Stanhope, with whom she had been touring in Scotland: a woman whom he had always disliked, and who, so he thought, had always encouraged poor Marianne's displays of uncontrolled anger. He put the letters into the post-box. And here apparently was her journal. He did not know that she had kept a journal. He smiled sadly as he thought of all the stormy scenes it must surely record. He did not read it. He tore it up and threw the fragments in the fire, and watched them curl up and carry their secret away with them. But one page, the last page, had escaped the destruction, and fell at his feet. He picked it up and he saw these words:

"*September 20th*.—-Had another temper to-night. As usual, bitterly, bitterly sorry. If only I could tell him; but I can't, and I won't."

Those must have been her last written words. They touched the most tender chords in the man's highly-strung gentle nature. He forgot his own sufferings: his own outraged peace and harmony of spirit: his own ambitions and schemes marred by constant turmoil of mind: his own broad outlook on life stealthily fenced in, now in one direction and now another, by her compelling pettiness of temperament. All this he forgot. She had not understood him—but—had he ever understood her? Ah, that was it—that was the crux of the whole matter; and he remembered now that never once had she reproached him with that. Never once had she said to him:

"And do you think there has been nothing to understand in me? I may not be the marvellous person you suppose yourself to be. I may not have all the gifts you are supposed to have; but at least I am a human being, with my own necessities and crying demands, no less importunate with me than yours with you."

Never had she said that to him. But he said it to himself over and over again, and almost broke his heart in the repeating of it.

CHAPTER IV.

"And so you have come home at last, dear old Katharine," Ronald Frensham said to his sister as they both sat over the fire in the music-room of Ronald's house in Kensington, one evening in the middle of March. "It is good to see you again."

Katharine Frensham said nothing, but held out her hand, which her brother grasped silently. There was a harmony in the atmosphere, a silent song of friendship. The faces of both brother and sister wore that expression of quiet happiness always unmistakable when people of the right temperament are feeling how gracious a thing it is to be together once more. The music-room, too, delicately furnished, was restful to the eye; and there seemed to be an appropriate sympathy between the pictures on the walls, the books on the shelves, and the musical instruments, some of the latter lying about casually, and others carefully enshrined in a Chippendale cabinet. A small organ at the other end of the room gave a dignity to the surroundings peculiar entirely to the presence of that most compelling of all musical instruments. A little white Pomeranian dog was curled up in front of the fire, and added for the time to the effect of peacefulness. Of course one knew that directly the music began, he would get up, yell, refuse to be removed, and go as near as possible to the very source of his nerve-disturbance; but for the moment he was in a dog's Paradise—on the best rug in the room, near those he loved best, and therefore in tune with self and circumstance.

It was now nearly three years since Ronald had married, and Katharine had left England to travel about the world alone. She and her brother had always been close friends, and their companionship had ever been a joy to themselves and to those who knew them. Since childhood they had been called "the inseparables." They had fished together, climbed trees, fought, followed the otter hounds in their old Somersetshire home, stolen, ridden, and accomplished all their fun and wickedness in close partnership. And together they had loved their mother passionately. And when she died, she said to them, "Love each other

always—promise me, whatever comes—whatever befalls. Stand by each other." And boy and girl of fifteen and sixteen then, they said, "Always—always."

So the years passed. They grew up and made their home together alone. Ronald became head of the organ-building business left to him and Katharine by their father, and thus they were partners in business as well as in pleasure. And they were still called the inseparables. People said, "Ah, Katharine is somewhere about, for I see Ronald." Or they said, "Ronald cannot be far off, as Kath has arrived." There was a story that Ronald had said at a picnic, "Nothing more for me, thanks, and nothing more for my sister!"

But at last the inevitable happened: Ronald became engaged to an attractive girl, and Katharine had the bitter experience of becoming a secondary consideration in his life. And then people said, "What will Katharine do? How will she take it?"

She behaved splendidly, and bore herself in a manner worthy of a warm and generous nature.

"Ronald and Gwendolen shall have a joyous engagement-time," she said to herself. "I will keep all my jealous feelings locked up in an iron safe."

And they had it, unmarred by any sadness or jealousy on her part. Nevertheless she suffered; for she and Gwendolen had nothing in common. Katharine had the free spirit and the broad outlook. Gwendolen was essentially of the world worldly, belonging to that ever-increasing community known as "smart," with no outlook worth speaking of, but, for all that, delightfully engaging in her beauty and her bearing. In her metallic way, too, she was appreciative of Katharine's kindness, and she made a very real attempt to accept the sisterliness affectionately offered to her.

But they spoke a different language. That was the only criticism Katharine made of her, and then only to Willy Tonedale, her old friend and admirer.

"Well, my dear Kath," he had drawled out as he twirled his moustache, "all I can say is that I prefer your language. It is more intelligible. Perhaps it may be because I am supposed to have a slow brain. Anyway, you're behaving like a brick to them both, and Ronnie is a deuced old duffer for giving you up. I would not have given you up if you'd been my sister, my grandmother, or my great-grandmother, for the matter of that."

"Nonsense, Willy!" Katharine had answered laughingly. "Don't be ridiculous. It is right that Ronnie should marry. It all comes in the day's march; and I might have been the one to have given him up."

She said that to Ronald when for the last time he and she sat together by their fireside on the eve of his marriage. She comforted him when, in spite of his passionate adoration of and desire for Gwendolen, he felt torn by the thought

that he was entering on a new life and renouncing Kath irrevocably.

"Kath, dear old senior partner," he said, "I feel—terribly upset about you—now it comes to the point—I——"

He broke off, but there was no need to finish the sentence, for Katharine knew.

"It is all right, dear old chap," she answered. "And you see, we are friends for life. And I might have been the one to leave you. I nearly did three times!"

"Four times," he said quaintly. "You never own up to four times!"

And they both laughed. They had had many merry times over some of Katharine's passing love affairs.

"But at least you will live near us," Ronnie said.

She shook her head.

"I am going to travel," she answered, "I am going to the ends of the earth. You know I've always wanted to see the great vast countries of the great world. And this is my chance. You have some one to love you and look after you, and I can go forth. But I want you to promise me one thing. Don't give up your music. Don't give up your Wednesday evening quartette meetings. I should love to think that you had kept that pleasure out of our old life, and that Herr Edelhart, Monsieur Gervais, Signor Luigi, and yourself were continuing to fiddle together on Wednesday evenings. And when I come back I shall try to arrive on quartette-night."

That was three years ago, and now Katharine had returned from her wanderings and arrived at her brother's house on quartette-day. She left her things at the Langham, intending to take up her quarters there until she should have made up her mind how to shape her life. But Ronald seemed hurt, and so she consented to stay a few days in his beautiful home. Gwendolen was away, but she was coming back the next morning; and Ronald assured Katharine that his wife's welcome to the returned traveller would be as warm as his own. Meantime brother and sister, alone together, renewed the sweet old intimacy which had been so dear to them both. They talked of old times, old bits of fun, old difficulties, old bits of mischief, old quarrels, old reconciliations.

"Do you remember that day when I shook you?" Ronald said. "We had had a terrible upset over one of my love affairs, and I lost my temper, whilst you remained quite silent and stared into the fire. You were most irritating."

"And I claimed damages, three theatres and a new evening dress," Katharine said. "And Signor Luigi declared we ought both to be heartily ashamed of ourselves for quarrelling, and that the only way of effacing the disgrace was by giving *him* a new violoncello bow! I have always thought that was so funny."

"Well, he uses the bow to this day, and calls it his Queen," Ronald said. "How

glad they will all be to see you. They have no idea that you have come back. Every night after we have played, we have drunk your health, each of us taking it in turn to propose the toast.

'"To the illustrious Signorina.'

'"To the wunderbar Fräulein.'

'"To the gracieuse English Mees.'

'"To the senior partner.'"

The tears came into Katharine's eyes.

"I am so glad you have remembered me," she said.

He rose as he spoke, perhaps to hide his own eyes, and he began to get out the music.

"Do you know this is the last of our quartette-meetings?" he said. "Gwendolen does not like them. They seem to interfere with other arrangements. Every invitation that ever ought to be accepted, appears to be fixed for that evening in the week. But I'm awfully sorry."

Katharine was silent.

"I should have given them up long ago but that I promised you," he said. "I think they are a little out of Gwendolen's line, you know. And I want to please her. I always want passionately to please her. She is my life, my whole life."

"Then you are really happy, Ronnie," she said gently.

"Yes, yes," he said, his face lighting up, "of course I am. Only sometimes I am rather worried about money, Kath, and think we are spending too much. It seems to take such a frightful lot of money to keep up with other people—and, oh well, we can talk about it another time—but the quartette costs money, and I think I must let it go at last. It was different when I was unmarried."

"Let me stand the quartette, old fellow," Kath said. "I like four people to drink my health regularly once a week."

"No, no," he said, smiling at her. "You must keep your money for yourself."

And then he added:

"Where are you going to live, and what are you going to do?"

"I am going to live in a flat in Westminster; that is my idea," she answered. "When you have been away a long time from England, you yearn to be within sight of the dear old Thames, the Houses of Parliament, and the Abbey. I have often closed my eyes and seen Westminster in a vision."

"Do you never intend to marry one of the many men who want you, Kath?" he asked.

"No," answered Katharine. "You did not marry until you loved passionately, did you? I shall not marry until I love passionately. And as that may never happen to me, and the years are passing, I have made up my mind to go into the

business. The senior partner wants at last to be an active partner. I want to have something definite to do, Ronnie. I know you won't oppose me."

"Dear old girl," he said warmly, "you shall do as you like, and for as long as you like, or for as short. You shall receive the clients, help with the correspondence, design the organ cases, voice the reeds, any mortal thing you like."

"I am sick of travelling merely for travelling's sake," she went on. "If I had been a clever woman like Mary Kingsley, for instance, then I could have contributed something useful to the world as the results of my travels. But being what I am, there is no real zest in merely moving about aimlessly like any other globetrotter. No, I want something to do. I envy all women with a profession, Ronnie. When loneliness comes into their lives, they have something which has to be done, whether they are sad or gay. That is the salvation of men. And I believe it is going to be the salvation of women."

"Are you very lonely?" he said, turning to her impulsively.

"No, no," she said, gathering herself together. "But there have been times when——"

At that moment the door opened, and a sprightly little man with white hair leapt into the room. When he saw Katharine, he stood speechless at first and then advanced running.

"Signorina, the adorable and illustrious Signorina once more!" he cried. "Ah, what joy, what delight to see you here!"

"Signor Luigi," she exclaimed, "how glad I am to see you again!"

"Ah," he cried, as he shook both her hands time after time, and then lightly kissed them, "the world have changed places with Heaven. I have not forgot you one leetle minute. See here, my pocket-book, your gift, nearest my faithful heart. And the bow, 'my Queen,' here she is—under my faithful arm. Ah, she is a treasure. We chosed her well—you and 'brother' and I. Yes, that was a splendid idea of mine!"

"Yes, it was brilliant," Katharine said, laughing. "How often I have laughed over it. How often I have thought of you all. And you see I have kept my word, and come back on quartette-night."

"The last quartette-night," he said. "But never mind. It will be an adorable finishing-up. And we will play extra beautiful for the Signorina. I will make my violoncello sing superb. The others—they shall be nowhere!"

The door opened once more, and a stately-looking German came in carrying his violin case. He had bushy hair and a fierce moustache.

"Guten Abend, Signor," he said. "Guten Abend. It is sehr kalt to-night. Meine Finger——"

Then suddenly he saw Katharine, and Signor Luigi was only just in time to prevent the violin case from falling to the ground.

"Lieber Himmel!" he cried. "I do see my distinguished pupil."

"Distinguished for my ignorance and impatience, Herr Edelhart, wasn't it?" said Katharine, greeting him.

"And for wunderbar charm," added the German fervently. "Ah, I have had no one so distinguished for that. The others have had a little talent or none—generally none—and no charm. But Fräulein's wunderbar charm—it could not be described—only felt. Ah, and how himmlisch that you are come back. My violin shall sing her very best to-night. She shall inspire herself to welcome Fräulein. The others shall be nowhere! They——"

Then the door opened again, and a dark little man, obviously of French persuasion, came into the room looking rather dreamy and preoccupied; but when he saw Katharine he returned to real life, and his face broke out into a radiant smile.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried. "Mademoiselle have returned to us. Ah, *le climat* detestable of England have become a beautiful, French printemps. The fogs is gone. My dead hearts is alive. And Mademoiselle have made the miracle."

"You see that you have come back to faithful admirers, Kath," Ronald said, laughing.

"I see that I have come back to faithful flatterers," Katharine answered, as she stood in their midst laughing and shaking hands with them repeatedly. "But it is all delightful, and I feel years younger at being amongst my old friends. How many years have we known each other? Isn't it ten?"

"Ten years, five months," said Herr Edelhart, accurately.

"Onze, onze," said Monsieur Gervais.

"Always, always!" cried the Italian, waving his arms about in dismissal of time, and then dancing a sort of war-dance round the room.

"Ah, ha, we have not been so gay since the Signorina was cruel enough to leave us," he cried. "Tra, la, la, tra, la, la!"

"Look here, Luigi, we must manage to behave ourselves somehow," said Ronald, catching hold of the little Italian. "For there is a stranger coming to-night, and he will think we are all mad."

"A stranger," they cried, "and on our last night?"

"Oh, hang it all," said Ronald, laughing, "it can't be our last night."

"Bravo, bravissimo!" they cried.

And Herr Edelhart whispered to Katharine:

"Fräulein has come home, and 'brother' is coming back to his senses."

"Who is the stranger?" Katharine asked. "And how dare he intrude on us at

such a moment?"

"Poor fellow, he wouldn't willingly intrude on any one," Ronald answered. "But I asked him in myself. He was a neighbour of ours in Surrey during the summer. And I met him several times. He lost his wife under very tragic circumstances, and he is a sad man. We must not let our gaiety jar on him."

The door opened, and Professor Thornton was announced.

"Light of mine eyeballs," whispered Luigi, "he does not look gay, does he?"

"Mon Dieu!" whispered Gervais. "He belong to the country of fogs. He give me the sore-throats at once."

Katharine had risen to receive Clifford Thornton, and when he saw her he said gravely:

"But, surely I know you?"

"And I know you, surely," she answered, almost as gravely; and for a moment they stood looking at each other in silence, surrounded by the four musicians, each waiting with his instrument in his hands.

"Where have you met?" Ronald asked, turning first to Clifford and then to Katharine. "On your travels?"

"I do not know," they said together, and they still stood motionless, arrested of body and spirit.

"Well, now for the quartette," said the musicians, and they resined their bows and tuned up. It was their habit to go into raptures over their respective instruments; so that sighs of content, and mysterious expressions of admiration, were soon filling the air. Signor Luigi bending over his violoncello, kept crying out:

"Ah, per Bacco, what for a treasure! Light of mine eyeballs—light of mine eyeballs—maccaroni of my native land, what for a beautiful treasure!"

They laughed as they always did laugh over the merry little Italian, and were just settling down to Beethoven's Rasomoffsky Quartette, when Signor Luigi remembered the Pomeranian.

"Ah, ha," he said, "the adorable dog will howl—he must go—he or I must go. We will depart him prestissimo. He will come very, very near and mock us. I know him, the rogue! Ah, Signor Professor, many thanks, no use you trying to do it. It needs a grand genius like myself to depart that amiable animal."

"And now I think we are safe," he said when he had expelled the reluctant white Pomeranian and shut the door.

Then the voices and laughter were hushed, Herr Edelhart gave the sign, and the quartette began, led off by the low notes of the violoncello. Clifford Thornton and Katharine, sitting in different corners of the room, lost themselves in the wonderful regions which music, with a single wave of her magic wand,

opens to every one desirous of entering.

"Behold my kingdom," she whispers, "wander unharmed in all directions—you will find the paths for yourselves——"

Clifford Thornton, with the war of conflicting emotions in his heart, entered and found the path of peace.

Katharine entered too, and trod unconsciously the path of noble discontent with self and circumstance.

"Ah, how one rests," thought the man.

"Ah, what an aimless, lonely life I've been leading," thought the woman. "No use to myself or any one——" The sounds died away, and the listeners came back from their distant wanderings. Katharine looked up and met the grave glance of the stranger.

He seemed to be asking her:

"Where did we meet, you and I?"

And her silent answer was:

"I cannot tell you, but I have known you always."

Two or three times during the next quartette, of Brahms, she was impelled to look in his direction, and saw him sitting alone at the other end of the room, in an isolation of frigid reserve, staring straight at her as over a vast, with that strange expression of inquiry on his thin drawn face. She was curiously stirred, curiously uneasy too. She was almost glad when the quartette was over and he rose to go.

He went up to the players and thanked them. Then he turned to Katharine.

"Good-bye," he said, and a ghost of a smile, which he repressed immediately, began to cross his face. "I have been trying to think——"

He broke off.

"Good-bye," he said, and he went to the door.

Ronald followed him out of the room, and every one was silent, until Signor Luigi made an elaborate gesticulation with his right forefinger, and finally landed it in the centre of his forehead.

"Signor is like me," he said, "just one leetle poco agitato in the brains."

Ronald came back after a few minutes and said:

"Well, now, he did not interfere with us much, did he? And I am sure the music rested him, poor fellow."

"For certain it should have given him pleasure," said Herr Edelhart, "for we played grand to-night. I was at my wunderbar best. Lieber Himmel, what a tone I make! We were all at our wunderbar best because of Fräulein's wunderbar charm."

"The Fatherland don't leave off admiring himselves!" whispered Gervais to

Katharine.

"Gentlemen," said Ronald, "I believe this is an evening for '47 port. Are we in tune about it?"

"In perfect tune," they cried. "Bravissimo, 'brother'!" So in '47 port the three foreigners and Ronald toasted Katharine, who responded by drinking to the *entente cordiale* of all nations, and the long life and good health of the quartette.

"May it never be shut out like the adorable Pomeranian dog," she added, "and if in a moment of temporary aberration it is shut out, may it howl and howl like the Pomeranian until it is called in again!"

When they had all taken their leave, Katharine spoke affectionately of these faithful old comrades, and begged Ronald to let her at least help him to keep on the quartette which had been a pleasure to them both for so many years. And then, in her own frank way, without any preliminaries, she asked him about this stranger, Clifford Thornton, who had made a great impression on her. Ronald told her what was known of the tragedy of Mrs Thornton's sudden death, which had taken place after some disturbing scene of unhappiness between husband and wife.

"I admire the man," Ronald added. "It was an awfully sad position for him to be in, and he bore himself with fine dignity. And he did not leave his home. He stayed on quietly, living down and ignoring the gossip and talk of the neighbourhood."

Katharine was deeply interested.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow," she said. "He looks as if he had suffered."

She could not forget him. He penetrated into all her thoughts that night as she lay awake thinking about her plans for the future, about Ronald's new life in which she feared that she would have but little part, about her travels of the last three years, about the people she had met, talked with, liked, disliked. Her wandering mind came ever back to this one thought:

"We knew each other. But how—and where—and when?"

CHAPTER V.

For a few months after Mrs Thornton died, Clifford Thornton and his boy had stayed quietly at home at "Falun." People in the neighbourhood were kind in their expressions and actions of sympathy, and repeatedly invited both father and son to their houses; but the Thorntons had always been so reserved, that no real intimacy had ever been possible with them. Professor Thornton had written to his old governess to come and stay with them, and but for her, it is difficult to imagine what these two desolate people would have done with themselves.

Fröken Knudsgaard, generally called "Knutty," was a cheerful old soul, fully persuaded that the world was an excellent place to live and thrive in. She was Danish by birth, and the Danes, unlike the Norwegians, have a large supply of good spirits and the *joie de vivre*. She had lived a great many years in England and spoke English perfectly, with a slight foreign accent which was very engaging. Clifford loved her, and indeed he might well have done so; for she had taken entire charge of him when he was a little child, and had lavished on him all the kindness and affection of which her warm heart was capable. If in his great trouble he could have unburdened his heart to any one, it would have been to Knutty. But apart from the man's painful reticence, his own sense of chivalry made him shrink from confiding in one who could not be generous in her estimate of his dead wife's character. Marianne and Fröken Knudsgaard had never succeeded in making friends; and after one or two visits to Clifford's married home, Knutty had said:

"Farvel, Clifford. You must come and see me in Copenhagen. I am not coming to you again yet. None of us get any pleasure out of the visit, and I only do harm to you all. My aura does not match with Marianne's aura. But do not let the boy forget me. Speak to him sometimes about old Knutty."

She immediately packed up and came to him when she heard of Marianne's death; but although he was overjoyed at having her near him, he told her nothing. Still, it was a comfort to know she was at "Falun;" a comfort to sit with her and try to begin to tell her something of that which was torturing his mind, even if the attempt always ended in failure.

"Ak, ak," she reflected, "he was always like that. I used to try and make a hole in the ice; and when I thought I had succeeded, lo and behold it was frozen up again! People of his temperament have a hard time under that ice. Poor dears, all of them."

He told her of course the outward circumstances of the tragedy, and he made one remark which puzzled her.

"I am so terribly afraid, Knutty," he said, "that Alan may turn against me."

"Sniksnak!" she said. "Why make trouble for yourself? Why should he turn against you? If you had murdered your poor Marianne, of course then——"

"Ah, but sometimes I think——" he began, and then broke off.

"I know what I think," said Fröken Knudsgaard, getting up and tapping him on the head with her knitting-needles. "You must go away, and at once. Shut up 'Falun,' and turn your back on the laboratory. Take a journey immediately."

"Shall I come to dear old Denmark?" he said. In the old days he had had many happy times with Knutty in Copenhagen.

"That is not far enough," she said decisively. "I should advise you to go round

the world, and at once. You have plenty of money and plenty of time. Don't take a million years to make up your mind. Start tomorrow, both of you. It will do Alan good to get away. He is a dear boy, but he is going to be sensitive like you. I wish I could come too. But I am too old and fat. But you must go, Clifford. You cannot stay on here and add to your unhappiness by inventing absurd tortures for yourself. Go and see some of the Yankees' laboratories first, and then run out to Japan to see your Japanese chemist friend at Tokyo. You have always been talking about going."

"Shall I really go, Knutty?" he asked, a little wistfully.

"Ja, kjaere,"[A] she answered, nodding at him. "Otherwise, you will have to go much farther; you will have to go out of your mind. What a nuisance that would be, and selfish of you too! For you would spoil the boy's life, and poor old Knutty's life. You know how she loves to smile and be happy like a true Dane. Take my advice, shut up 'Falun,' go to London, stay at a hotel for a few days, amuse yourselves, get your kit, spend a lot of money, and then take your tickets and be off to Japan. And when you come back, call in at Copenhagen and see me. We will then go down to your beloved harbour to see the ships coming in. Do you remember how interested you used to be in the egg-and-butter ships? Very well, is that settled?"

Clifford Thornton was silent. But he knew that his old Dane was right, and that he could not go on day after day struggling with his conflicting emotions without the immense help of changed circumstances. He knew that every hour he spent in his laboratory mooning over the subjects on which he could not fix his real attention, was wasted time and wasted strength.

"And as the days go by," Knutty continued boldly, "you will feel differently about everything, dear one. And then you must find some one whose aura will be entirely sympathetic with your aura. Ah, you shake your head, Clifford."

"Hush, hush, you must not say that," he said, turning away from her.

"Well, well," she said, half to herself, "perhaps I press on too quickly. But you will go away—promise me that? And shut up 'Falun' with all its sad memories?"

"In my secret heart," she thought, "I should like to blow up 'Falun' and have done with the wretched place!"

"If we go away, will you come too, Knutty?" he said eagerly. "We would take such care of you."

"Seventy years of age, and seventeen stone in weight!" she replied gaily. "No, no, kjaere, I should be too heavy a responsibility. No, I will wait for you in my own little Danish home, made so wickedly comfortable by your kindness; and every day I shall say, 'My Clifford is finding his way into the sunlight again.'"

He stooped down and kissed her kind old hand.

"If I could only tell you my inmost thoughts; but I cannot," he said sadly.

"You never could unfold yourself, dear one," she answered. "You know I always had to guess at what was going on within your mind, and always guessed wrong, of course, and therefore could not help you. I am sure there can be no mental or physical suffering so great as reluctant repression of the thoughts within us."

"Knutty," he said, after a pause, "do you believe that minds can reach each other in dreams?"

"I don't know, kjaere," she said. "I have never reached any one's mind, either in a dream or out of one. In the years gone by, I prided myself on doing so, and then found out that I was mistaken. My present belief is that no one mind can ever reach another in reality, and that each human being speaks and understands only one language—his own language—and every one else's language is what you English people call a 'damned foreign tongue.' Excuse me, dear one, my words may not be academic, but they are supposed to be philosophic. And that reminds me that, in my opinion, you have been a true philosopher, Clifford."

"How so, Knutty?" he said.

"You have asked very little of any one," she answered, "and you have made a successful fight with bitterness. That is what I call true philosophy."

He shook his head in deprecation of her praise, and after another pause he said:

"Do you think, Knutty, that one might be able to injure another person in and through a dream?"

"How should I know?" she said, looking troubled. "I am not given to reflecting on such matters, thank Heaven."

"If one could injure, one could also benefit," he said, without heeding her answer. "There would at least be that comfort—for others."

"And why not for you?" she asked.

"Alas!" he answered, "my dreams were always the other way."

But after he had said that, he returned hastily to his usual reserve, and Fröken Knudsgaard understood him too well to press him for a confidence.

"Besides, it would be waste of tissue," she said to herself. "One would have more success in pressing an alabaster effigy."

But in this way she had had one or two glimpses into his mind, and she was really anxious about his mental state, and not happy about Alan either. She kept her shrewd old eyes open, and she began to see that Alan sometimes avoided being alone with his father. He seemed a little awkward with him, as though some shadow had risen up between them. He too was reserved, and Knutty could not get him to speak of his mother's death.

"I am living with a pair of icebergs," she wrote to her botanist nephew and niece in Copenhagen, Ejnar and Gerda. "Darling icebergs both of them, but icebergs all the same. I find this Arctic expedition of mine, like all Arctic expeditions, fraught with grave difficulties. Write and encourage me, dear ones; and in case I should become a frozen plant, keep an extra warm place for me in the herbarium of your hearts."

But Alan was not reserved about other matters, and he and the old Danish lady became excellent friends together. He said repeatedly to her:

"Knutty, why haven't you been to see us more often?"

And Knutty, stroking her chin, would reply:

"The climate, dear one, the climate; either too hot or too cold; too dry or too wet—generally too wet! Anyway, the atmosphere didn't suit me; too trying."

And of course she was speaking of the mental atmosphere of "Falun."

She transformed "Falun" into an abode of comparative cheerfulness, and brightened up the house in a most astonishing manner. The boy hastened home from his riding or cycling. There was something to go back for now; and Knutty was always in a good temper, always ready to be photographed at the exact moment when she was wanted, and always ready to sympathise with electric batteries, books on architecture, square towers, round towers, telephones, and of course chemical experiments.

"Make any experiments you like," she said. "Don't be afraid of blowing me up. I have been accustomed to it for years. In fact, I prefer it. Anything is better than monotony. The unexpected is always delightful, and it is quite refreshing to have a few fingers blown off in a thrilling fashion, or even a head! Most people lose their heads in a much less interesting way, and under much less provocation. And as for smells, Alan, I worship them. In fact, I feel quite exhilarated when I have the smell of that adorable sulphuretted-hydrogen under my Danish nose. As for architecture, I could listen all the day long to anything you have to say on that subject. I am glad you are going to be an architect; indeed you cannot with any self-respect be anything else, since you were christened after your father's hero, Alan de Walsingham. Only listen: if you don't succeed in building a cathedral every bit as fine as Ely, I shall cut you off from my visiting-list. So there. Now you know what you have to expect from old Knutty."

She disliked the dismal drawing-room. She was much happier sitting in the laboratory, and even happier in the dark room, where Alan sometimes enticed her. And occasionally he got her out for a walk, which was a great concession; for Knutty hated walking. She always declared it was the invention of the devil.

In fact she won him entirely, and then by many subtle processes, she tried to find out what his real feelings were towards his father. He undoubtedly loved his father, but there was something troubling his mind: something which had to be cleared up; and from Clifford's allusion to his own fears of the boy turning against him, Knutty guessed that the father too was conscious of a change in his son's attitude towards him. Whatever it was, it must not be allowed to grow. She was nearly distracted between the two of them. Sometimes she thought it would be better for them to be separated for a little while, and at other times she believed it would be safer for them to have a complete understanding at once. One morning Alan's strained manner to his father strengthened her in the belief that her two icebergs must be brought into closer contact again before they drifted away into different parts of the Arctic regions, where they might never rejoin. By means of great craft, she at last managed to make Alan speak of his mother, and then some of the trouble came tumbling out. He regretted so bitterly that he had told his mother that he knew his father and she were unhappy together; he regretted so bitterly that he had said it was all her fault.

"And to think that those were the last words I ever said to her," he said with almost a sob.

He did not say that he blamed his father for telling him about the proposed separation, but he kept on repeating:

"If only I had not known, if only I had not known."

And of course in his heart he was saying:

"If only father had not told me, if only he had not told me."

Knutty listened and felt torn, for the boy and his father too. Clifford had wounded his child; there was no doubt about that. And only the hand which inflicts the wound can give the healing touch—if people love. Nevertheless, it was for the man she pleaded, for the one who had done the injury to his son whom he loved.

"You see, kjaere," she said, "your father is very unhappy. He would give his whole life not to have told you. And you know he was very good to your mother—very gentle; and he is suffering greatly over her tragic death. It is a hard time for him. And when he looks at you, he remembers that he has made things hard for you too; and that naturally adds to his trouble. And he is ill. No one can comfort him except you. His poor old Knutty is no good to him now. She is no use to any one now—she is too old, and too stupid."

"Oh, Knutty, you know you are not stupid," Alan said indignantly. "Why, you know an awful lot about all sorts of things—and an awful lot about chemistry. Father says so. And he doesn't think you are useless; for the first thing he said, was, 'We must send for Knutty.'"

Fröken Knudsgaard closed her eyes for a moment to check some tears. Those words were very precious to her. When she opened them again, there was a twinkle in them, and no sign of tears.

"Perhaps I am not so stupid after all," she said. "I forgot I knew about chemistry! Not that I do know anything, dear one, but I can talk about it! However, it comes to the same thing. And perhaps I am not so useless either, not if I make you understand how he has suffered, and how sad he is, and how you only can help him. He has only you. Talk to him, kjaere. Tell him everything in your mind. Get rid of every thought which is not friendship. And now pull old Knutty up from her chair. That's right. Mange tak.[B] Now I am going to have a sleep. I'm sleepy, Alan. It is the atmosphere of the dark room. Tell your father I am going to have a good Danish snore in the dismal drawing-room, and no one must disturb me unless it is to unfold some plans about the journey to Japan."

So Fröken Knudsgaard went hastily into retreat, for she had heard Clifford's voice outside, and she wanted her two icebergs to be alone together.

"By St Olaf's sword, I am very tired," she said to herself, as she lay on the sofa in the desolate drawing-room. "Arctic expeditions are exhausting journeys. All the same, I could not have forsaken my poor icebergs."

Knutty yawned and yawned, and then stared at Marianne's portrait which hung opposite to her.

"Never liked that woman," she thought. "Beautiful, but Billingsgate. Quite the wrong aura for Clifford. What a mercy she has died! Cannot help saying it, though of course I ought to be ashamed of myself if I were a moral person, which, thank goodness, I'm not! Ak, that Marianne! And how like her selfishness to die in that way, and leave my tender-hearted Clifford torn in pieces. Nå, these English people, how stubborn and ungracious they are! And yet I love them, and love England too. If Ejnar and Gerda came and stayed long enough, they too would love England, and not feel angry with their old Tante for being so fond of this wicked country. Ah, the battles I have to fight for England. I ought to be given the Order of St George. Ja, ja, and I must remember to send those mosses to Ejnar to-morrow. How happy he will be over them! And Gerda, too. I can see the botanical smile on their dear faces. Dear, dead-alive plants, both of them!"

And Knutty fell asleep and dreamed marvellously of mosses found in icebergs, and of her nephew, Ejnar, the botanist, and Gerda, his wife, and of how they came over to England and made friends with the authorities at Kew

Gardens.

"There now, I told you!" Knutty said triumphantly, "I told you that the Kew people would not insult you after the first quarter of an hour. After the first quarter of an hour, when they had recovered from the shock of receiving foreigners, they would be delighted to see you, and would be willing to exchange specimens. I know them—the dear, proud, rude ones! You just have to learn how to unwind yards and yards of Red Tape. I own it takes time. I admit that, Ejnar."

She smiled, laughed, and woke up. Perhaps it was her laughter which woke her up, and perhaps it was the voices of her two icebergs who were standing by the sofa.

"Where am I—where am I?" she said, rubbing her eyes. "Of course, I remember, at the North Pole again! You horrid chemical compounds, I told you not to wake poor old Knutty unless you had something to tell her about going to Japan."

"That is just what we have to tell you," Clifford and Alan said together.

Fröken Knudsgaard glanced furtively at father and son, and saw that they were standing arm-in-arm. She was too wise an old bird to ask what had passed between them, and what they had said to each other. Besides, she knew that icebergs would use only a few words of explanation, and then drift into intimacy again. She saw at a glance that her Clifford looked comforted, and that in some way Alan had eased his father's heart and his own boyish heart too. That was all that mattered. A tender expression came over her face.

"Help me up, dear ones," she said, holding out her hand to each. "You know Knutty's knees have become very rheumatic. And Clifford, kjaere, we really must send those mosses off to Ejnar and Gerda without delay. I heard this morning that they have had a serious falling out over a fungus. Let us hope that they will become reconciled over the mosses. Ah, you must bring them all sorts of treasures from your journey to Japan."

CHAPTER VI.

So "Falun" was shut up, and Clifford Thornton, Alan, and Knutty came up to London to spend two or three weeks at the Langham, and get the tickets for the journey to Japan. When Knutty was satisfied that all arrangements were going on satisfactorily, she left her icebergs, but with a good deal of uneasiness in her kind old heart. She had been increasingly stern about the necessity for this change of scene and habit, for she saw that Clifford's unhappy state of mind prevented him from again taking up his life and work. She knew, of course, that

it was only natural that he should be unhappy in the circumstances and considering the tragic manner of Marianne's death; but she could not help thinking that, in addition to the sadness and lingering regret from which a man of his sensitive character would inevitably be suffering at such a time, he had some other trouble at the back of his brain. He had told her nothing about his dream, but he continued to make strange references to psychic phenomena, such as dreams, telepathy in dreams, transmission of thoughts, subconscious activities, and subjects of that description, subjects which Knutty knew to be entirely outside his natural range of inquiry and thought. In puzzling over this, she said to herself, "Perhaps he dreamed he wanted her to be dead, and was horrified with himself when the dream came true. Well, it is all too much for me. Not for me these problems of occult thought. Certainly I am of the earth, earthy; and grateful in all conscience for the comfortable possession of a mundane spirit. May I never have any aspiration beyond. But, alas for my poor Clifford if he is going to spoil his freedom won after sixteen years of unhappy married life!"

But although Knutty knew a great deal about Clifford's married troubles, she had not, up to the time of Marianne's death, realised the seriousness of the havoc which sixteen years of uncongenial companionship with Marianne had wrought in his spirit. He had kept his secret hidden away from the world, hidden away until the last from Marianne, almost hidden away from himself. Knutty only knew that he had married the wrong woman—married a coarse-fibred person who could never appreciate his delicate sensitiveness of brain and character, the innate chivalry of his heart and the great possibilities of his intellect, which needed, however, a protecting care to bring them to easy and natural development. She saw, as the years went by, that Clifford's labours in his own branch of work were being grievously hindered, and she had heard in scientific circles that he was not considered to be fulfilling the brilliant promise of early manhood. It was thought to be a pity that a man of his leisure and means, and of undoubted gifts, should not come more prominently to the fore, since there were so few scientific men in England who were, like himself, independent of paying work and able to devote their time to research. Something was wrong with him. Knutty knew that that something was Marianne. Sometimes, when she had questioned him, on his visits to her at Copenhagen, he had said, shrugging his shoulders:

"Temperamental strife, Knutty. Temperamental strife, nearly every one's trouble."

That was all he told her. But when she learned that he had made up his mind to separate from Marianne, and had told Alan of his intention, she understood that he, so gentle and chivalrous by nature, must have been driven to desperation

to even think of taking such a decisive step. In speaking of his part of his trouble, his deep regret at having burdened Alan with a knowledge of their unhappiness, he merely said:

"You see, Knutty, I waited nearly fifteen years, until I thought that he was old enough, and then I found he was too young."

"But you had some happiness, dear one?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Knutty, none," he answered.

"But you had your work, kjaere," she said. "That has been a haven, surely?"

"My haven was always invaded," he said. "There was no peace."

"Ak," she thought, "he must and shall find peace for his work and happiness for his heart. He was meant to be cared for and loved by some dear woman with a suitable aura. And where is she, the wretch? Where is she? She must be waiting somewhere in space for him, if he could only see her and capture her at once. Ak, how glad I should be! Ak, how I should cry aloud, 'I see daylight!' Bah, if we could only get rid of this absurd convention called time! Moments are centuries and centuries are moments, according to circumstance; and yet we go on adjusting our lives and emotions to the strike of the parish clock. Parish clocks indeed! I'd like to stop every one of them all over the world."

But she did not venture to give utterance to these bold sentiments when Clifford put her on the boat at Harwich. She kept to the safe subject of his work and arrested ambitions, and tried to arouse his intellectual pride.

When he thanked her for her tender kindness to himself and the boy, she answered:

"Alas! dear one, I have done little enough for either of you. I should have loved to have put everything right for both my beloved icebergs, but that is not possible. The longer I live, the more clearly I see that we cannot put matters straight either for ourselves or for other people. We can only muddle through difficulties, and help others to do the same. So I say to you: Muddle through your worries quickly, kjaere. Go for this long outing, and then come back and take up your life again. Come back to your test-tubes, your platinum dishes, your carbon compounds, your asymmetric carbon atoms, and get to work on your stereo-isomerism and all that kind of comforting nonsense! Do, dear one! You are at your best now—forty-three. What is forty-three? If I were forty-three, I believe I could make discoveries in all the branches of every science which ever existed and ever will exist! Come back and knock everybody into fits by your successful work. Talk about carbon compounds indeed! I expect you to become a compound of Berzelius, Crookes, Liebig, Faraday, Hofmann, Gay Lussac, and all the other chemistry creatures. Don't I rattle off their names beautifully? Oh! what a clever old woman I am! Of course, being a Dane, I couldn't help being

clever—or thinking I was! But there now! How I chatter, and the boat just going! Sweep the past away, Clifford. Remember, some people only begin to wake up at forty-three, and then they have to crowd all sorts of splendid achievements into their remaining years. And don't fret about the boy. He loves you in his own icebergic way. And don't dare to come back to 'Falun' until I give you permission."

She had raised her finger, and was still shaking it in playful warning, when the boat moved off. Clifford stood and watched her until he could see her no longer, and then took his place in the train for London.

"My good old Dane," he said, "my best friend in the world. How are we going to get on without all your kind ways?"

He was alone in the carriage, and his thoughts turned unhindered to the past, which Knutty had wished him to sweep away. He could not sweep it away. It was seven months now since Marianne had died. During that time he had not known one single day's peace of mind. It was in vain that he had reasoned with himself. Reason had had no lasting influence on his emotions. If he could have spoken to some one about Marianne's death, if he could have talked it out with some clear-headed, impartial person accustomed to ponder over the strange phenomena of the dream-world and their true relation to everyday life, over the mysterious workings of the brain, when, under the influence of sleep, it loses the responsibility of normal consciousness, he might perhaps have shaken off some of the burden which was so greatly oppressing him. But, in the first place, he was reserved by nature; and, in the second, he shrank, as a scientific man, from entering that debatable land, the phenomena of which are not verifiable by the direct experimental method. Even if his mind had been tuned to such subjects, how could he have brought himself to say to any one:

"This was my dream and hers. Now tell me, have I killed my wife?"

So he had to fight the battle by himself, and this was how it was fought. One day he would say, "I will not let the past crush me. I will remember only that I did my best for Marianne, sacrificing to her the most precious part of myself—my very brain-power, my power of thinking and working. I look back with mourning, and see that I have accomplished scarcely anything of all I intended to do; that I have lost the threads of this and the threads of that, and also the habit of subtle concentration. Marianne has ruined my life and my career. But now she has gone, and I am free. And at forty-three years of age, with health still left me and my working powers intact, surely I am not going to let the remembrance of this tragedy rise up between me and my freedom?"

But the next day, this bravado of mind would have spent itself, and he would remember only that Marianne had died, and that he had certainly had some part

in her death. She had fallen in their final conflict of temperaments. He was left as victor. And yet no victor either. No, rather was Marianne victorious, as she had ever been. And he was the one left vanquished and remorseful. Then all the pity and kindness in him rose up to condemn him in his own judgment. He forgot his own grievances and remembered only hers; adding with generous hand to her list. Where she could scarcely have claimed one, he gave her ten, twenty, a hundred. And the next day he took them back again, remembering only the harm done to him by her turbulent spirit. He shuddered as he recalled the incessant irritations, the senseless scenes of uncontrolled temper, the insane jealousy, with which his work seemed to inspire her, the scornful utterances hurled against the things most precious to him, the carping criticisms on the people he admired most in the world.

All this had taken an immense effect on him, although he had always tried to ignore it. But he could not ignore scenes. He capitulated to them. They took the life and spirit out of him. And Marianne knew it. She knew her power and used it ruthlessly. It had seemed in her lifetime as though she had been irritated beyond bearing when she saw him intent on some task in his laboratory; as though she had deliberately got up a scene to wreck his day's work, and had only been propitiated when she saw the fabric of his brain-power in ruin for that morning at least.

He went over all this as he leaned back in the carriage. He remembered that Knutty said he had made a successful fight with bitterness. It was true that he was not bitter; but he knew that he could take no praise to himself on that score. For he had discovered that bitterness ruined his abilities even more ruthlessly than want of serenity; and so, out of self-preservation, he had tried to keep the citadel of his heart permanently fortified against that enemy. Knutty also said that he had asked little of life; but, looking back now, he knew he had asked for the greatest thing in the world, being what he most needed—*peace*. Peace. He had had no peace in Marianne's lifetime; and now he knew it all depended on his own strength of will whether or not he could reach it at the eleventh hour.

"If I can put from me the remembrance of the past, stifle morbid fears, and get to believe I was not responsible for Marianne's death, I shall reach peace," he said.

"Responsible," he repeated. "How could I be considered responsible, unless it could be proved that there is dormant power in us to prevent our evil thoughts from overwhelming us in our dreams?"

"Dormant power," he said. "Is it not rather that, proved or unproved, there must surely be a living force in us which should be able to control our attitude of mind whether we wake or whether we sleep?"

"Ah, that is the trouble," he said, as he got up and moved restlessly to the other end of the carriage. "The responsibility comes not from the dream itself, but from the everyday attitude of mind which caused the dream. If I could have felt and thought differently, I might have dreamt differently, and a different message would then have been transmitted to my poor Marianne."

So he tortured himself; argued with himself; fought the battle unaided; conquered; was conquered, and, worn out with the strife, longed all the more passionately for peace which implied the power to work and forget.

"And what else is there in life greater than work and peace?" he said.

Something in his lonely heart whispered, "There is love."

"Yes, yes, there is love," he answered impatiently. "But love has passed me by. I and love have nothing to do with each other."

And then suddenly the past was swept from his remembrance, and he found himself thinking of Katharine Frensham.

"Where have I seen her before?" he asked himself. "I knew her face. I knew her voice——"

The train stopped.

CHAPTER VII.

Gwendolen arrived home the day after Katharine's return, and the two women, although speaking a different language, were genuinely pleased to see each other. Katharine thought that Gwendolen was more beautiful than ever, and with her generous heart recognised that her sister-in-law was one of those women born to be worshipped by the men they marry, to the extinction of every one and everything. Her complexion was perfect, her features were in harmony with each other, her smile was bewitching. Her eyes were the least attractive part of her; they were a little cold. Her figure was grace itself, and so was her bearing. She dressed faultlessly, but in such a quietly extravagant fashion, that Katharine was appalled when she thought of the enormous outlay which her toilet implied; whilst in the management of the luxurious home, too, money seemed to be of no consideration to her. Katharine remembered that Ronald himself had expressed uneasiness about his increasing expenses; but when she hinted at her own anxiety on his behalf, he merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Oh, every one lives like this, Kath. Times have altered since you were here. One is obliged to keep up a style if one wants to be in society."

"Well, old fellow," she answered, "all I can say is, don't make a fiasco and have to retire into the country suddenly one day, with the excuse that you have

become violently in love with rural life. Every one knows what that means, and it only makes one look ridiculous."

But even this much had ruffled him, and Katharine said no more. As time went on, and the first flush of pleasure at her return had faded, she saw that he had changed, and the atmosphere around him had changed too. None of his old personal friends belonging to their old happy free life visited his home. All the people who were in touch with him now were acquaintances only, of the so-called "smart type," most of them over-dressed, under-dressed, mindless women and snobs of men, at whom Katharine and Ronald would not have looked in former days. Katharine thought:

"I suppose these women are what is called 'respectable,' though they don't look it. And they are not half so pleasant and interesting as that *bona-fide* demi-mondaine with whom I travelled across America for four days. She had a heart, too, and these people seem to be without such an old-fashioned possession. Well, I suppose I am out of date."

Once or twice she inquired after their old friends.

"Where are the Grahams? Where is Willy Tonedale?" she asked.

"Oh, the Grahams have gone away," Ronald answered indifferently, "and Willy comes down to the office to see me. He prefers that. He says he doesn't like the people he meets here, and they don't like him. He feels out of it."

Katharine was silent again. She felt as Willy Tonedale, out of it. And not only was she out of harmony with her surroundings, but she found as the days went on, that Gwendolen was becoming jealous of her, and that if she continued to stay, she would soon be a source of discord between husband and wife. For although Ronald was passionately attached to his wife, worshipping, indeed, the very ground she trod on, he could not quite hide from Gwendolen or himself that he loved to have his sister near him.

Gwendolen, who was not unkind by nature, tried to conquer her growing jealousy; but her attempts were not successful. She was all the more ashamed of it, because in her metallic fashion she admired Katharine, and wished to be friends with her. But one morning her manner was so insufferable, that Katharine, without giving any warning of her intention, packed her trunks. When they were packed, she came down into the morning-room and bent over Gwendolen, who was sitting at her bureau, writing scented invitation-cards for several dinner-parties.

"Gwendolen," she said gently, "I am going to leave you, dear. You must not think that I am running away in a temper. But I cannot stand your jealousy, nor the strain of appearing not to notice it. I have never been accustomed to strained relations with any one. People have always wanted whole-heartedly to have me;

and I have been glad whole-heartedly to be with them. I would much prefer to live alone in a top-garret than to be on difficult terms in a luxurious house with my everyday companions. It saps all my strength and all my pleasure in life: and to no purpose. If I were benefiting you and Ronnie, I might perhaps be virtuous enough to wish to stay; but as I am only harming you both, I want to go. And I want you to take me: so that we may both feel there is no ill-will. Put on your things and come down to the Langham and settle me in. Kiss me, and let us be good friends now and always. No, no, dear, don't argue about it. I have not come back from my wanderings to make your home unhappy."

Gwendolen was ashamed and touched, and even shed two or three metallic tears on the scented envelopes.

"I thought I had been hiding my jealousy so beautifully, Kath," she said.

"My dear child," Katharine answered, "a polar bear could have found it out. It requires no exquisite and dainty power of penetration. Jealousy is felt, tasted, seen at once. Did you really think you had been hiding it?"

Gwendolen nodded, and Katharine laughed ever so gently.

"Well, dear, at least you tried," she said. "Come now, put on your prettiest hat, and let us go at once."

So they went without any further discussion, Katharine's mind being completely made up on the subject. And when Ronald came home that evening, he found, to his astonishment, that his sister had fled.

"Had you any words?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no," Gwendolen answered. "I wish we had had. I should not be feeling such a wretch then. Kath said she could not stand my jealousy, and that she had not come home from her wanderings to make our home unhappy. She was lovely about it, and I don't wonder you love and admire her. I think she is a grand creature built on a grand scale, Ronnie, and I am a horrid mean-spirited thing, and I hate and despise myself——"

"No, no, darling, not that," he said, as he comforted and kissed her. "But it is sad. I am sorry. My good old Kath who gave you so uncomplainingly to me! To think she has come home after three years' absence to find she cannot stay a few days happily with us."

He paced up and down the drawing-room, his heart torn with sadness and concern.

The clock struck six.

"Ronald," Gwendolen said, "it is only six—if you are not too tired, let us go to her and fetch her back."

He brightened up at once.

"I would go miles to see her, Gwen," he said eagerly—"miles."

"And so would I," she said. "You can't imagine how much I wish to see her again."

They had never been so near together and so much in sympathy as when they started off to find Katharine. Ronald did not attempt to reproach Gwendolen, and indeed there was no need. As far as her limited nature would permit, she was overcome with remorse, which gave her an added beauty in her worshipper's eyes. It was nearly seven o'clock when they knocked at Katharine's door. Katharine did not hear. She had drawn her chair up to the fire, and was busy with her thoughts. Loneliness had taken possession of her heart; for although she had known that sooner or later this cold visitor would invade her with his chill presence, his coming was even worse than she had imagined it would be.

"Why did I return?" she said. "If there was nothing and no one to return for, why should I have returned? Home-sickness—ah, yes—and love of the old country. But even then, if one has no ties and is not wanted, what is it all worth? One country is as good as another if there is no love-niche anywhere. And there can be no loneliness greater than that found in old conditions changed to new."

She looked lonely, like some strong tree left standing alone on the mountain-side, to face the tempests alone. She was tall, and, as Gwendolen had said, made on a grand scale. As there was nothing petty in her attractive appearance, so also there was nothing petty in her mind. Without being learnèd or clever, she had been born with a certain temperamental genius which could not be classified, but only felt and seen. It was this which drew people to her; and because she knew that they were always ready to like her, her manner had that simple ease seen often in unself-conscious little children. Bitterness and harsh judgments were foreign to her nature; and so now, although she felt desolate, she was free from bitter thoughts. She remembered with gratitude all the years of happy comradeship with Ronnie—thirty-six years: his whole lifetime and nearly hers; for she was his senior by one year only, and their mother had always said that the two children had begun their friendship at once.

"No person on earth has the right to grumble," Katharine said, "if he or she has been lucky enough to have thirty-six years of close companionship with some beloved one. And it was a splendid time; something to give thanks for, all the rest of one's life."

"And I had a beautiful home-coming, alone with him, and under the genial old conditions," she said. "I could not have expected that happiness to continue. And perhaps it was as well that it came to an end quickly, before I found it too hard to go——"

Then the knock came outside, but Katharine heard nothing.

"In any case I had to face a new kind of life," she said.

The knock came again—louder this time. Katharine heard it. She went to the door and opened it. Gwendolen and Ronald stood outside.

"Oh, Kath!" Gwendolen cried, putting out her arms.

"She longed to come," Ronald said.

"Come in at once," Katharine said, holding out a hand to each of them, and drawing them into the room. There were tears in her eyes, and there was a smile of welcome on her face. The chill in her heart had turned to warmth. Perhaps it was only then that she knew what she had been through; for she collapsed into the armchair and cried. They watched her silently. They felt that they could do and say nothing. So they waited. But when she looked up and smiled at them, Gwendolen knelt down by her side, and Ronald bent over her and pinched her ear as in the old days when he wanted to show especial sympathy and attention.

"I can't help crying a little," she cried, "because I am so happy."

"Happy?" they said inquiringly.

"Yes, happy," she repeated, "because you cared to come. You see, that is what matters most."

"Come back, Kath dear," Gwendolen pleaded. "I will be so different. You have taught me such a lesson. You have not any idea how ashamed I feel of myself."

"No; I cannot come back," Katharine said, shaking her head. "Some other time perhaps. But not now. No, Ronald, old fellow, not now. One has to go forward, you know—and alone."

"But you will not put us out of your life, Kath dear?" Ronald said sadly.

She had risen from the arm-chair, and now put her arm through each of theirs and drew them to her.

"You will not get rid of me so easily as all that," she answered with some of her old brightness. "I can skip out of your home, but not out of your lives. No; I am yours always, and always ready for you. And now I think we ought to have dinner. You know, my dears, there is no denying that great emotions produce great hunger! I am starving."

So they dined together and had a happy evening; and when they were saying good night, Gwendolen whispered:

"When you feel you can come to us again, Kath, you will see how different I shall be."

Ronald stayed behind a moment to say:

"Kath, it is dreadful to leave you here alone—I feel it dreadfully—won't you come even now? Do, dear old Kath."

But Katharine shook her head and sent him on his way, promising, however, to come down to the organ-factory in a day or two. After they had gone, she

lingered for a few moments in the hall, watching some of the people who were standing together talking and laughing. Every one seemed to have some belongings. There was that stern-looking military man whose harsh features relaxed as his two pretty daughters stepped out of the lift and touched him on the arm.

"We are ready, father," they said, and the three went off arm-in-arm.

Then there was that handsome mother with her fine young son, each proud of and fond of the other; and that happy young couple yonder, the centre of a group of friends; and that crippled man leaning on the arm of his wife, whose face was eloquent with tender protectiveness and love.

Katharine felt desolate again. She went slowly into the reading-room.

"I will read the papers," she thought, "and forget about personal matters."

There was no one in the reading-room; at least she thought there was no one, until she discovered a young boy who had hidden himself behind a paper. He was sitting near the fire, and she drew up her chair to the fire too, and began to read. She had previously greeted him; for Katharine did not observe the rigid English rule of ignoring the presence of a stranger. So she had said, "Good evening," as though he were a grown-up friend and not a young stranger of perhaps fifteen years.

The boy coloured a little and said, "Good evening," and retired quickly into 'The Graphic' again. At last he put down 'The Graphic,' and Katharine said:

"May I have 'The Graphic' if you have done with it?"

He rose at once, brought it to her, and glanced at her shyly. Something in his wistful face prompted her to speak to him.

"Is it a good number?" she said, smiling at him.

"Yes," he said.

And he added with a jerk:

"There is a picture of my school and our football team—here it is—it is so awfully good of the fellows."

"And are you here too?" Katherine asked, looking at his face and then trying to find him in the picture.

"No," he said, "I'm not there. I've not been to school this term."

"Been ill?" said Katharine; "perhaps measles, mumps, smashed-in head, broken knee or nose—what other ailments do boys have? I used to be so well up in them. My brother was always being brought home in fragments."

He smiled a little and said:

"No, I've not been ill, but——"

He paused a moment, and having glanced at her once more, seemed to gain confidence. He was evidently very shy; but he desired to explain his absence

from that football team.

"You see," he said, "mother died."

Katharine made no answer, but nodded sympathetically, and for a moment there was silence between these two new acquaintances. The boy himself broke it.

"Father and I are going to travel for a few months," he said. "But next year I shall be in the team again."

"And where are you going?" she asked.

"We are going to Japan," he said half-heartedly. It was obvious that his heart was not in the travelling scheme.

"Why, that is where I have just come from," Katharine said. "You are a lucky young man. And you speak of it as if it were a horrible holiday task. You ungrateful boy!"

And she warmed him with glowing accounts of the journey and all the queer things and people he would see, and succeeded in making him so interested that he ended by saying:

"By Jove! I think I shall like to go after all."

"Of course you will," she said. "You will enjoy every minute."

A shadow passed over his young face; and she remembered that he had lost his mother, and that very likely he was feeling desolate in his own boyish way. He looked desolate too. He reminded her of some one she had met lately—who was it? Oh, well, she did not remember; but there was an air of distress about him, pathetically combined with boyish eagerness, which appealed to her sympathies.

"And you will come back feeling so spry," she added, "and fit for any amount of football. Besides, it is a good thing to go and see if Japan would make a suitable ally, isn't it? Then you can send in a report to the Government, you know."

His face brightened up, and he drew his chair a little nearer to her; for he felt that she was distinctly a sensible sort of person, not unlike Knutty in intelligence.

Katharine gave out to him unsparingly, and when she saw that the boy was becoming more at his ease and more inclined to talk, she went on laughing and chatting with him, until her own loneliness tugged less at her own heart.

Suddenly the door of the reading-room opened, and a man came in. Katharine and her young friend both looked round.

"It's father," the boy said awkwardly, not knowing what to do next.

"Professor Thornton," Katharine said, with a start of pleasure and surprise.

"Miss Frensham," he said, with an eager smile on his grave face.

And he sank into the arm-chair as though he had come into a haven.

CHAPTER VIII.

Katharine woke up the morning after her arrival at the Langham feeling much less miserable than she had expected. The visit from Gwendolen and Ronald had cheered her, and the evening's companionship with that lonely father and son had taken away the sting of her own loneliness. She sang as she rolled up her beautiful soft hair. And when the sun came streaming into the room, she felt so full of brightness and hope, that she paused in her process of dressing and danced the Norfolk step-dance in her smart silk petticoat. Then she stopped suddenly, arrested by an invisible touch.

"Ah," she said, "how often Ronald and I have danced that at the bean-feasts! And now, never again, never again, old fellow! All the old fun is over. You belong heart and soul to that over-dressed jealous little idiot."

"Shame on you, Katharine!" she said, shaking her fist at herself in the looking-glass. "You deserve to put on an unbecoming dress. You shall put on that blue failure. You know blue does not suit you—not that tone of blue."

Katharine took the dress in question from the wardrobe and began putting it on.

"No," she said with a smile, "I have changed my mind, Katharine. You shall not be punished. You shall wear your most becoming one—the dove-coloured one. Punishment, indeed! You don't need punishment. You need consolation. And what could be more consoling on earth than a becoming dress, unless it were a becoming hat? You shall have both."

She nodded and smiled to herself in the glass, and was still smiling when she went down in the lift, and found Clifford Thornton and Alan in the hall. By silent agreement they breakfasted together, and then made their way into the reading-room and drew up to the fire. Katharine was so genial and companionable that it was impossible even for Knutty's two icebergs not to thaw in her presence. Free of spirit always, and fresh from her recent travels, she was feeling as if she had met two strange people unexpectedly in some desolate corner of the earth, and had therefore the right to greet them and treat them as fellow-travellers. She knew that they would pass on, of course; but meantime here they were; they had broken in upon her loneliness, and she had the right to enjoy what the hour brought. It was only a chance that the desolate corner happened to be the Langham. It might have been Mount Ararat, or some spot in Siberia or Central China.

As for the icebergs themselves, they were feeling vaguely that it was

delightful to be with her. Alan's shyness yielded to her influence, and the man's grave reserve underwent a slight modification. He seemed to become younger. Once or twice he even laughed at something Katharine said. It was such a fresh, boyish laughter, and had such a ring in it, that any one would have believed he was meant for happiness. That was what Katharine thought when she heard it; and when she glanced at his face and saw that for the moment his strained expression had given place to easier adjustment, something tugged at her heart. In a curious, impersonal sort of way he, too, appeared to think that this chance meeting was to be made into pleasure for them all; for he said quite simply, as one traveller meeting another might say:

"What shall we do this morning?"

"I will do anything you both like," Katharine said. "I have no plans in the world, except to go to Denmark in a few weeks."

"Denmark!" they both said, interested at once.

"Yes," she answered, "I have a mysterious and sacred parcel intrusted to me by two botanists in Arizona; and I vowed that I would go myself to Denmark and put it into the hands of two botanists in Copenhagen—Ebbesen was the name."

"That is curious," Clifford said. "They are the nephew and niece of my old governess, whom I only saw off to Denmark last night. Ejnar and Gerda Ebbesen. And they are great on 'Salix;' and have a good many quarrels over that and other debatable subjects too. You will find them to be delightful people, and highly intellectual, as so many Danes are. But your parcel will probably give rise to many a battle-royal."

"Apparently all botanists quarrel," said Katharine. "I know my friends were in a perpetual state of warfare. They had a fearful dispute when I was there about a cactus. Such a hideous thing to quarrel over, too! And when I said that, they instantly became reconciled and attacked me!"

Then Clifford, with a smile in his heart at the mere thought of Knutty and her belongings, began to speak of his dear old Dane. And he added:

"You will not need an introduction to her good graces if you are bringing offerings to her nephew and niece, whom she adores. Still, she would like to know that you have seen her troublesome Englishman. She is the kindest friend I have ever had in my life. She came to take charge of me when I was about seven years of age. A lonely little beggar I was, too—in a great house in Surrey, with no one to care about my comings and goings. My mother was dead, and my father, a mining engineer, was always travelling about to all parts of the globe. When Knutty arrived on the scenes, I felt that heaven had opened and let out an angel."

"She doesn't look much like an angel now!" said Alan quaintly. "She weighs about seventeen stone."

"I would not have her otherwise, would you?" said his father, smiling.

"No, no," said Alan staunchly, "she is ripping, just as she is."

"We wanted her to come with us on our travels," Clifford continued.

"She would have been splendid, father, wouldn't she?" Alan said. "Nothing would have upset Knutty. Why, I believe if we had been drowning together, she would have said, 'By St Olaf, what a delightful ocean this is!'"

They all laughed. Knutty at that moment tossing on the sea, would have been glad to hear her belovèd icebergs laugh, and glad to know that she was the cause. She would have rejoiced also to know that some one, and that some one a sympathetic woman, was being kind to them. Perhaps she would have said:

"I see daylight!"

Then Clifford spoke of Denmark, and Norway, and Sweden, the wonderful North which Knutty had taught him to love and understand.

"I had the love of it in my veins," he said, "for my father had a passion for Northern countries and people, and that was why he chose a Northern governess for me; although of course she knew English perfectly. But she fostered my love of the North, and brought me up on the Sagas. And it was she who first took me up to the extreme north of Norway. That is where you should go: where you see the mountains as in a vision, and the glaciers reflected in the fiords, and the exquisite colours of the sky chastened and tempered by the magic mist."

Katharine said that she had always intended to go there, but that other places had taken precedence; and that when her brother married three years ago, she had been impelled to take a long journey, in order to get accustomed to a new kind of life, a crippled kind of life without him.

"And have you become accustomed to it?" Clifford Thornton asked.

"No," she answered. "Not yet."

"Then the long journey did not help?" he said.

"Oh yes, it helped," Katharine answered. "Mercifully one passes on."

"Yes," he said, and he seemed lost in thought.

Katharine broke through the silence.

"Well," she said, rising from her chair, "if we are going out, we should not delay much longer. Where shall we go?" she said, turning to Alan.

Alan chose the Hippodrome, and the three started off together in that direction. Knutty would have been somewhat surprised to see her two icebergs. They did not talk much, it is true, for Katharine did all the talking; but they laughed now and then, and made an occasional remark which was not at all Arctic. They had a splendid day together: a mixture of Hippodromes, ices,

lunches, animated pictures, Natural History Museums, and camera-shops; and in the evening they dined together, and chatted, like old cronies, over the day's doings.

They knew that they owed the day's pleasure to Katharine's companionship; and when Alan said good night, he blushed and added with a jerk:

"Thank you."

And Clifford said:

"Yes, indeed, thank you for to-day—tak for idag, as the Danes say."

"Ah, I must learn that if I am going to Denmark," Katharine said, and she repeated it several times until Alan pronounced her to be perfect.

"Tak for idag, tak for idag!" she said triumphantly. "It is I who have to thank you for today."

She thought of them as she went to sleep. They seemed to her two pathetic figures, hapless wanderers, not fit to be alone in the world by themselves. She wished the old Dane had not left them. She dreamed of them; she saw in her dreams the boy's young face and the man's grave face. She heard the man's voice telling her that he had met and known her before, and she answered:

"Yes, it is true. We have met somewhere, you and I. Some message has passed between us somewhere—somehow——"

When she woke up, she remembered her dreams and lay thinking a long time.

"He haunts me," she thought. "He is on my mind and in my heart day and night. I suppose I ought to try and get rid of him. I suppose it would be the right sort of British matronly thing to do, considering the circumstances. And yet why should it be the right thing? It does not harm him that I think of him and am strongly attracted to him. Why should I stamp down my emotions and impulses? No. I shall think of him as much as I like, and dream of him as much as I can. I know he is a man with a broken spirit—out of reach, out of region—but——"

"Well, well," she said, "I must shake myself and 'go forth.'"

She went forth that day looking the picture of health and attractive grace. She wore the dove-coloured dress, a most becoming hat, and a cloak which added to her natural charm of bearing. But it was her whole personality more than her looks which stamped her as a special brand of beautiful womanhood; whilst her adorable manner, the natural outcome of a big heart and generous spirit, gave her a radiance which was felt and seen by every one. Wherever she went, people even of the dullest types had a distinct feeling of being pleased and stirred. Her arrival at the organ-factory, near Cambridge Heath, was the signal for all the employees on the premises to be more or less agreeably excited, according to their varying powers of receptivity. The porter, who was known as the "dormouse," from his sleepy disposition, became electrified into activity when

he saw Katharine. He ran and spread the news.

"Miss Katharine has come," he said first to one workman and then another.

She soon passed in and out amongst them all. The sulky but clever artiste, who voiced the reeds, the sympathetic craftsman who was doing a delicate piece of carving for part of an elaborate organ-case, the mechanics, the packers, the clerks, the manager, all had their eager word of welcome ready for her.

"It's good to see you, Miss Katharine," they said. "Organ-building hasn't been organ-building without you."

Ronald was with a client at the time, but he too became excited when he heard that Katharine had come; and the client was ingeniously got rid of as soon as possible.

"How many times you have come and upset us all," he said, when they were alone together in his sanctum. "No one will do any more useful work to-day, and I am sure I don't wonder. And how jolly to see you here as in the old days! And how splendid you look too! Why, Kath, I do believe you have a flirtation on! You have that well-known air of buoyancy which always has meant a new flirtation. I should recognise it anywhere."

"No, no," she laughed; "I have no flirtation on. I should tell you at once, if only from sheer force of habit."

"Well," he said, "I have been torn the whole time thinking what a brute I was to leave you in that way and let you stay at the Langham. I can't get over it, Kath. Gwendolen is so ashamed, and so am I."

"Don't fret about it," she said gently. "The bitterness has passed, if, indeed, it ever existed, Ronnie. Gwendolen never meant to be unkind. Most people would have stayed on and pretended not to feel the strain; but I couldn't have done that. I would rather never see you again than live on strained terms with you now that you are married. That would be a pitiful ending to our long friendship, wouldn't it? No, no, cheer up. It will all work out beautifully; and I shall come and see you more often than you wish. I promise you that."

"But it is dreadful for you to be alone," he said.

"I have not been alone," she answered, and she told him about her strange meeting with Clifford Thornton and his boy.

Ronald pretended to believe that she knew they were there all the time, and that she had left his home deliberately.

"Don't be ridiculous," she answered gaily. "Life is only a series of chances, and this is one of them."

"And here have I been racking my brains to think how I might comfort you, Kath," said Ronald.

"Dear old fellow!" she replied. "Lonely people have to work out their own

redemption."

"Are you very lonely?" he asked regretfully. It always pinched his heart to think that he had abandoned her.

"No, no," she answered, giving him a sudden hug, "scarcely at all, and then only for a few passing moments. Nothing that matters. And now tell me about business. For if you want the benefit of my advice about anything, now is your chance. I feel that my brains are in splendid condition this morning, and that I can settle the most momentous questions in five minutes. I always was quick, wasn't I?"

"There are one or two matters you can help me with, if you will really give your attention," he said.

"Well, then, I must remove this hat," Katharine said, taking pins recklessly out of her hair. "No person could be business-like in such a hat, could they? There, I feel different now, absolutely serious and commercial! And here go my gloves and rings. Now, Ronnie, I am all brains and attention."

"And you won't flirt if I ask Barlow in?" Ronald said. "We shall want him too."

"I will be sphinx-like," she answered, with a twinkle in her eye.

Ronald laughed and sent for his manager, and the three together settled some important difficulties, over which Katharine showed herself so quick-witted and sensible that Mr Barlow was lost in admiration, and remarked it was a pity she was not in the business.

"I have always maintained, Miss Katharine, that you ought to take an active part in the business," he said. "You have a good and a quick judgment."

"Ah, Mr Barlow," Katharine answered eagerly, "you have touched the right chord. I want to take an active part from now onwards, and Ronald says I could be of use."

"Yes, but the trouble is that you'd soon get tired of routine work," Ronald said. "You were not made for a dull life."

"Why could I not be a traveller for the firm?" suggested Katharine. "I am sure I could manage ecclesiastics beautifully; and that wouldn't be dull really, though it sounds dull! I have every confidence that I could make all creeds employ our firm and our firm only. I feel myself quite capable of tackling Archbishops or Plymouth Brethren, Unitarian ministers or Anabaptists. All sects of all shades except Christian Scientists. I draw the line at Christian Scientists. No one could tackle them, no one on earth or in heaven or—anywhere!"

The manager laughed.

"I believe you can tackle any one, Miss Katharine, even Christian Scientists," he said, "and I am sure we can make use of your quick judgment."

When he had gone, she said to Ronald:

"Ronnie, I really am more stable than you think, and I believe I could even do routine work now. I must have something to do. And you admit I have a quick brain. It goes like a flash, doesn't it? Not like Willy Tonedale's, for instance."

And at that moment Willy Tonedale was announced. He was a handsome fellow, to whom the gods had given a beautiful face, a splendid form, a dear, kind heart, and certainly the very slowest of brains. Every one loved him, and Katharine herself was one of his best friends. He was too lazy to have worked seriously at a profession; but he had had a vague training as an artist, and had dawdled through the Royal Academy schools. It was his custom to propose to Katharine every time he met her, and he at once said:

"Ah, Katharine, there you are, home at last! Do be mine, my dear. Do. There's a brick."

"We were just talking of you," she said.

"Talking of my slow brain, as usual, I suppose," he said, slipping into Ronald's chair, his handsome face aglow with the pleasure of seeing her.

"It was just mentioned," Katharine said, laughing; and Ronald said:

"Kath wants to come into the business; and she was remarking that she had a quick brain, not like——"

"Not like mine, of course," put in Willy. "I know. But what on earth does she want to come into the business for? I never heard of anything so absurd. Why don't you tell her to marry me instead, Ronald?"

"You are not the right man, Willy," Katharine said brightly. "You are an awful dear; but you never were the right fellow, and never will be."

"Well, don't settle down to work," he said. "Work! Who wants to work at anything regularly? Never heard such an absurd idea. Good heavens! If it's money you want, take all I've got—every blessèd shilling—and remain yourself—Katharine the splendid! Business routine for you! It's ridiculous to think of. Why, the world wouldn't go on properly unless you were a leisured person. Some nice people have got to be leisured. That's why I take things easily. Too many busy people make life a nuisance. Even I've sense enough to know that."

"I am quite determined to take up business, Willy," said Katharine, "and the world will have to do without me. Ronald says I could be of use. And Mr Barlow says so too. Now just imagine for one moment how beautifully I might manage bishops, archbishops, curates, even Popes. Can't you picture to yourself the Pope ordering a new organ with all the newest improvements of which only our firm is capable!"

And she went through an imaginary interview with the Pope, which called forth peals of laughter from her little audience of two. Seriousness had scarcely

been re-established when the card of a real clergyman was brought in, and Ronald said laughingly:

"Here, Kath, here's your chance—the Dean of St Ambrose's."

"No, no," she answered. "I can't begin with any one inferior to a Pope or an Archbishop. Come along, Willy. I suppose you are going to your home to lunch. You know I am spending the afternoon there. Make haste, Willy! Ronald is longing for us to be off."

"My dear Kath," Willy Tonedale said quaintly, "it isn't I that am putting all those mysterious pins into my head. Can't understand how they don't hurt the head, going right through like that. They would hurt my head. But then it's true ——"

"Yes, it's true," said Katharine. "You needn't finish your remark. I know! Good-bye, Ronnie. Love to Gwendolen, and I'm coming to dinner to-morrow. If it had only been an Archbishop, I would have begun at once!"

The Dean passed into Ronald's sanctum as Willy Tonedale and Katharine passed out. The dignitary of the Church glanced at her, and a fleeting expression of pleased surprise lit up his clerical countenance. He had come about some experiment which he wished tried on the organ of St Ambrose's; but he found himself unable to concentrate his attention on business until he had asked who that delightful-looking lady might be. Ronald smiled invisibly as he replied that it was his sister—the senior partner of the firm.

"Dear me, dear me!" replied the Dean as he stroked his chin. His eyes wandered restlessly towards the door. Wicked old Dean. He was thinking:

"Surely I have heard that it is always safer to ask for the senior partner."

CHAPTER IX.

"Well, Willy," said Katharine, as he and she made their way towards the Tonedales' house in South Kensington, "what have you been doing whilst I have been away? Have you finished the famous historical picture of the unhistoric meeting between Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots? I should like to think that you have finished it, for then I shouldn't have to sit for it any more! Let me see, how many years have you been painting at that immortal masterpiece? Is it ten or fifteen years?"

"Don't make fun of me," Willy said. "You know perfectly well that I am one of those fellows who were never intended for work, although if I had had you to work for, Kath, I might have overcome my natural laziness. Anyway, the masterpiece isn't done yet. It has been waiting for your return. You must still sit for it. I have missed you fearfully. Everybody has missed you. Even that duffer

Ronald, infatuated as he is with that idiot Gwendolen, even he has had the sense to miss you. By Jove, though, he is altered! Not the same fellow at all. I never go to his home. Don't care to meet those pretentious asses of people whom Gwendolen thinks such fine style. I don't see how you are going to get on with them, Kath. They'll hate you, and you'll hate them. It's their pretentiousness I can't swallow. It makes me positively sick. No, when I want to see Ronnie nowadays I go down to the organ-factory. That is good enough for me. No one is artificial there."

"Yes, Ronnie has altered," Katharine said. "But still, if he is happy, Willy, that is the main thing. And I think he is happy; although I am sure that he knows he is spending too much money. The truth is, Gwendolen has always been accustomed to these weird people, and likes to entertain them. Ronnie has nothing in common with them, but he worships Gwendolen, and loves to please her, and so he has persuaded himself that it is the right thing to keep in and up with them. Perhaps it is, from one point of view. It all depends on what one wants in life. I assure you I was glad enough to escape two or three days ago, and take refuge in the Langham until I could find a flat for myself. Gwendolen was jealous of me, too. I felt that at once."

"At the Langham, nonsense!" said Willy. "Come and live with us. That's the proper place for you until you have decided what to do. Come, Kath, do!"

Mrs Tonedale and Margaret, Willy's mother and sister, also begged Katharine to come and make their home her own; but she could not be persuaded to leave the hotel, and said in excuse that she was still feeling a wanderer to whom a home was not yet necessary. They did not coerce her, knowing her love of freedom, and knowing also that she understood there was always a warm welcome awaiting her. For they loved her dearly, in spite of the fact that she did not respond to Willy's adoration.

Margaret Tonedale had been Katharine's earliest school friend in the years that had gone. They had both been together at one of those prehistoric private schools, where the poor female victims used to get very little learning and much less food.

"It didn't matter so much about the learning," Kath said to Margaret that afternoon, when they were speaking about old times. "I always thought vaguely one could make that up somehow or other, but one could not make up the arrears of food; and, you know, I have remained hungry ever since."

"If you married me, Katharine, I would feed you splendidly," Willy said. "You'd soon forget that you had been starved at school. My dear girl, you should have a baron of beef every day!"

"Willy is still incorrigible in the way he proposes," Mrs Tonedale said,

laughing. "You must go on forgiving him, Katharine."

"Willy is a dear, and I don't mind when or how he proposes to me; whether with a poem, or a baron of beef, or a picture of the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots," said Katharine, smiling. "I think we still understand each other, and he knows that he will always get the same answer. Don't you, Willy?"

"Yes, my dear," answered Willy. "Same question, same answer. That is all I expect now."

"But, supposing some day I said 'Yes,' instead of 'No.' What would you do then?" suggested Katharine, teasing him.

"By Jove! Kath, I should go out of my senses," he said eagerly.

"My dear fellow, you must keep what brains you've got," she replied. "You know I've always said you had some, though they do work slowly."

"The machine's there, my dear," he said, "but it certainly doesn't work quickly. I'm quite willing to own that it doesn't work quickly. It never could, not even for love of you. Quite sure you couldn't stand a slow machine?"

"Quite sure," she answered. "It would send me frantic, Willy."

"Awfully hard on a man to have a slow machine when only a quick one will do the trick," he said. "Where's the justice of it, I should like to know? Tell me that."

"Oh, I don't pretend to know about justice," she said. "But I think there are plenty of other women who would not go frantic over the slow machine."

"Exactly," he said, pulling his moustache. "But I want the woman who would go frantic."

"Do be sensible, Will," she said. "Our temperaments are hopelessly different."

"Oh, hang temperament!" he said recklessly. "I hate the word."

"Everything turns on it," she answered. "I see that more and more."

"Oh, don't you begin to talk about temperaments," he said. "I can't stand it from you, Kath. We hear of nothing else now, since cousin Julia came to live in London. But, there she is, confound her! And now she will begin on her eternal subject: a dead friend who was done to death by her husband's temperamental cruelty. And mother and Margaret will listen in rapt delight. And if any one fresh is here, she tells the whole story from beginning to end. All I can say is, that if the woman was anything like cousin Julia, the husband must have had an awful time of it, and, if he is a sensible chap, must now be revelling in his freedom."

Katharine looked in the direction of the new-comer, and saw a well-dressed woman with a hard face. She was received by Margaret Tonedale, and joined the little group of friends who had come in whilst Katharine and Willy had been talking together at the other end of the big drawing-room.

"What was the name of the dead friend?" Katharine asked indifferently. She wondered afterwards why she had asked. It was nothing to her. At least she believed at the moment that it was nothing to her.

"The name was Thornton—Marianne Thornton," Willy said. "I ought to know, considering I've heard it about a million times. Even my brain would retain it after that."

Katharine rose from the sofa.

"Let us join the others, Willy," she said; and she took a chair not far off from Mrs Stanhope. Willy followed her reluctantly.

"Never thought you'd want to listen to that shrew of a woman," he said. "Besides, what good does she do to her dead friend? The whole thing is past and gone. And, as for temperaments, I tell you——"

"Hush, hush!" said Katharine, with a slight flush on her face, "I want to hear what she says."

"Oh, I am never tired of talking about it," Mrs Stanhope was saying. "You see, she was my great friend, my dearest friend on earth. And to lose her in such sad circumstances has made me feel tenfold more bereaved than I should have felt if she had just passed away from ordinary causes and chances of everyday life. As for her husband, he deserves all the unhappiness which remorse can measure out to him. He wrecked and ruined my poor friend's life. She was high-spirited and full of noble emotions. She had a fine natural disposition which he never even tried to understand. He never spared a thought to her. His thoughts were for himself, his work, and his son. I will do him the justice to say that he loved his boy. But he never gave a thought to his wife. She had sacrificed everything to his temperament; she sacrificed herself, her friends, her social obligations, her personal inclinations, her very love for her boy. No woman could have given more. She was alone in the world. Her husband had put her out into the biting cold of loneliness."

She paused for a moment, and Willy Tonedale drawled out:

"But you did say once, Cousin Julia, that she had a most fearful temper. No fellow can stand that sort of thing for long."

Mrs Stanhope glanced at him sternly, and said:

"Could you imagine your temper improved under such conditions? She went to him sweet-tempered enough; and, if she became a little hasty as the years went on, it was only right that she should have won that protection for herself. I encouraged her. '*Let yourself be felt, Marianne*,' I used to say."

"Poor devil of a man," whispered Willy, "if Marianne were anything like cousin Julia. By Jove! she must have made herself felt."

"It was temperamental strife," continued Mrs Stanhope, "and my poor darling was worsted. She was doomed from the beginning. She had no chance against that man's cruel neglect and selfishness. You had only to look at him to know that he had no emotions and no heart."

"That is not true," thought Katharine; but she remained silent, although increasingly stirred by Mrs Stanhope's incisive words.

"And," said Mrs Stanhope, "I know from my poor friend's confidences, how greatly she suffered from his unvarying unkindness. He killed her by a long series of tortures—temperamental tortures—and he must have given the finishing stroke to her on that last evening when, by his own confession at the inquest, they had had some miserable scene together, and he, no doubt to recover from his own outbreak of anger, went off riding, leaving her to right herself as well as she could. He knew that she had a delicate heart, and that she was always jeopardised by over-excitation. All this he knew well; and yet he never tried to make her life happy and calm. He never spared her anything. It was so like him to bring about a last access of unhappiness for her—and then leave her to die broken-hearted alone. I shall always say, that if ever a man killed a woman, Clifford Thornton killed his wife."

There was silence. Mrs Stanhope's words cut into every one's sensitiveness. Every one was suffering. But she herself leaned back as if resting from a newly accomplished task and well-earned triumph. She had raised her voice and testified once more against her dead friend's husband.

Then Katharine spoke.

"Well," she said, "it is a pitiful story; but nothing and no one will ever make me believe that Professor Thornton is a cruel man. He may have made mistakes, and probably did do so, being only human; but it is impossible to believe anything worse of him than that."

They all turned to her. Her face was flushed. There was a gleam in her eyes, and a curious tenseness in her manner. She looked as one who had divined some advancing danger, and was standing ready to ward off the evil from some friend loved and defenceless except for her.

"Do you know Professor Thornton, Kath?" Willy and Margaret exclaimed. "You never told us."

"I have met him," she answered. "I believe he is incapable of cruelty—physical, mental, or temperamental—quite incapable of it."

"I have known him for twelve years," said Mrs Stanhope in her steely voice. "And you?"

"I have known him for three days," said Katharine, undaunted. "But with what you would call 'temperamental knowledge,' Mrs Stanhope. I do not believe

he ever said one unkind word to any one."

"He is lucky to inspire such faith in a stranger," Mrs Stanhope remarked. "He is lucky to have such a staunch defender."

Katharine looked at her steadily for a moment, and then said:

"It is well for him that he has even a stranger to defend him, if you go about the world saying that he murdered his wife."

"You are scarcely accurate, Miss Frensham," Mrs Stanhope said, flushing. "I did not use that word."

"I am as accurate as the ordinary outside world would be in the circumstances," said Katharine.

"Ah, you are right there," drawled out Willy Tonedale. "The outside world knows nothing about temperamental tortures and temperamental murders, and all that sort of confounded subtleness. Torture is torture, and murder is murder to the outside world of ordinary dense people like myself—and others. I ought to see that man and warn him against you, cousin Julia—'pon my soul, I ought."

"Oh, there will be no need, Willy," she said with a short, nervous laugh. "No doubt Miss Frensham will do it instead of you."

Every one had stood up, by silent consent dissolving the meeting. Mrs Tonedale, Margaret, Willy, and the three or four visitors now looked towards Katharine again, wondering how she would meet Mrs Stanhope's parting thrust. She met it quite simply. She said:

"I will gladly warn him. Though I daresay he does not need to be warned. For at least Mrs Stanhope does not stab in the dark, does she?"

And directly she had spoken these words, she thought of the young boy, and a wave of sympathetic anxiety swept over her. Supposing that this woman did stab in the dark; supposing that out of mistaken loyalty to her dead friend's memory, she believed it to be a solemn duty to tell her version of the story to the young boy—Marianne's son—what then—what then? She was obviously such a bigot that she was capable of doing anything to forward the cause which she had at heart.

At that same moment Mrs Stanhope was saying to herself:

"The boy shall know—the boy shall know—it is only fair to my poor Marianne's memory that he should learn the true history of his mother's unhappy life."

The two women glanced at each other, and each read the other's thought. Then, after a hasty leave-taking, Mrs Stanhope hurried away. Katharine had an uneasy feeling that she ought to have followed her to her very door, and thus have made sure that Marianne's avenging colleague wrought no harm that afternoon to the boy and his father. She attempted several times to go, but was

prevented by her friends, who wished to hear some of the details of her three years' travels.

"I believe you want to chase cousin Julia and give her a ducking in the Serpentine," said Willy. "By Jove, I should like to see it!"

Katharine laughed.

"Willy," she said, "you're really becoming quite electrically intelligent. What is the cause of it?"

"You are, my dear," he said. "And also that adorable female relative of mine always rouses my indignation. Shades of my ancestors, what a tongue! How she would yarn to the boy if she ever got hold of him alone."

"That is what I've been thinking," Katharine said, turning to him earnestly. "It would be too cruel."

"But why should you mind?" he said. "After all, they are nothing to you—just strangers—that's all. Can't let yourself be torn in pieces for strangers. Better do it for me instead. My word, Kath, but you did speak up for him well."

"Did I?" she asked, with a sudden thrill in her voice.

Willy Tonedale glanced at her and saw a light on her face which had never shone for him—never.

And the cold crept into his faithful heart.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs Stanhope went on her way home fiercely indignant with this stranger who had dared to defend Clifford Thornton. In her own unreasoning anger she felt doubly fierce towards him for daring to have a defender. She had loved Marianne always, and she had disliked him always. She was of limited understanding—like all bigots. She knew nothing, and wished to know nothing about his side of the case. All she knew was that he had made her poor Marianne miserable, and had brought about her death. All she hoped now was that he might be miserable himself, for ever and ever. In memory of her dear, dead friend, she determined that her hand should always be against him. It was a simple creed, and therefore primitive and strong, like all primitive instincts. She knew even less than Marianne about sensitive brains, delicate nervous organisms, and the surcharged world of thought and imagination. When she spoke about temperament, it was as though a blacksmith were working at a goldsmith's goblet: as though a ropemaker were working at a spider's web. She honestly believed that Marianne had been sacrificed to him. She could not realise that Marianne was made of coarser fibre than Clifford Thornton. She knew nothing about Marianne's birth, antecedents, and environment. She was

quite unequipped with delicate understanding of human nature to judge between any two people—much less two married people—that unfathomable twin-mystery. But she did judge, and she condemned him without any reservations. And she thought of Marianne's son, and resolved in her own mind that he, too, should judge his father and condemn him.

"It is only right," she said to herself repeatedly, "that the boy should know, and should carry in his mind a tender memory of his mother. His father will tell him only cruel things about her. She shall not have that injustice done to her."

She did not take into account the tenderness of Alan's years; she had no instincts of mercy and pity for his young thoughts, and his young birthright of forgetfulness. She did not stop to imagine that Marianne herself would have wished him to be spared. It never entered her mind that Marianne herself would have said:

"Let the boy be—he is only a boy—let him be—what does it all matter now? and he is so young still—let him be."

She never thought of that. She filled a cup of poison ready to put to his lips at the first opportunity: the poison of disbelief and doubt.

"I must find some means of seeing him," she said to herself. "Marianne shall not have the injustice of being misinterpreted."

Full of these thoughts she paused before going into Hyde Park.

"Shall I walk through the Park, or shall I go straight to St. James's Mansions?" she asked herself. "I think I will go straight home. I am tired."

But after she had advanced a few steps, she turned back and passed into the Park, impelled to do so against her will. It was a charming evening at the beginning of April. The spring had come early, and the borders were gay with flowers. A young boy came along, whistling softly. He stopped to look at some of the beds, and then went on again. After all, he thought, it was not so bad going for this journey to Japan. And all the fellows had said they envied him. And father was better already. And that was a bully new camera they had bought to-day. And, by Jove, he had enjoyed himself yesterday. And——

He looked up and saw Mrs Stanhope.

"Alan," she said in her steely voice, which had always jarred on him. His face clouded over. His heart sank. He had always disliked her.

"Alan," she said, "I have wanted to see you. I was thinking of you this very moment. I was by your mother's grave yesterday. Shall we sit down here? It is not cold this evening."

She had kept his hand, and led him to the nearest bench. He disengaged his hand, and shrank a little from her. She did not notice that.

"Yes," she repeated. "I stood by your mother's grave yesterday. It is a

beautiful stone, simple but beautiful."

"Father and I liked it," the boy said a little nervously. "We—we went there to say good-bye before—before going away, you know."

"Ah," she said, "you are going away then? Are you going to leave 'Falun'?"

"Yes," he said, "for a few months. Father is not well."

There was a pause, and then she said suddenly:

"Alan, you will never forget your dear mother, will you? She died in such a sad, sad way—it breaks one's heart to think of it—doesn't it?—all alone—without a kind word—a kind look—nothing—no one near her—no one to help her—alone."

The boy bit his lips. Something pulled at his heartstrings.

"You must always think lovingly of her," she continued. "You must always think the very best of her. She was a grand, noble woman who had not been understood. When you are older, you will see it all clearly for yourself—see it with your own eyes, not with any one else's eyes, and then you will know how unhappy she was, and how sad she was all—all the days of her married life. Poor darling, she was lonely in life and lonely in death—you must never forget that—you must be loyal to her—you, her son. You were good to her; you loved her; you would have loved her more if—if your father had allowed you, Alan."

The boy's face was rigid.

"Father never stopped me from loving mother," he said, half to himself.

"Ah," she said bitterly, "when you are older you will understand it all only too well. And meanwhile be loyal to her memory—you, her son."

The boy's face softened again. The tears came into his eyes. The appeal to his sonship touched him deeply. He said nothing, but Mrs Stanhope realised that his silence was charged with grief; for she saw the tears in his eyes, the flush on his face, and the quivering of his mouth.

"Alan," she went on, "and the pity—the pity of it all. She might be here with us now—there was no reason for her death; it is that which makes it so sad. If she had had some terrible illness, one might be comforted a little by her release; but to be cut off like this—suddenly—and in this sad, sad way—ah, how your poor father must tear his heart to remember that he had angry words with her that night—to think that but for that unfortunate incident she might be alive this very moment—to think——"

She stopped suddenly, for she had already said more than she intended. Alan turned his face to her. The flush had gone now. He looked deadly pale.

"Father was always, always good to mother," he said, in a strained tone of voice. "You were not always with us. You couldn't know."

"No, no—of course I could not know all," she said soothingly; and again she

put her hand on his arm. And again he freed himself.

"But this I do know," she continued with great gentleness, "that you have lost a noble and unselfish mother who loved you with her whole heart—more than you ever knew. But I knew. I knew all her hopes and fears and ambitions for you; and I knew, too, how she yearned for the time when you would love her more and more, and understand her more and more. For a mother clings heart and soul to her son, Alan. If he does not love her, she mourns always, always."

She rose from the bench; and he rose too, his young heart torn and his young spirit troubled. He stood there looking down on the ground, overpowered with many emotions.

"Good-bye, Alan," she said. "And remember you have a friend in me. Come to me in trouble, and I will not fail you—for your dear mother's sake."

She left him, and he lingered for a moment scratching the ground with his stick. Then he went on his way to the Langham. He was not whistling now. He ran up against an old gentleman.

"Look out where you're going, my boy!" the old man said angrily. "Dreaming, I suppose. Boys didn't dream in my time. I've no patience with this generation."

At the hotel he saw Katharine, who was standing in the hall giving some instructions to the porter. She had just come back from the Tonedales, whom she had left as soon as she could. She had been thinking of him all the time, of him and his father and that metallic woman; and she could not rest until she was back again at the Langham, mounting guard, as it were, over these strangers who had come so unexpectedly into her life. She greeted the boy and spoke some kindly words, which brought a faint smile into his face.

But he slipped away from her, and locked himself up in his room.

CHAPTER XI.

Katharine spent that night wondering what she could say to Professor Thornton to warn him against Mrs Stanhope's biting tongue. She felt that she must warn him, even at the risk of seeming to intrude on the privacy of his personal concerns. She believed that it would be the part of a coward to shirk the task, and yet she dreaded to undertake it. She said to herself a hundred times over that there was no reason why she should interfere; they were nothing to her —these strangers, their troubles, their tragedy were nothing to her. That was the common-sense way of looking at the whole matter. They had their own lives to live. And she had hers. In a day or two their chance companionship would be a thing of the past. Why should she be troubled about them? Willy Tonedale was right. One could not take every one's burden and carry it. Ah, there was no

common-sense about the matter; but there was something else, something infinitely more compelling than calm reason—the heart's insistence.

"I must tell him," she said. And her heart was lighter when she decided that. Then came the difficulty of deciding what to say. She did not solve that problem. She fell asleep and dreamed, and when she awoke, she said:

"What was it I dreamed I said to him? Ah, I remember I said that——Ah! it has gone again."

But it came back to her when she stood with Clifford Thornton alone in the reading-room. She made no preliminaries, she offered no excuses; she behaved exactly as though nothing else could be done by her in the circumstances, as though he and she were in some desolate region alone together, and she saw some terrible danger threatening him, and cried:

"Look out! Beware!"

"Professor Thornton," she said, "yesterday I met an enemy of yours. It sounds melodramatic, perhaps, to speak of an enemy. Nevertheless, that was what she appeared to me. You probably know who she is—a Mrs Stanhope. But you cannot know how she speaks of you. No one could imagine it, unless one heard it for oneself."

His drawn face seemed to become thinner as she spoke.

"She has always disliked me," he said in a painfully strained voice.

"It is not merely dislike, it is malice," Katharine said. "It would not matter so much if you were by yourself in the world. But there is the boy to think of. Keep him away from her. She might poison his heart against you. It would be cruel for him, and cruel for you."

The expression of intense anxiety on the man's face filled Katharine's heart with pity.

"Ah," he said, as if the words were torn from him. "That is the bitterness of it; he might turn against me simply and solely because he could not understand; he ——"

He broke off and looked at Katharine hopelessly. He appeared to be appealing to her for help in his distress; she could almost have heard his voice saying:

"What shall I do—what shall I do? Help me."

But the next moment his pride and reserve got the better of his momentary weakness. He gathered himself together. He asked for no details, and made no attempt to justify himself in her eyes. He did not even give a passing thought as to how much or how little she knew of his sad story. He felt instinctively that she believed in him.

He came across to her, and leaned over the table by which she was standing.

"It was beautiful of you to warn me," he said quite simply. "I know it could

not have been easy. But it was the act of a true friend."

Then he went away. And Katharine, alone with her thoughts, threw herself into the arm-chair and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

Clifford Thornton passed on from that moment to a new chapter in his heart's history. He was too stern with himself to yield without a struggle to even any secret locked-up happiness; and so he tried to turn from the thought of Katharine Frensham as from something altogether out of his horizon. But, against his wishes, bright hopes sprang up within him. Unbidden and harshly rebuked possibilities of joy pressed themselves importunately on him. A fair vision of a fresh life rose before him. He dispelled it angrily, and returned to his former self, with the old tyranny of Marianne chafing him, and the added anxiety concerning his young son's love and loyalty. Nevertheless, he had passed on. He was of course too proud to ask Katharine what accusation Mrs Stanhope had brought against him, and too reserved to thank her the next morning for her words of warning. He did not even tell her that he had made up his mind to take an earlier boat to New York, and thus remove Alan from Mrs Stanhope's influence. His secret belief that he was responsible for Marianne's death made him morbidly anxious to keep Alan away from any one who might come between them. And Katharine Frensham's allusion to Mrs Stanhope's attitude towards him made him doubly apprehensive of her powers of making mischief. He knew that she had unceasingly stirred up strife between himself and Marianne, and he considered her capable of at least making the attempt to cause a breach between himself and his son. He knew that she disliked him, and that she believed he had always been hard and unkind to poor Marianne. Many a time Marianne herself had said to him:

"Julia at least appreciates and understands me; she at least knows of my unhappiness and your unkind indifference."

What would she say to Alan if by chance he passed her way? Alan, too, had always disliked her; he, too, had felt that she was an enemy to his father and himself; nevertheless she would certainly be able to influence him, for the very reason that his mother had died in circumstances of great sadness, and generous young hearts remember only the best things of the dead. Marianne would conquer as she had always conquered, and the boy's heart would turn from his father.

Clifford was greatly troubled.

"I must have my boy's love, I must have his loyalty," he said. "I cannot do

without it. I desire with all my heart that he should think lovingly of his mother; but he must not, shall not turn from me. I have done nothing to deserve that he should not love me. He shall not see that woman if I can help it. She shall not have the chance of saying one word against me. His dear young heart shall keep its love and trust. The sadness of this tragedy in our lives will pass from him; it is passing from him even now. And the wound which I, in my selfishness, inflicted, shall be healed with a love which father never gave to son before. He must and shall believe in me. If I have missed other things, at least I will wrest this from life. She may say what she likes to the whole world, but not to him; he would not understand. If he were older, I would take my chance of his belief or disbelief. But the young judge and are hard."

Then in the midst of his distress he remembered Katharine, and again that vision rose before him. He tried to turn from it, but in vain.

"She believed in me," he said. "Whatever that woman may have said to her, she believed in me."

He went back to the hotel buoyed up in spite of himself, and found Alan moping in the reading-room. The boy looked miserable, and appeared to have no heart for anything that was suggested. Clifford remembered that he had been quiet at breakfast, and had eaten nothing. He had slipped away, evidently wanting to be alone. His father glanced at him with some uneasiness.

"What's the matter?" he asked kindly.

"Nothing," said Alan a little roughly, and he turned away with a slight flush on his face.

"Well, we shall soon be off," Clifford said. "I have changed our berths for a week earlier. In a fortnight we shall be in New York; then on we go to San Francisco, and so on to Japan. Knutty was right to send us away from 'Falun.' We shall both feel better for the change. I shall get rid of my moods and become quite a jolly companion for you. We'll have such splendid times. Won't we?"

"Yes," said Alan, but without any ring in his voice.

The father stood looking sad and puzzled.

"I am just going out to buy some books," he said. "Come, too?"

Alan shook his head.

"No, father," he said. "I thought I'd like to read."

Clifford nodded and went out.

"It will be all right between us when we are off on our travels," he thought. "We ought to have started long ago. I am glad I have berths for an earlier date. It will be better for him, and for me. And yet——"

He made a gesture of impatience with himself.

"It is high time that I took a journey," he said sternly.

He bought several dry treatises on scientific subjects, a new book on architecture for Alan, and a brochure on Alan de Walsingham. He was greatly pleased with this.

"Alan will be glad," he said. And then he found an amusing book about balloons, also for Alan. And after this he saw a Baedeker for Norway and Denmark.

"I should like Miss Frensham to have that from me," he said, as he handled it dreamily.

He hesitated over it, put it aside sternly, then went back to it, hesitated again, and finally bought it. He had a guilty smile on his face when he carried it off.

"After all, why not?" he said in excuse to himself.

Knutty would have been glad to know that he had allowed himself to go even thus far. Surely again she would have whispered, "I see daylight!"

He passed along Oxford Street, stopping now and then to look at the shop windows. He was thinking all the time what he should buy for Alan. He went back armed with books, chocolates, new penknives, sketch-blocks, some fresh kind of printing-paper, and a little pocket microscope.

The buying of that guide-book had exhilarated him astonishingly. He had the uplifting joy that afternoon of believing in himself; and because he believed in himself, he was feeling for the moment that all things were possible to him: to keep his boy's love, to take a reasonable view of poor Marianne's death, to mend his torn spirit, to lift his head, to lift his heart, and being free from harassment, to use to better advantage the gifts of his intellect, and—to pass on. He knew that this mood would change, but whilst it was on him he was grateful and almost jubilant.

"What should we poor mortals do unless we did believe in ourselves sometimes?" he said. "It is our moments of self-confidence which carry us through our years of self-doubting."

He came in like a schoolboy, tremendously pleased with his shopping, especially with that guide-book. He hurried to the reading-room, but Alan was not there; and so he hastened to the boy's bedroom, where he found him moping as before. One by one, with unconcealed eagerness and triumph, Clifford displayed his treasures. Alan did not seem to care. He scarcely looked at them, and even the pocket-microscope aroused no enthusiasm in him. Clifford gave no sign of noticing the boy's indifference and ungraciousness; but he was disappointed, and longed to tell Knutty. In the evening Alan was still in the same mood, and Clifford made up his mind to speak to him in the morning. They were both so reserved, that speech was not easy to either of them when it had to do with their inmost thoughts; and Clifford knew that Alan was suffering, not

sulking. He let the boy go off to bed alone, and sat in the reading-room by himself.

All the old sadness came as a wave over him, and swept everything else from him. There was a rift in the lute; he had been conscious of it ever since Marianne's death. Knutty had laughed at his fears; but even she had noticed the boy's strained manner, and had tried to ease the tension. And then for a time things had gone better, and Alan had come nearer to his father again, back, indeed, to the old tender comradeship so dear to both of them. But now he was retreating once more. Clifford knew by instinct that Marianne was between them: Marianne in all her imperiousness, tenfold more imperious because of her tragic death.

An hour or so went by, and Clifford still lingered, given over to sad memories and anxious fears. Two or three people came in, glanced at the evening papers, and hurried away. He did not look up. But when Katharine opened the door, he knew. In spite of himself he came out of his sad reveries; in spite of himself a passionate gladness seized the man's heart. He forgot Marianne, forgot Mrs Stanhope. He forgot Alan. He forgot everything.

He threw all his former life, with its failures and burdens, to the winds, and rushed recklessly on, free for the moment—gloriously free—with the song of spring and hope resounding in his ears and urging him onwards, onwards!

He rose at once and went to meet her.

"Ah," he said. "I must just go and fetch that book about Denmark. I want to tell you several things about my old Knutty's country. I will not be one moment gone."

He hurried away, leaving her, too, with the song of love and life and hope echoing around her. Her loneliness had passed from her.

He ran up the stairs to his bedroom, found the book, and was just running down again, when he paused outside his boy's room, which was opposite to his own.

"I will slip in and see if he is asleep," he thought. "Then my mind will be easier about him."

He opened the door gently, treading as softly as a loving mother might tread who has come in the stealth of the night to see if all was well with the beloved bairns; to touch each one on the dear head, as in blessing, to smile at each one and then creep out again, satisfied and comforted. Alan was sleeping, but restlessly. The bedclothes were thrown off him, and he was murmuring something in his dreams. His father bent over him and covered him up. He did not wake, but went on, whispering a few disconnected words. Clifford bent to listen, and he heard, "*Mother ... Mrs Stanhope*...." Then there came a sort of sob.

The man's heart stood still. He waited with bowed head. The boy was dreaming of his mother. Was he perhaps remembering in his dream how he used to come and say to his father, "Mother has been with Mrs Stanhope to-day"? That was the only comment on Marianne which ever passed between father and son; it was their code, their signal of danger. Was it that? Or what was it? What was troubling him?

Suddenly the thought flashed through the man's mind:

"*Has he seen that woman somewhere?*"

And again the old miserable fear took possession of him. He longed to kneel down by the side of the bed and beg his little son to tell him everything that was in his heart, so that nothing and no one might ever come between them. He knew that when the morrow came he himself would be too proud and reserved to ask, and his boy too proud and reserved to own to any secret grief, however great. He had been like that himself as a boy—he was scarcely any different now—he, a grown man; he understood so well this terrible stone wall of reserve which the prisoners themselves would fain pierce. Supposing he were to waken the boy now and ask him, this very moment? Perhaps it would be easier to tell, this very moment.

He did not waken him after all; for Alan's restlessness subsided suddenly, and he passed into quiet sleep. So Clifford stole out of the room and stood waiting at the top of the staircase, in doubt as to whether he should go down or not. At last he went down, impelled against his will. Katharine saw at once the change of expression on his face.

"I feel greatly troubled, Miss Frensham," he said in his half-reluctant way. "My boy has been unhappy all the day, and now he is talking in his sleep about —about that Mrs Stanhope. After what you told me, I hope with all my heart that she has not seen him."

"Oh no, no. It can only be a coincidence," Katharine said.

"Do you really think so?" he said, with a faint smile on his troubled face.

"Indeed I do," she answered emphatically.

"Ah," he said, "the worst of it is that I do not believe in coincidences. There is a secret threadless thread of communication running through the whole region of thought and feeling and event."

"Then I must find something else to say to you," Katharine said, still undaunted.

And she looked at him, and for the very life of her she could not keep back the words which came with a rush to her lips:

"Believe in yourself more, Professor Thornton, as I do."

CHAPTER XIII.

After a few days Clifford Thornton and his boy started for New York, and Katharine was left once more alone in heart and spirit. She had no idea of the great struggle which had been going on in the man's mind: a double encounter with the past tragedy of his life and the future possibilities of love and happiness. When he said goodbye to her, there seemed to be no sign of regret over the parting which had come as a matter of course. She could not know that behind his impenetrable manner was concealed a passionate longing which appalled him by its insistence and intensity. She could not know that his hurried departure was out of sternness to himself, as well as out of consideration for the boy's well-being. She could not know that once, twice, several times he had nearly thrown up the whole journey for the sake of staying longer near her—in her presence. If she could have known this, she would have been comforted. But she only saw that a grave, sad man had gone back to his past. There had been a moment of travelling on; for that moment they had travelled together. But now the brief journey was over. She lived it all over again: she went through the pleasant meetings, the grave impersonal talks, the sudden passings on, the sudden retreats: the feeling of fellowship, the feeling of aloofness: her championship of him to Mrs Stanhope: her championship of him to himself: her entire belief in him openly expressed direct to him.

"My belief in him waits for him whether he wants it or not. And I am glad that he knows it," she said to herself proudly.

But in her heart of hearts she knew that he wanted it. If she had not known it, she might, for all her brave show of spirit, have regretted her impulsive outcry.

But she regretted nothing—nothing except that he had gone. She thought of the men who had wanted to marry her, men unburdened with sad histories and memories, men to whom life had been joyous, and circumstance favourable. She had pushed them all aside without a single pang. But this stranger, who was no stranger, and who was claimed by his past, Katharine yearned to detain. But he had gone.

She gathered herself together to pass on. She looked about for a flat, and found what she wanted across Westminster Bridge, in Stangate. There she established herself, and began to see some of her old friends, and take a fresh survey of London. Katharine was intensely patriotic, and having been three years from home, was eager to see once more the favourite sights and places to which absence had lent a glamour of love and romance. She spent hours in her own surroundings: by the Embankment, in the Abbey, round about the Houses of

Parliament. She sat in the Abbey, enjoying the dim light and hushed silence of the Past. Lonely thoughts did not come to her there. There, the personal fades from one. One is caught up on wings. And if the organ should play, the throb of the outside life is stilled.

She haunted Trafalgar Square. She watched the Horse Guards change sentry. She went down to the City, sat in St Paul's, visited the Guildhall. Her friends laughed lovingly at her.

"Ah!" she answered; "go and live out of the old country for a few years, and if you don't feel a thrill when you return, you are not worthy of having been born in England."

She went down to the Natural History Museum. She spent hours there, lingering in the Mineral-room, where she had been with Clifford Thornton and his boy. It comforted her to be there. She went over all the beautiful things he had pointed out to her; she recalled how an unknown mysterious subject had become as a romance full of wonder and interest.

She had meetings with the three devoted musicians, lunching with them at restaurants representative of their respective nationalities. Ronald did not go with her.

"No use asking 'brother,'" said Signor Luigi, waving his arms and giving a sort of leap in the air. "Maccaroni of my native land! *I* will do the *rôle* of the adorable lady—the Signora Grundy!"

"No use asking 'brother,'" said Monsieur Gervais. "'Brother' is a grand gentleman now, and goes to 'Princes.' He has the stiff necks now."

"No use asking 'brother,'" said Herr Edelhart. "'Brother' likes not to come without madame his wife, and madame does not love the quartette, does not admire my wunderbar tone. Donner wetter! what a tone I have!"

Katharine laughed with them and at them, and loved to be in their company, but her heart was far away; and in the midst of the fun, her thoughts went straying to that man who had come in that unexpected way into her life—and gone. She fretted, and there was no one in whom she could have confided. Ronnie was too much taken up with his own affairs and his passionate adoration of his wife to have any real mental leisure for her. Katharine saw that great love, even as great sorrow, shuts the whole world out. She knew herself excluded from his inner shrine, whilst his outward social surroundings were increasingly uncongenial to her. She was troubled about him, too. He looked harassed, and had lost the old lightheartedness of three years ago. She tried in her kindly way to probe him; but in vain. She turned away sadly, recognising that she was no longer his confidante, and he was no longer hers.

She was happier with the Tonedales; and to them she went from time to time

during those sad weeks, and continued to sit to Willy for that eternal portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots.

"Thank Heaven, Kath," he said one day, "you still have some leisure. No one has any leisure nowadays. Even Margaret has got dragged by the scruff of the neck into what my delightful cousin Julia calls 'a strenuous life.' Always at something, always doing something for some one who doesn't want that something done; always working at some cause. Great Scott, Kath! I don't mind you going into business so much, but if you take up a Cause, I shall commit suicide! Darling cousin Julia is great on Causes, you know. Good Heavens! What a tongue that woman has! If Causes want tongues, then she ought to get permanent employment without any difficulty. By Jove! though, you gave it to her that day, didn't you?"

Katharine had arrived in a state of great depression on that afternoon; and when Willy began speaking of Mrs Stanhope, her thoughts turned at once to Clifford Thornton, and her face became full of grief. Willy noticed the change in her expression, but went on painting silently. When he looked at her again, he saw tears in her eyes. He put down palette and brush and came to her. He saw at once that something was wrong with her, and all his kindest feelings of concern sprang up to protect her.

"Why, Kath," he said, "what's the matter with you? Any one been unkind to you? By Jove! I'll let them know if they have. They won't do it a second time. You should have heard me bullyragging cousin Julia. I gave her a bit of my mind for being so disagreeable to you the other day. What is wrong, Kath? Tell me, my dear."

She looked at him in a forlorn way.

"I am unhappy, Willy," she said; "that's what is wrong."

"Well, you might at least tell me what it is, my dear," he said. "You know I would do anything to help you. Anything on earth."

"You cannot help me," she said listlessly. "It is something I have to fight out in myself, old fellow."

He glanced at her, and then said:

"I believe we have known each other twenty years, Kath."

She nodded assent.

"Then I think the least you can do for me, if you can't love me, is to let me be your best friend," he said. "We all know that Ronnie is so taken up with Gwendolen that he has no thought for any one else just now. But I—I have no wife. And my mind is at leisure, and my brain too—such as it is—and always at your service, as you know."

"If only I had a profession," Katharine said. "That has been my mistake all

along, Willy. Every one ought to have a calling—no matter what it is; and it won't fail them in moments of poverty and trouble and—and desolation."

"So you are feeling desolate," he said sadly, "I knew you would when you came back and realised that Ronnie was married. I dreaded it for you."

"It is not only that," she answered, "though I have felt that bitterly. But——"

"Well?" he said, turning to her.

"I should like to tell you, Willy," she replied tremblingly—"but it is not fair on you."

"I know what it is," he said quite quietly, but with a sudden illumination on his face. "You have fallen in love with that stranger, Professor Thornton, Kath."

There was no answer, no sign. Katharine sat rigid and speechless.

"It would be fairer to tell me," he said, "fairer and kinder. Believe me."

"Yes; I have fallen in love with the stranger," she answered gently; and as she thought of him afresh, the tears streamed down her cheeks.

Willy Tonedale watched her a moment.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I can't pretend to be glad; but, of course, you had to love some one sooner or later—even I knew that."

"I wish I had something else to tell you, Willy," she said simply, "something to make you happy; but I can't help myself, can I?"

"No, my dear," he said in a low voice. "'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' And you have never been anything except your own frank splendid self to me."

"It came over me the moment I saw him," Katharine said, half to herself. "I knew nothing about him, but I seemed to have come suddenly out of a lonely wilderness—such a lonely wilderness—and found him. Then I heard part of his history, and it filled me with great pity, as it does now. And then we met again in the hotel. It was so strange that we should meet there, each knowing nothing of the other. And yet it seemed natural to be together; it seemed almost to be the continuation, not the beginning, of something. And then—that's all, Willy. He has gone his way."

"He will never forget you," Willy said dreamily. "He could not if he wished."

"I suppose if I were a well-balanced sort of person," Katharine went on, "with the regulation mind which a regulation woman is supposed to have, I ought not to have allowed myself to think twice of him—him so recently bereaved of his wife. And, having allowed it, I ought to be prepared to receive the reproaches of all the British matrons in the world. I know all that, and yet I have not been able to help myself, Willy, though I've been ashamed, too."

"There was no reason for you to be ashamed," he said. "She had died and gone her way before you even saw him. Don't be miserable about that, Kath. You could not do anything mean or horrible if you tried till Doomsday."

"How you believe in me, Willy!" she exclaimed. "That makes me ashamed. But it is a great comfort, too."

"Kath," he said sadly, "I knew that you loved him when you spoke up for him to cousin Julia. Your face told me that."

And then there was a silence between them. Willy had lit a cigar, and he walked up and down the studio, his eyes fixed on the floor. At last he raised his head, and stood still in front of her.

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Oh, I am going to gather myself together somehow," she replied, with something of her old vivacity. "One has to live."

"Yes, yes, you must do that, and you must take comfort and courage," he said. "He cannot forget you."

"But Willy," she cried, as though in sudden pain; "but he is a man sad and overburdened—a man with a broken spirit—perhaps if things had been different—but now——"

Willy came nearer. His face was pale and his eyes were a little dim.

"Look here, Kath," he said, "you take my word for it, you were not born for unhappiness. By Jove! and you shan't have it either. You were meant for all the best and brightest things in the world, and, by Jove! you shall have them. I'll help you to get them—we'll all help you to get them; you must have anything you want—any one you want, only you mustn't be unhappy. I can't stand that—never could stand that—always was a fool about you, Kath—always shall be one—never could change if I wanted to; don't want to—unless—unless I could have been the man with the broken spirit."

Then Katharine forgot about herself and remembered only Willy. All her kind and generous feelings broke through the barrier of her grief. She sprang to her feet, brushed away her tears, and turned to him with impetuous eagerness.

"Willy," she said, "I've been a selfish brute pouring out my troubles to you in this way—poor old fellow! What have I done to you in return for your faithful kindness of all these years? Given you pain and disappointment and sadness, and never a glimmer of hope, and now my own selfish confidence about my feelings for another man. What can I do to ease your kind, unselfish heart? I know there is not much I can do—but there must be something. Let me do it, whatever it is."

A tumult came into Willy's heart. A light came into his eyes. He quenched the light; he quelled the tumult for her dear sake.

"There is one thing you can do for me, Kath," he said in a voice which trembled; "don't ever regret you trusted me and told me. You couldn't have told every one. It had to be the right person. Don't take that from me. And, you see, I knew. I knew by instinct. So don't reproach yourself. You've never been anything

else except a brick to me ever since I can remember you."

She shook her head in deprecation of his praise, and said gently:

"I will never regret that I trusted you, Willy."

"Thank you, my dear," he said, with more of his old drawling manner again. "And now let's have another shot at my immortal masterpiece. That's right, Kath. Dry your eyes. Pull yourself together like Mary Queen of Scots did on the scaffold. By Jove! she must have been a stunner! I shall never believe that when her head dropped off, it was the head of a wizened-up old woman. If that was the truth, I don't want the truth. By Jove! here's tea. Margaret has gone off to a Cause, and mother has gone to a dentist and then to a Christian Science meeting. Those Christian Scientists pretend they can do without doctors, but they stick to the dentists right enough. No, I'll pour out the tea, Kath. You stay where you are, on the scaffold—I mean the platform. My word, what a brain I have! It isn't only slow, but it's so deucèd confused, isn't it?"

So he tried to cheer her; and when he took her to her home that afternoon, she had regained her outward composure, and felt all the better for having had the blessing of a true friend's kindness. His last words were, "Don't you dare to regret that you trusted me."

But when he was alone, his face looked ashen and sad, and his eyes had a world of grief in them. For that evening, at least, Willy Tonedale, his beautiful features illuminated by love and loss, might well have stood for the portrait of a man with a broken spirit.

And whilst he was passing through his hour of sadness, Katharine was reading a letter from the Danish botanists, Ejnar and Gerda Ebbesen, Knutty's nephew and niece. They wrote in answer to her letter to say that they had left Denmark and were spending their holidays at a Norwegian farm. They suggested that she might be inclined to bring the botanical parcel to them there. Their aunt was with them, and she was most interested to hear that Miss Frensham had made the acquaintance of her Englishman and his boy.

"I shall go," Katharine said. "There is nothing to prevent me."

"I shall see the old Dane whom he loves," she said, with a glow of warmth in

her heart.

In a few days she packed up and went to Norway.

PART II.
IN NORWAY.

CHAPTER I.[C]

Fröken Knudsgaard pretended to grumble a good deal at having to leave Copenhagen and go to Norway with Gerda and Ejnar. But there was no help for it. It was a time-honoured custom that she spent the whole summer with her nephew and niece. It was true that they saw each other constantly all through the year, for Tante lived opposite the Orstedpark, and the botanists, who lived at Frederiksberg, passed that way every time they went to the Botanic Museum and Library, and would never have neglected to run in for a chat. Sometimes, also, they lunched with her in her cosy little home, where, in the spring, she saw the limes of the Boulevard unfold their tender leaves, and where in summer she watched the sun disappear in the north-west behind the trees. It was indeed a pretty little home, made, so she said, wickedly comfortable by her Clifford's kindness.

But these fragments of companionship were not considered enough by the botanists; and summer was the time when they claimed Tante for their own, whether she liked it or not. But of course she liked it; only she felt it to be her duty as a healthy human being to have a permanent grievance.

"Don't talk to me about giving up my grievances," she said. "All right-minded people ought to have them. Rise above them, indeed! Thank you! I don't want to rise above anything!"

However, after the usual formality of grumbling, Tante was charmed at the prospect of having a change. Ejnar had set his heart on going to the Gudbrandsdal to find a particular kind of shrub which grew only in one district of that great valley. He was a gentle fellow, except where his botanical investigations were concerned. But if any one thwarted him over his work, he became quite violent. Tante Knudsgaard used to look at him sometimes when he was angry, and say in her quaint way:

"Kjaere, one would think you were an anarchist instead of a harmless botanist. One would think you spent your days with dynamite instead of with innocent flowers and mosses, which don't explode."

Gerda, also a botanist, and just as clever and distinguished as her husband,

wished specially to go up to Tromsö, to find some particular kind of saxifrage, growing nowhere in Europe except on the Tromsdalstind.

But Tante struck.

"No," she said. "You don't get me to go up there within the Arctic circle. I've had quite enough of icebergs this spring with my two poor icebergs in England. Poor darlings! I suppose they have reached America by now. I ought to be hearing soon."

"I cannot imagine why you made them go so far," Gerda said.

"When people are in trouble they must always go a long way," said Tante. "Even if they come back the next moment."

"You might have sent them to Tromsö," Gerda remarked, with a grim smile. "That is almost as far. And then we could all have gone and found the saxifrage. You would have been willing enough to go if you had had your Englishman with you."

"Perhaps; who knows?" replied Tante. "The human heart is a wayward thing. I think you have never heard me say otherwise. But why not go to Tromsö by yourself, dear one? You won't feel at all lonely if you have the companionship of the saxifrage. You won't miss Ejnar and me in the least. You won't want to come back the next moment after you have left us. Oh, no! You won't miss us."

"No," answered Gerda, giving her a hug. "But you would miss me. And Ejnar would be wretched if he hadn't me to quarrel with."

"Yes, you must have your quarrels," said Tante gravely. "All well-conducted botanists would go to perdition without two or three quarrels a-week. You must stay, Gerda, if only for the sake of science. Only, give in without a mortal battle this time, and let us go peacefully to the Gudbrandsdal. Ejnar has the dynamite-look on his face. He has set his heart on that shrub. Heaven and St Olaf help us! We must get it!—even if we have to scale mountains. Imagine me scaling mountains, dear one. Have pity on me, and come and help!"

Gerda gave way; a mortal battle was avoided, the dynamite-look disappeared from Ejnar's gentle face, and all three started off for Norway in good spirits and admirable tempers. Ejnar was a tall man, thin, and dark for a Dane. He looked rather 'comatose,' as Tante called him, except when his botanical emotions were aroused. Then he sprang into life and became an inspired being, with all the sublime beauty of intelligence on his face. He only cared for botany, Gerda, and Tante Knudsgaard. He did not positively dislike music, and did not always go out of the room when Gerda sang. He was a silent fellow, and scarcely ever laughed, except over his work, and then sometimes he would give forth peals of hearty laughter most refreshing to hear and quite boyish. That was when he had done some satisfactory bit of difficult classification. Gerda, being musical as

well as botanical, was rather more human. She was of middle height, slight, and wonderfully fair, with an abundance of fair hair, and a pair of glacier-blue eyes. She sang gloriously in a wild, untrained manner which thrilled through every one except Ejnar. He had, however, the greatest and most generous admiration of her knowledge as a botanist, and was most particular that every paper with which she had helped him, should bear her name as well as his. In fact, in his way he loved her dearly. Their quarrels were entirely scientific, never human. In their simple way they led an almost ideal life, for they were free to work in an untrammelled fashion at the subjects they loved, Ejnar holding no official position in connection with his work, but being sleeping partner in his brother's glove-factory in Christianhavn. They were very happy together, and although Gerda had a restless theory that it was ridiculous to be always together, she had been utterly miserable on the one occasion when she had gone off alone, and had returned the next day. Tante, remembering this, teased her continually, of course; and when the good ship brought them to Christiania, she said to her:

"Are you quite sure you are not wanting to go off to Tromsö alone? You could come back the next minute, you know, quite easily."

"Nå," answered Gerda gaily. "I prefer to stay and be teased!"

They saw the sights of Christiania, spending most of the time in the Botanical Department of the University; and then took the train up to the Gudbrandsdal, the largest and most fertile valley in Norway. They had engaged rooms for themselves at a large Gaard (farmhouse) owned by rich peasants of noble lineage, who in the summer months took a few guests into their spacious dwelling-place. The Gaard had a splendid situation, lying on the mountain-side, about two thousand feet above sea-level, and commanding a far-stretching view of the great valley, which was spread out generously below, dotted with hundreds of farms, and with two shining rivers flowing on separately, meeting each other, and then passing on together. Looking down on all those homesteads, one was reminded all the time of the words of the Norwegian poet, who sings of Norway, the land of a thousand homes. Red Gaards, being new buildings added to the original family-home of many generations: bright red, standing out boldly and picturesquely against the grain fields and the green of the firs and birches. Dark-brown, almost black Gaards, burnt to their deep dye by the ever-working hand of Time. Fine old Gaards, not built of puny slices of wood with which builders content themselves in these mean-spirited days; but fashioned of entire tree-trunks, grand old fellows of the giant forests of the past. Dense masses of firs and birches: down in the valley and advancing boldly up the mountain-sides, and lining the deep gorges of the side-valleys as well, and pressing on to a quite unreasonable height, from a conventional point of view, firs and birches

contending all the time as to which should climb the higher. Waterfalls here and there, catching the sunlight and sending forth iridescent jewels of rarest worth. Hundreds of grass-grown roofs, some with flowers and some even with a fir or two amidst the grass. White bell-towers to every storehouse, with the bell to summon all the labourers to food and rest. Countless fields of grain of every kind: some of it cut and fixed on sticks at regular intervals, so that a regiment would seem to be waiting the word of command: ready and immovable: a peaceful region of warfare. And a warfare in reality, too, a hard nature being the enemy.

Then those wonderful rivers: one of them coming straight from a glacier and therefore unmistakable, even though the changing clouds might give to it varying shades of colour. Grey and glacier, blue and glacier, rose and glacier, black and glacier, white and glacier, golden and glacier. And the other river, not less beautiful because less complex. And the two together winding through the valley: now hidden from sight, now coming into view again, now glistening in the far distance, and now disappearing finally—no—one more glimpse if one strains the eye—one more greeting, and then, farewell—they have gone their way!

And the snow mountains—not very near, and not very snowy just now; but, for all that, the glory of the country, the very desire of one's heart, the shrine of one's secret and mysterious longings.

CHAPTER II.

Both the botanists and Tante were delighted with the place. Tante, who adored limitless space, had not quite liked the idea of coming to a valley.

"You know I have always hated restraints of any kind, dear ones," she said. "And even at the age of seventy, I desire to continue in the straight path of blessed uncontrol. Valleys make me shudder a little—like conventions! Bah!"

But even she was content when she saw the immense proportions of her prison.

"Well," she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "there is space and freedom enough for me, for a little while. All is well with me, dear ones. Go and find your shrubs and be happy. It is true that you have brought your poor stout relation to a place on the mountain-side where she can neither go up nor down. Nothing could have been more cruel. But no matter. She will look at the view and try to feel chastened by patience and all the other dull virtues. And she will go on knitting socks for the dear English soldiers. They will never get them, of course. Still, she will do her best for them, hoping that King Red Tape will allow

them to be delivered. Yes, dear ones, hasten to your shrubs and have some stimulating quarrels over them. Tante is content for a minute or two."

And she really was happy, and deeply interested in the owners of the Gaard, rich landowners, Bönder, aristocrats of Norway, direct descendants of kings and chieftains—Vikinger, in fact; proud and reserved: proud of their noble lineage, and reserved of feeling and in manner, and yet, when tactfully approached, capable of the greatest kindness and appreciative understanding: dignified in behaviour, and refined in form and feature, bearing on them, indeed, the royal seal of good birth and good breeding. The Solli family was one of the oldest and noblest in the valley, and had the most important and most highly decorated and carved pew in the old brown church. There were three girls: stately Ragnhild, lovely Ingeborg, and gentle little Helga, the pet of the family. And there were two sons, Karl and Jens. Karl, being the elder, would in time inherit the Gaard, paying his brothers and sisters a share, and giving to his father and mother mysterious dues called Föderaad. But as Solli and his wife were strong and active, and Karl was not even betrothed, there was no occasion for the older people to retire; and meanwhile an older couple still, the grandparents, were eking out their lives in the comfortable old black dower-house in the court of the Gaard. Grandmother (Bedstemor) had never wanted to retire, and bore on her face a settled look of disappointment which had been accentuated by the coming and going of twenty years. Grandfather (Bedstefar) had been ailing for many years. He lay in the big bedroom of the black house, and waited for the caressing hand of Death.

Solli's wife, whose Christian name was Inga, and who in accordance with custom was called Mor (mother) Inga, was, in her stately way, greatly attracted to the old Danish lady, and told her many interesting details about the Gaard. Tante had such perfect tact, and was such a comfortable easy creature to be with, that she found herself soon *en rapport* with the family. A glass of gooseberry-wine, followed on the next day by some corn-brandy, seemed to indicate that a delightful acquaintanceship was ripening; and when Mor Inga took her to the Stabur (the storehouse), that most sacred precinct of every self-respecting Norwegian Gaard, and showed her the treasures and mysteries of Norwegian housekeeping, every one felt that Fröken Knudsgaard "had arrived." Even the disagreeable old magistrate (Sorenskriver)[D] from S——, one of the eight or ten guests, admitted that.

"She has seen the Stabur," he said, with a grim smile, and he actually forgot to help himself first to cheese, but passed her a few delicate shavings; a sure sign from him of even passing respect.

After an introduction to the Stabur, any other honour on earth was easy of

attainment; and no one was surprised to learn that Ragnhild was going to put up her loom and teach the Danish lady to weave. And Mor Inga fetched great-grandmother's old painted spinning-wheel from the top room of the Stabur and put it in the little balcony which overlooked the courtyard; and she brought some fresh wool from the wool-room—another sacred spot—and sent for old Kari, who was especially clever at carding the wool. And Tante sat and knitted, whilst old Kari carded the wool and Mor Inga span. This was Tante's first introduction to old Kari, eighty years old, and full of fairy lore.

"Ah," whispered Mor Inga to Tante, "Kari can tell thee many stories of the Gudbrandsdal if she likes. But it must be in secret, when there is no young person near to laugh and disbelieve. One day thou shalt give her a little coffee in a packet—all for herself—and then thou wilt hear all sorts of things."

But to-day Kari only carded the wool, smiling amusedly at being in the company of the big Danish lady, who spoke to her so kindly and treated her as though she were a lady herself and not an old parish-woman who had no home of her own. Ja, ja, that was very nice, and Kari scratched her head, and smiled more and more, until even the furrows on her grim old face were filled up with smiles, and her eyes seemed almost young and very bright.

"Ah," said Tante, with a friendly nod, "I know some one who has been very pretty. Oh, I have eyes—sharp, sharp eyes. I can see!"

And Mor Inga laughed and said:

"Kari was beautiful, and she could dance too. They say that in the old days no one could dance the spring-dance like Kari."

"Nei, nei!" said Kari, smiling more and more still. And her thoughts wandered back to her Ole—dead these twenty years and more. He had always said that no one could dance like Kari.

All this kept Fröken Knudsgaard busy; and indeed her distractions increased as the days went on. Sometimes she sat in the balcony which looked over the splendid view, and, seized by a sudden enthusiasm for nature, watched the ever-changing colours of the rivers, and the shadows on the hillsides, and listened to the music of the waterfall down below in the Vinstra gorge. But she did not pretend to be able to live on Nature's great wonders alone. She was delightfully candid about it.

"No, my dear ones," she said to Ejnar and Gerda, "I am the wicked product of a beautifully wicked world. I need my fellow-sinners. It would never have contented me to lie flat on my stomach looking for flowers and grasses, and so forth. Nor would it have been desirable for me. I should never have got up!"

Nevertheless, when her botanists came back from their wanderings, with their green tin wallets full of mystic treasures unguessed at by the uninitiated, she was

eagerness itself to know whether they had had "good hunting." And when Gerda said:

"Wicked old Tante, you know you are interested in these things," she answered gaily:

"No, no; but I have accepted my fate. Since my best beloved ones are all scientific sillies, I have to appear to be interested in what they do."

She felt it to be her duty to secure, on behalf of science, a big study for her botanists, and Mor Inga let her have a vast room in one of the out-buildings.

"They must have plenty of room to quarrel in," she explained to Mor Inga. "Everything goes so much more easily if there is generous space."

"And," she added to herself, "it is my experience that scientific people are safer caged up in their laboratories and studies. You know they are all right then. When they are wandering about, they might get lost; but when they are shut up, they are comparatively safe, barring brain fever and explosions, of course."

So she caged her botanists, and felt herself free to amuse herself with human nature whilst they were immersed in the study of nature.

"Well, then, good-bye for the moment," she said, when she shut them up for the first time. "I will now go and have a few disagreeable words with that horrid Sorenskriver, who dislikes my belovèd English. I will go and sit quite near him, and knit my stockings for the dear English soldiers. That annoys him beyond everything. What a delight to see his irritation! Poor Sorenskriver! He suffers, and I enjoy. That is the way in life, and very amusing too. My poor dear ones, what a pity you cannot have a little fun too. Well, I suppose you do get it through your microscopes."

But they had a great deal of fun in a quiet way. No one could be long with Tante without catching a little of her gaiety; and even Ejnar was heard to laugh sometimes over matters which had nothing to do with his work. And Gerda left her cage and went singing in the birchwoods above the Gaard, and along the mountain paths. She was content, too, and had forgotten about the saxifrage. And Tante attempted short little strolls along the easiest road, and always stopped by the black hay-barn near the group of mountain-ashes, which rejoiced her eyes. Here she sat down and took out her opera-glasses, really to observe the clouds, though she pretended always to be looking at the numberless Gaards and barns which covered the hillsides and mountain-slopes. But once she forgot her *rôle* of indifference to nature, and cried enthusiastically to Gerda:

"By St Olaf! I never saw such soft clouds in my life, nor such colours! And just look at the reflection in the rivers, Gerda. Sapristi, how beautiful!"

"What is this I hear?" cried Gerda. "Tante admiring nature!"

"Oh, that's a big Gaard—that yonder," said Tante, correcting herself with a

twinkle in her eye. "I wonder what the name is, and how many cotters they have, and how many children, how many cows up at the Saeter, how many goats, how many cheeses they make, how many sheep they have; whether Bedstefar and Bedstemor are alive, and whether they have as comfortable quarters as our Bedstefar and Bedstemor. Ah, and that reminds me that I am drinking coffee with Bedstemor this afternoon. Help me up, Gerda, and don't stand staring at that cloud as though you had never seen one in your life before."

So Tante drank coffee with picturesque old Bedstemor in the old dower-house of the Gaard.

The principal dwelling-place of the Gaard had been considerably added to in modern times. The old part was in the middle, and new wings had been built on either side, a whole new storey with a slate roof added, and a new balcony and porch. So that the Gaard proper, in which Mor Inga reigned, was a curious mixture of the old and the new: the new part being painted pink, and the old part keeping its ancient glory intact. But Bedstemor's house was untouched by modern hands; in fact, all the houses which formed part of the settlement were just as they had been for two or three hundred years. Bedstemor's house was the largest of them all. There were about eight or nine others, all black or dark brown, all with their roofs covered with long grass, amongst which grew poppies, corn-flowers, and forget-me-nots. They were grouped together round the courtyard, as quaint and picturesque a sight as one might see anywhere. The Stabur stood somewhat apart from the other buildings, and was raised above the ground by tree-trunks which looked like elephants' legs. The Stabur had a conceited, self-contained look after the manner of all true Staburs. It seemed to be saying all the time, "*Behold me, I am the Stabur!*" The possession of a white bell-tower on its grass-grown roof, and of an old carved door, encouraged its self-importance, and gave it an air of distinction not enjoyed by the other houses. Still, they had their tall white chimneys; and it is obvious that one cannot have everything in life. And some of them also had a more picturesque situation than the Stabur: creeping up the hill, indeed, as though they were thinking of climbing up into the woods, but had stopped to rest by a mountain-ash, or by a graceful birch; whilst others, mounting higher, came to a standstill at last and were used for storing wood. Then there were hay-barns of various sizes and shapes, the most characteristic being those with sloping bridges leading up to the top floor. And last, not least, there was the great cowhouse, forsaken now except for five or six cows which had not gone up to the Saeter. And Ingaros, the most beautiful cow of all, christened after Mor Inga, was sulking partly because she had not gone up to the Saeter, but chiefly because she, the belle of the Gaard and the authorised leader of the herd, had been deprived of her noble collar and bell. Some wretched upstart of a creature was wearing it, so that she might be sure to come home to her calves.

Ingaros had Tante's profound sympathy. She visited her in the cowhouse at milking-time, and exchanged a few understanding greetings with her. Old Kari was milking her and singing a soothing little song, something about a saeter-girl who lost all her cows, and she danced and they all came back again, and then she sang and sang till they ran away again! Tante stood and listened delightedly to the clear, sweet voice of the old woman.

"Ja, ja, Kari," she said, "I believe I have some coffee-berries in my pocket.

Such a song deserves a good cup of coffee."

"Stakkar!"[E] said Kari, smiling with delight. "Thou art a kind one, although thou art not Norwegian. Thou shalt hear all the tunes I know."

CHAPTER III.

It was a hot afternoon. Ejnar and Gerda had had a quarrel over "Salix." Ejnar's face wore the dynamite expression, and Gerda was white with anger. Her glacier eyes looked like the eyes of a polar bear, and she was moving her head to and fro in a manner which always meant rebellion. On these occasions she longed for a divorce.

"Give me a divorce at once!" she cried tragically both to Ejnar and Tante.

"My dear one," remarked Tante soothingly, "I don't keep divorces ready in my pocket; and you know Ejnar never has even a handkerchief in his pocket. You should have a divorce at once if we had one handy. Be reasonable. Have I ever denied you anything in this world? Of course you should have one instantly."

Ejnar was silent; but his expression was quite enough to blow up all the royal palaces and personages in the universe. Tante herself did not feel too amiable that afternoon. She had had an angry discussion with the Sorenskriver and another man, a Norwegian fur-merchant, about England; and she was shocked to hear them say things against the English which she knew to be not only untrue, but venomously unjust.

"Why," she said, flourishing her knitting-needles, "even the greatest criminal has some redeeming features. And as with criminals, so with countries. But you leave England no virtues: not one."

The men shrugged their shoulders. It was so obvious to them that England had no virtues. It was so obvious to them that they, who had never been to that detestable country, knew far more about the character of the people than this ridiculous old Danish woman who had spent about twenty years amongst the barbarians. Tante was ruffled. And Ejnar, being in a disagreeable mood, had chimed in too against this much-abused nation.

"Ja," he said in his quiet way, "it is a barbarous country, this England. I know nothing about politics, thank heaven, nothing about wars and so forth. But this I can tell you: that England is the only country which refused to exchange botanical specimens with our Botanical Museum. The barbarian director wrote a rude letter."

"I've told you a dozen times, Ejnar, that it was all probably owing to Red Tape," replied Tante angrily. She could have shaken Ejnar.

"And pray what is this Red Tape?" asked the Sorenskriver contemptuously.

"It is an invisible thread which no one has been able to cut, so far," said Tante. "Every one knows it is there and deplores its presence. If it could once be cut, it would shrivel away, and one of England's dangers would be gone."

"Then you admit she has dangers?" asked the fur-merchant, triumphantly rubbing his hands.

"Ja, ja," said Tante Knudsgaard; "but the greatest of them is Red Tape. She suffers from it in everything—both in war and in peace. But she will overcome all her difficulties and emerge."

"Never, never!" said the Sorenskriver and fur-merchant joyfully together. "Her day is gone."

"Then her twilight and her night will be like the glorious midnight sunlight of your north," said Tante, turning to the fur-merchant who came from the north.

"Pyt!" said the fur-merchant scornfully, and went away.

"Sniksnak!" said the Sorenskriver impatiently.

Tante made no reply, but went on knitting; and in a few minutes finished a sock, which she spread on her knee, and then added it to a great pile beside her on the seat of the courtyard verandah, where every one was awaiting the arrival of the letters.

"That makes twelve pairs for those brave English soldiers," she said, half to herself. And the Sorenskriver moved nearer to the horrid spectacle, attracted to the spot against his own wishes. Tante laughed silently; but, all the same, she was ruffled. Every one was more or less cross.

Solli was worried about the crops, for there had been no rain for a long time, and both corn and potatoes threatened to fail. Also, there was a shortage of water, and that made him anxious about fire. Also, Bedstefar was more ailing than usual, and the doctor had been sent for. Bedstemor came over from her house, sat near Tante, and grumbled a little because Bedstefar was so obstinate about the doctor. But she cheered up when a Swedish lady, an artist, one of the guests, praised her quaint, old-fashioned head-gear, and wanted to take a photograph of her pretty old face.

"Ah," said Bedstemor, "many people have wanted to take a picture of me."

And then every one laughed, and said:

"Ja, Bedstemor, we can well believe it!"

That seemed to put every one in better spirits again; and soon beautiful Ragnhild came out of the kitchen with a bundle of letters and papers, and was the centre of an eager circle. Ejnar stood apart, near the Stabur, not being concerned with human affairs. But Ragnhild had a letter even for him, and took it to him herself. She and all the peasants had a great respect for scholarship.

"There is a letter for the professor. Will he care to have it?" she said gently.

She handed it to him in her own charming way, and even Ejnar was pleased; for Ragnhild was the object of great admiration amongst the men, although she kept them at a distance. And all the women, too, admired her, and were glad when she came amongst them. Tante gave her a good hug when she dropped several letters and papers into her lap, and got in return an affectionate pat of approval on the back.

"Thou hast more than thy share of letters to-day," she said. "I shall give thee none to-morrow."

"I don't want any more!" cried Tante, who had just glanced at one of her letters. "Only think, Ragnhild, some dear friends of mine are coming here. I should like to dance the Halling dance. Help me up, kjaere. I want to dance over to the Botaniker. No use calling to him. He never hears human sounds."

Then gaily the pretty girl and the old Danish woman went arm-in-arm to the Stabur, near which Ejnar and Gerda were standing, their heads buried in a letter. They looked up when they saw her, and cried:

"Such news! such news! It has come from America. She will bring it to us at once. We have only to write and say where we are."

"And I, too, have something coming from America," cried Tante. "My Clifford and his boy!"

"Only think, Tante, that valuable botanical parcel at last!" cried Gerda wildly.

"Only think, my poor icebergs home again!" cried Tante, putting her arm round each of them. "What could be more delightful! Your dried-up flowers and my frozen-up human beings! Let us all be friends again and have some aqua vitæ. I feel at peace even with that wretched old magistrate!"

"Oh, Gerda," said Ejnar, "what joys are before us! Just think of it—the Mariposa lilies and the Romney poppy at last!"

When they had all calmed down a little, Tante read Katharine Frensham's letter, and learned that she wished to bring the botanical parcel as soon as she knew whether Herr and Frue Ebbesen could receive her. She had heard from Professor Thornton that they were perhaps going to Norway. If they had already gone, she could just as easily come there. She added:

"It is curious that I, who knew nothing about Professor Thornton a few weeks ago, should all the time have been in communication with the nephew and niece of his dear Danish friend."

"Ja," said Tante, "waves—waves—wireless telegraphy, as always."

There was a sentence in Clifford's letter which struck Tante as being a remarkable thing for him to have written.

"I have become acquainted with a Miss Frensham," he wrote, "to whom I

have given a letter of introduction to you—though she will scarcely need it, being, as she is, on a botanical errand to Ejnar and Gerda, and therefore to you. But I desired not to be left out in the cold where she is concerned."

"Well," reflected Tante, "that is a remarkable thing for an iceberg to say."

And she read the sentence several times in order to make sure that she had caught the meaning. The rest of the letter ran thus:—

> "DEAR OLD KNUTTY,—Alan and I are coming back, and we shall come and find you somewhere and somehow. We have not been happy together. There is a shadow between us—that shadow which I always feared,—and he has something against me in his young heart which makes easy and close companionship impossible. We have both suffered. There was a man of my own age with his son, a boy of Alan's age, on board. I used to look at them with hungry eyes. They had such a good understanding between them; there were no shadows there. He was a great traveller, an ornithologist. And his boy thought he was the finest hero on earth, and worshipped him. I would not wish that; but I would only ask that Alan should believe in me again, as in the old days before—before Marianne's death. It will be good to hear your voice again, even if you do scold me for throwing over Japan. But, under present conditions, it is waste of money and waste of heart-fibre. Alan will be happier without me. Perhaps you won't scold me after all, Knutty. You are such a wise old Knutty; and I still think you were wise to send us in spite of everything."

"Of course I was wise to send you, my poor Clifford," Knutty said, as she read the letter over and over again in the quiet of her beautiful big bedroom, with its lovely views of the valley, the wood, and the grass-roofed houses. "Of course I was wise to send you—even if you came back the next moment. That doesn't matter. It is the starting-off which counts. My poor boy, I won't scold you. My good, gentle-hearted Clifford. You ought to have had a heart as tough as Knutty's. You would not have wanted to gnaw it then; no temptation then. My poor boy!"

She rubbed two or three tears away from her cheeks, and tapped the floor impatiently with her foot.

"Bah!" she said; "that Marianne, I never could bear her!"

And then something prompted her to turn once more to his letter, and she read the words, "But I desired not to be left out in the cold where she is concerned." A faint smile came over Knutty's face. It disappeared, came again, stayed, deepened and deepened.

"By St Olaf, I believe I see daylight!" she cried.

CHAPTER IV.

So Katharine started off to Norway, taking the boat from the London Docks. By a curious chance Mrs Stanhope was on board too, and the presence of this bigot, Marianne's friend, Clifford Thornton's enemy, stirred Katharine to her depths. They had bowed stiffly, and then had contented themselves with glaring at each other.

It was a rough passage, and they were the only two women who did not retreat to their cabins. They sat side by side, in silence, in a sheltered part of the boat, having no choice to go elsewhere.

But although no words were spoken between them, an active warfare went on unceasingly: encounter after encounter, and the victory to neither.

The voyage came to an end, Christiania was reached, and the two women went, each her own way; each thankful to be free of the other.

But Mrs Stanhope, without knowing it, had sown fresh seeds of love and protection in Katharine's heart for Clifford Thornton. More than ever her thoughts turned to him. More than ever she found herself weaving a fancy fabric of happiness and love. Then she rent it in pieces and began it over again. She had to begin it again each time she had destroyed it, and each time some new beauty was added.

And thus busy with her work of destroying and restoring, the train bore her past beautiful Lake Mjösen, the biggest lake in Norway, and into the Gudbrandsdal, where she at once made the acquaintance of the river Laagen, the glacier river which Knutty, Ejnar, and Gerda were learning to love in their upland Gaard. She thought of them as old friends. It seemed to be quite natural that she was coming to them. She longed to see Knutty. She knew that she would not have one minute's shyness with Clifford's old Dane.

But she had not any idea how eagerly she was awaited. Tante was most impatient to see her, and kept on murmuring to herself, "By St Olaf, I see daylight through a leper's squint!" And when asked to explain these mysterious words, she only said:

"Keep to your own department, botanists. Don't interfere with the section marked human nature."

And Ejnar and Gerda were wild with delight, and even spoke soft words together about "Salix." Of course they only looked upon Katharine as the bringer of the parcel: having no value in herself, being, as it were, only a base instrument. It made no difference to them whether she was fair or dark, tall or

short, agreeable or disagreeable, electric or soporific, with an attractive aura or an antipathetic personality.

"What on earth does it matter so long as she brings the parcel safely?" said Ejnar, in answer to Tante's repeated, "I wonder whether."

"That sort of thing matters very much to people who are alive," replied Tante sternly. "Of course to people who are prematurely dead, like botanists, nothing matters except the parcel. My belovèd Ejnar, I am delighted to see you so happy; but I must entreat you not to sing. You are frightening the horse; he looked round then to see whether an ostrich was driving him. And you observe we are on the most dangerous part of the cliff. Don't let us have an accident until we have embraced the parcel and received the bringer of it with indulgence.—And do remember to thank her, Gerda. And don't let Ejnar ask for the parcel the minute he sees her. Let us show the English barbarian woman that we know how to behave.—Ah, here we are on the level. Now, Ejnar, you can sing as much as you please. What a curious voice—not human! The sort of voice you would expect a decaying plant to have. But how happy you must be! You don't often sing, I think."

"Ja, I am very happy," said Ejnar, smiling radiantly. "I only sang once before in my life, after Gerda accepted me, when I was alone in the woods."

"A good thing she didn't hear you, or else she might have changed her mind," remarked Tante.

"Dear ones, dear ones," said Gerda, "here is the train. Oh, Ejnar, how I hope we shall not quarrel over the parcel. I know we shall, though."

They hurried out of the carriage, all of them in a state of great excitement, and Tante, very red and hot, but her face beaming with kindness and pleasant expectancy. She looked up and saw Katharine standing at the window.

"That is Miss Frensham," she said.

"How do you know?" said Gerda and Ejnar. "You've never seen her."

"Instinct, stupid ones!" answered Knutty breathlessly. "Of course it is Miss Frensham. Come along now, and remember to say nothing about the parcel, Ejnar."

Then she pressed forward, and just as Katharine was stepping out of the train, she put out her hand and said: "Welcome, Miss Frensham. I am Fröken Knudsgaard, and these are my botanists—your friends. We are so glad to see you."

"Ja, ja!" cried Ejnar and Gerda.

"And I to see you," Katharine answered. "It is like coming to see old friends. And I have the parcel quite safely here in my little travelling-box. I put it there so that there might not be one moment's delay. For, of course, you must be

feeling impatient. I am sure I should."

With those simple but magic words Katharine immediately won her way into the botanical hearts of the botanists; and Knutty, looking at her dear frank face and delightful appearance, felt a glow of pleasure such as she had not been conscious of for many long years.

Then the clever Norwegian ponies, those yellow little fellows, full of mountain-wisdom and resource, drew the carriage slowly up the winding road which led to the Solli Gaard. Like all true Norwegians, they did exactly what they wished: rested when they wished, and went on when they wished: went very near the edge when they felt so inclined, or paused to drink of the brook running into the hollow tree-trunk placed there for their benefit. As Knutty said, they allowed plenty of time to look at the graceful birches which crept up from the valley, lined the hillside, were shimmering in the sunlight, trembling in the breezes, and sending out their own delicious fragrance laden with subtle sweetness.

"Ja, ja," said Knutty, "the birches are at their best to-day, to welcome the Englishwoman to beautiful Norway!"

CHAPTER V.

The contents of the parcel exceeded the botanists' wildest expectations. They were radiantly happy over it, and delighted with Katharine. She had stamped herself on their minds as a woman of sense, who had understood that the parcel had been the entity and herself the non-entity.

"Obviously a person of discernment," Ejnar remarked several times to Tante, who laughed secretly when she observed that the impersonal botanist was beginning to show distinct signs of human appreciation as well. He even left his study once or twice, and came to sit with the ladies on the balcony, bringing his long pipe with him. He did not speak much, of course, and when he did he never touched on human affairs. But Katharine had seen these flowers, and in an unscientific but vivid way she could tell him a little about them, and a great deal about the botanists who had sent the precious gift. Gerda and he listened with rapt attention while she described to them the Colorado botanists' herbarium. She told them that they were rich, but that they did not care for a grand house. They lived in a small 'frame house,' and had built a princely herbarium, which, together with their wonderful botanic garden, was the chief feature of their property.

"They do not care about human grandeur," Katharine said, in conclusion.

"That is as it ought to be," exclaimed Ejnar and Gerda approvingly.

"All the same," remarked Tante, "I would prefer to inhabit that herbarium, and put the stupid dried plants in the cottage. But then I know I have a base human soul. Always have had—isn't it so, dear ones?"

"Yes, yes," said Ejnar and Gerda. "And you've always liked comfort."

"Yes," replied Tante—"good English comfort. Give me good English comfort and mange tak![F] Let me be base and comfortable, like my darling, much-abused English people."

"Are you really so fond of them, Fröken Knudsgaard?" Katharine said warmly; for every one feels a glow of pleasure at hearing one's country praised in a foreign land.

"Ja, I love them," Knutty replied, smiling at her; "and I spend half my time in fighting their battles. Even here I have several deadly conflicts every day with a Norwegian magistrate and a fur-merchant from the north. But now you've come, you can defend your own country much better than I can. But I shall always be delighted to help."

"Ja, she loves them," said Gerda. "And that Englishman of hers is the only person for whom she cares in the whole world. Ejnar and I have been jealous of that Englishman ever since I can remember."

"I have told you hundreds of times that it is absurd to be jealous of an iceberg," Knutty said, with a twinkle in her eye.—"You know, Miss Frensham, they are speaking of my dear Clifford Thornton, whom I've known and loved ever since he was seven years old. There is no one like him on earth——"

"Ak," said Gerda, "if she begins to talk to you about her Englishman, all is lost. Don't encourage her, Fröken. Take my advice. Tell us something more about the Colorado botanists and their garden. Moreover, the Englishman is soon coming himself. That will make her happy."

"*He is coming*," Katharine said eagerly, turning to Tante; "*he is coming here*?"

"Yes," said Tante, nodding at her.

And the quick old Dane glanced at her and saw how the light of a great happiness had come into her eyes.

"Yes," Tante said; "he has given up the journey to Japan, and I suppose he and his boy will be here in a week or so."

"In a week or so?" Katharine repeated, as though she could scarcely believe it.

Then, with a gaiety which delighted them all, she turned impulsively to the botanists and continued telling them all the details she could remember of that wonderful garden and the interesting collection of cactuses, and the different kinds of pepper-trees. And Gerda and Ejnar, entranced, kept on saying:

"Ja, and what more?" And Tante kept on thinking:

"Surely I see daylight! But, good heavens, what can we do to get rid of these botanists? Wretched creatures! Why don't they go back to their study provided so thoughtfully by me? And what a darling she is, and how delightful to look upon, and with a fine temperament. Simple and easy as a child. Built on a big scale, mind and body. Like the Gaard itself. Ja, ja. And then to think of that Marianne! Ak, what a brute I am! Never mind. Let me remain a brute! Oh, those botanists! If only they would go to their study and quarrel about the Mariposa lily, or cactuses, or salix, or something. And just look at Ejnar! He is becoming human. He is leaving the vegetable and entering the animal kingdom. By St Olaf, he has picked up her handkerchief! Ah, and here is Ragnhild coming to the Stabur to ring the bell for dinner. Nå, after dinner, we can have a talk about my Clifford."

So after dinner Tante took entire possession of Katharine, but much against the botanists' wishes. And Gerda said privately:

"Well, at least, don't bore her by talking about your Englishman all the time. You yourself saw how glad she was to get away from a subject which could not possibly interest her, and to continue to talk to us about Arizona and Colorado."

In answer Tante had a mysterious attack of laughter, and gave Gerda a specially affectionate hug; and, having assured her that she would use moderation, walked off with Katharine to show her, so she said, the principal sights of the Gaard, and to introduce her to some of her intimate friends, all of whom were interested in the arrival of the Englishwoman, the first English person they had ever seen. Knutty was proud that Katharine had such a fine appearance and such a charming way with every one. The Sollis, Johann himself, and Mor Inga, in their grave, reserved fashion, were kindly to her; and Karl, a most unemotional creature, was quite excited when she spoke some German to him. Bedstemor arrived on the scene, having heard that an English guest had come to the Gaard; and when Katharine was presented to her, she greeted her with great dignity, and said to Tante:

"She is nice looking, this Englishwoman. But thou shouldst have seen *me* when I was young."

This was translated to Katharine, who said to Tante:

"Tell her that I can see her in my mind's eye as a beautiful young girl; but she has not forgotten how to be beautiful in her old age."

Bedstemor was gratified, patted her on the back, and told her that she might come one day and drink coffee with her and see her wedding-cap.

Then she was introduced to old Kari, whom they passed on their way to Tante's favourite resting-place, an old black barn near a group of mountain-ashes. Kari was standing outside the great cowhouse; she looked at Katharine

critically, seemed to approve of her, and said:

"She is nice looking, and strong too. She could do a good day's work in the fields. And how many children has she got?"

"Well, I *suppose* she has not any," laughed wicked old Tante. "She is not married."

"Perhaps she will find a husband here," said Kari reflectively.

"Perhaps she will," laughed Tante; and she was passing on when Kari came a little nearer to her and said mysteriously:

"If thou wilt come into the cowhouse to-morrow, I think I can tell thee something thou wilt like to hear—about the Huldre,[G] the beautiful long-tailed one—but thou must come alone. And I will sing to thee again very willingly, for thou art a kind one. And to-morrow Mette makes Fladbröd.[H] If thou dost wish to see her make the Fladbröd, thou shalt most certainly. Ja, and Mette can sing too. Thou shalt hear her also."

Then she nodded and disappeared into the cowhouse. Tante and Katharine paused for a moment to look at the picturesque winter-house of the seventy cows, and its long, grass-grown roof, its two bridges leading up to the top floor, where some of the hay was stored, and its most curious gap in the centre of the upper floor, through which one could see enclosed in a great oblong frame the valley below, the rivers, and the distant mountains. Tante pointed out this beautiful picture to Katharine and said:

"You know, I really enjoy Nature very much, although I pretend not to do so just to tease Ejnar and Gerda. Ah, they are dears, both of them. It was good of you to come and bring them their parcel. You do not know how eagerly you have been looked for—by them and by me. Of course they wanted their parcel; but I had another reason for being eager to receive you. May a wicked old woman tell you something some day?"

"Tell me now," Katharine said, turning to her.

"Well," said Tante recklessly, "it may be only an old woman's fancy; but he said in his letter that you did not really need a letter of introduction to me, since you were coming to see Ejnar and Gerda, and therefore me."

"But he felt that he could not be left out in the cold where you were concerned."

"Did he say that?" asked Katharine, with a tremor in her voice.

"Yes," answered Tante; and they strolled on together in silence until they came to the hay-barn on the hillside, near the mountain-ashes, Tante's terminus. There they sat, still in silence, but with their hearts and thoughts charged with the remembrance of Clifford Thornton. It was a long silence, probably the longest which Knutty had ever endured without impatience; for an instinctive

comradeship had sprung up between her and this Englishwoman in whose eyes the light of love had come when Clifford Thornton's name was spoken. They were both glad to be together, and they knew it. At last Knutty said:

"My dear, since we are both thinking of him all the time, shall we not speak of him?"

And Katharine looked up and answered simply:

"Yes, let us speak of him."

So they spoke of him: Knutty with warm affection and pity; Katharine with sympathetic interest. That was all. She spoke of him as one traveller might speak of another traveller, both of them having met on some mountain-path in a distant land, spoken some words of greeting, and then passed on. That was all the personal part she thought she put into it.

But Knutty listened, and heard distinct unspoken words.

CHAPTER VI.

Katharine spoke a fair amount of German, and some of the guests at the Gaard spoke a little English. The fur-merchant from Tromsö spoke English well; but he scorned at first to show any sign of friendliness to any one from such an abominable country; and the Sorenskriver was consistently careful not to be betrayed into the most primitive form of politeness to this Englishwoman. He knew, of course, that she spoke and understood German; and he went out of his way on several occasions to make in his aggressive voice disparaging remarks about England, using for this purpose the language of Germany. At first Katharine took no notice; but after a day or two of quiet forbearance she said to him at dinner, fearlessly but politely:

"Herr Sorenskriver, you insult my country every time we sit down to dinner. I am sure you do not intend to insult me personally. But you see, Englishwomen love their country passionately, although they may know and share its faults. May I ask you to use the Norwegian language, which I do not understand, when you feel particularly insulting? If, however, you want to *discuss* England with me, then let us speak German together; and I will tell you all I know, and listen to all you have to say. That is quite another matter. Then you shall say all you have to say against us; and I will answer you if I can, and bear with your criticisms if I cannot."

Her words were so simple, her manner was so direct, and her own temperamental charm was so irresistible, that England, personified in her, went up twenty-five per cent. in every one's estimation. There was quite a stir amongst the guests; they all left off eating their beloved cloudberries (multebaer), of

which the Norwegians think so much, and turned expectantly to the Sorenskriver. The gruff old Norwegian did something unexpected, both to himself and the whole company.

"Ah," he said, "you carry your flag better than I carry mine, Fröken. You are right and I am wrong."

Then he lifted his half-filled glass and turned to her with an almost shy smile on his face.

"Skaal!"[I] he said.

"Skaal!" she answered, raising her glass too, and smiling at him.

"Bravo—skaal to them both!" said every one with one accord; and no one was surprised afterwards to see the Englishwoman and the Sorenskriver strolling off together in the direction of the foss in the birch-woods above the Gaard.

Katharine had conquered him, and the fur-merchant was the next person to capitulate. He was heard saying to the Swedish professor that, when all was said and done, the English were people of spirit, and whatever their politics might be, they were honourable people to trade with. Ejnar, too, forgot for the moment about the barbarian authorities at Kew Gardens, and gave such remarkable signs of wanting Katharine's companionship, not at all from botanical reasons, that Gerda began to complain to Tante that he was neglecting his work and not taking the least interest in the Romney poppy. And once he came back from a short expedition which he himself had planned, leaving poor Gerda to look for the little rare plant which was the object of the expedition. He said he was tired and wanted to go home; and he fetched his long pipe and established himself in a corner of the verandah where Tante and Katharine were sitting. Gerda came back angry and wanted a divorce; but Tante laughed and said to her:

"Don't be with him. It is only an aberration. It won't do you or him any harm. He will soon be ready to quarrel with you over the Romney poppy. And you cannot possibly be angry with *her*. She knows nothing about it. Every one likes her; she wins every one. It is her nature; her temperament; her aura. If she has won the Sorenskriver, she could win the most ferocious Trold ever heard of in Norwegian lore. Don't be angry with anybody. I think I ought to be the one to be angry. He always interrupts our conversations. And you always want her when you can get her. Everybody wants her. Even Bedstemor likes to talk with her. I can scarcely get a word in. Poor old Tante."

"You wicked old woman, you were talking to her for hours yesterday," said Gerda, laughing.

"Nå," said Tante, "yesterday is not to-day."

"I cannot think what you want to talk to her about," said Gerda.

"There are other subjects besides the 'botanik,'" remarked Tante sternly.

"And, after all, you are both strangers," said Gerda.

"Strangers very often have a great deal to say to each other," answered Tante. "Ah, and here she comes. Now I insist on you dragging your wretched Ejnar off to your study and keeping him there. Have a quarrel. I mean a real botanical quarrel. Do, kjaere. You have not had one for quite two days. Talk about Salix. That is always a safe subject for a quarrel. And you need not be afraid that I will bore the barbarian woman. I will speak only of subjects which interest her."

No, Katharine was not bored. She drifted to Tante on every possible occasion; and they spoke on many different subjects, but always ended with Clifford Thornton. It was curious how he came into everything. If they began about the customs of the peasants, they finished up with Clifford and his boy. If they started off with Bedstefar's illness, which was becoming more and more serious, they ended with Clifford Thornton. If they spoke of England, it was natural enough that they should speak of Tante's Englishman. If they spoke of America, it was natural enough that Clifford and his boy should slip into the conversation. And if they spoke of Scandinavia, and especially of little Denmark, where he and his boy would soon be arriving, it was natural enough to refer to the two travellers now on their way home to Europe.

"Ja, ja," said Tante, "he always loved the North. I, who taught him, took care about that. And his father before him had loved the North. That was why I was chosen to be the little lad's governess; because I was a Dane—and not a bad-looking one either in those days, let me tell you! Yes, I was chosen out of about ten Englishwomen. I shall never forget that day."

"Tell me about it," Katharine said eagerly; and the old Danish woman, nothing loth, put down her knitting and gazed dreamily out on the great valley below. It was about six in the afternoon. All the other guests had finished their coffee and left the balcony, and Katharine and Tante were in sole possession. There were no sounds except the never-ceasing roar of the foss in the Vinstra Valley.

"It was many years ago," Tante said,—"about thirty eight, I think. He was seven years old when I was called to look after him. I journeyed to a desolate house in the country, in Surrey, and waited in a dismal drawing-room with several other ladies, who were all on the same errand. A tall, stern-looking man came into the room, greeted us courteously, but scanned us closely. And then he said, 'And which is the Danish lady?' And I said, 'I am the Dane.' And he said, 'Do you speak English very badly?' And I said, 'No, I speak it remarkably well.' And he smiled and said, 'Ah, you're a true Dane, I see. You have a good opinion of your powers.' And I said, 'Yes, of course I have.' Then I went with him alone into his study, another depressing room, and we had an interview of about an

hour. I saw he loved the North. It was a passion with him. He was a lonely impersonal sort of creature; but his face lit up when he spoke of the North. He asked me to wait whilst he spoke with the other ladies. Lunch was served in the dining-room; and those of us who were not being interviewed, tried to enjoy an excellent meal. But every one was anxious, for the salary was exceptionally high, indeed princely. When all the interviewing was over, he did a curious thing; but I thought it considerate and kind to the little person for whose care he was providing. He went upstairs and brought down to us a desolate-looking little boy, and said:

"'Clifford, my little son, one of these ladies is going to be good enough to come and take care of you. I wonder which is the one you would like best of all.'

"The little fellow shrank back, for he was evidently shy; but he looked up into his father's stern face, and knew that he had to make an answer. Then very shyly he glanced round, and his eye rested on me.

"'That one, father,' he said, almost in a whisper.

"So that was how I came to be his governess. He knew what he wanted when he chose me. I have always wished that he could have known just as cleverly what he wanted when he chose his wife—that poor Marianne."

And here Tante paused, and gave that sort of pious regulation-sigh which we are always supposed to offer to the memory of all dead people, good, bad, or indifferent.

Katharine waited impatiently. She longed to know something about that dead wife. She longed to know something of Clifford's childhood, of his youth, his early career—but chiefly of that dead wife: whether he had loved her, whether she had loved him. She did not try to conceal her eagerness. She bent forward and touched Tante's hands.

"Tell me about her," she said. "I have only heard what Mrs Stanhope said of her."

"Ah," said Knutty, "she was her friend. If you have only heard what Mrs Stanhope said, you have heard only unjust things about my Clifford."

"Yes," replied Katharine, "and believed them to be impossible, and told her so."

"My dear," said Knutty warmly, "you have a mind that understands. Well, about this Marianne. She has gone her way, and I suppose custom demands that one should speak of her respectfully. But I cannot help saying that she had a Billingsgate temperament. That was the whole trouble. She had a great deal of beauty, and something of a heart. Indeed, she was not bad-hearted. I always wished she had been a downright devil; for then my poor Clifford would have known how to decide on a definite course of action. I own that I often wished

she would run away with another man. But of course he would have forgiven her. Bah! It was so like her not to run away. Excuse me, my dear. But I have never learnt not to be impatient, even with her memory; for she preyed on his kindness and his great sense of chivalry. I don't know where she originally came from, and whether it was her original *entourage* which gave her the Billingsgate temperament, or whether it was just her natural possession independent of surroundings. I did not see her until he had married her. When I saw her, I knew of course that it was her physical charm with which he had fallen in love. It could not have been her mind. She had none."

Knutty paused a moment, took off her spectacles to clean them, and then continued:

"He married her in Berlin, and took her to Aberystwith College, where he was Professor of Chemistry for two years. Alan was born there. Then his father died and he gave up teaching. He settled down at 'Falun,' his country-house, and devoted himself to research-work: as far as she would let him. But she was jealous of his work, and I believe did her best to thwart it. I saw that as the time went on. He used to come over to Denmark partly to see me, and partly on his way to Sweden, which is a grand hunting-ground for mineralogists. He had always been interested in mineralogy; indeed, as a child he played with minerals as most children play with soldiers. Well, one morning he walked into my room unexpectedly and said, 'Knutty, I came to tell you I've discovered a new mineral. You know I've had a lot of disappointments over them; but this one has not cheated me. He is a new fellow beyond all doubt. *And I felt I must have some one to be glad with me.*' That was all he said; but there was something so pathetic about his obvious need of sympathy that I felt sure things were not going well with him at home. When I went over to stay with them, I understood. I had not been three days at 'Falun' before I discovered that Marianne had this unfortunate temperament, the very worst in the world for his peculiar sensitiveness and his curiously delicate brain. I knew his brain well. As a child, if not harassed, he could do wonders at his studies. But he needed an atmosphere of peace, in which to use his mental machinery successfully. I learnt to know this, and I gave him peace, dear little chap, and spared him most of the petty tyrannies which the grown-up impose on youngsters. But Marianne could give him no peace. Peace was not in her; nor did she wish for it; nor could she understand that any one wished for it. Life to her meant scenes: scenes over anything and everything. Day after day I saw the delicate balance of his brain, so necessary for the success of his investigations, cruelly disturbed. But to be just to Marianne, she did not know. And if she had been told, she would not have understood. I tried to hint at it once or twice; and I might as well have spoken in

the Timbuctoo original dialect. I did not even offend her. She did not even understand that much of this foreign language. It was all hopeless. Her aura was impossible. So I said 'Farvel,' and I never went to stay with them again for any length of time. But occasionally I went for a day or two to please him. I saw as time went on, that he was getting some comfort out of the boy. That was a comfort to me. But I also saw that the brilliant promises of his early manhood were being unfulfilled. I heard that his scientific friends wondered and mourned. They did not know the disadvantages with which he had to cope. Probably they would not have allowed themselves to be thus harassed. But he was not they, and they were not he. And, after all, a man can only be himself. And if he is born with a heart as well as a brain, and with an almost excessive chivalry for the feelings of other people, then he is terribly at the mercy of his surroundings.

"Yes," she repeated, "at the mercy of his surroundings. And poor Marianne had no mercy on him: none."

"But if she had no understanding, then it was not that she was unmerciful, but only ignorant," Katharine said gently.

"Yes, yes; but it works out the same," Tante answered.

"Not quite," Katharine replied. "It makes one think more mercifully of her."

"Why, that is precisely the sort of thing he says!" Knutty exclaimed.

"Is it?" said Katharine, flushing up to her very eyes. And at that moment there came a sound of sweet melancholy music from the hillside.

"That is Gerda," whispered Tante. "That is one of her favourite Swedish songs—how sweet and melancholy it is."

They listened, arrested and entranced. The stillness of the evening and the pureness of the air made a silent accompaniment to Gerda's beautiful voice.

Untitled sheet music
[Listen]

Allt under himmelens fäste
Der sitta stjernor små
Allt under himmelens fäste
Der sitta stjernor små
Den vännen som jag älskat
Den kan jag aldrig få Ah ...

And the wail of despair at the end of the verse was almost heartrending.

They listened until the sad strains had died away, and then Tante softly translated the words:

"High on the dome of heaven shine the bright stars;
The lover whom I love so well, I shall reach him never.
Ah me, ah me!...."

She turned impulsively to Katharine.

"But that is not for you, not for you," she said. "You will reach him, I know you will reach him—I feel it. I want you to reach him—something or other tells me that it must and will be so—that——"

The door of the balcony opened hastily, and Ragnhild came to Tante and held out both her hands to help her up.

"Two Englishmen have come and are asking for thee," she said.

"Men du milde Himmel!"[J] cried Tante. "My icebergs, of course!"

She almost ran to the hall, where she found Clifford and Alan standing together like the two forlorn creatures that they were.

"Velkommen, velkommen!" she cried. "I don't know where you've come from, whether from the bottom of the sea or the top of the air! Nor how you've got here! But velkommen, velkommen!"

Their faces brightened up when they saw her and heard her cheery voice with its slight foreign accent.

"Oh, Knutty, it is good to see you again," the man said.

"Yes, by Jove! it is ripping," the boy said.

"Come out into the balcony, dear ones," she said, taking them by the hand as she would have taken two children. "And I'll inquire about your rooms and your food. You look like tired and hungry ghosts."

Katharine was bending over the balcony, looking down fixedly at those wonderful rivers, and with the sound and words of that sad song echoing in her ears and heart. Then she turned round and saw them both; saw the look of shy pleasure on the boy's face, and of gladness on the man's. The music died away, hushed by the gladness of her own heart.

"Velkommen!" she said, coming forward to greet them. "I've learnt that much Norwegian, you see!"

CHAPTER VII.

Knutty was overjoyed at the return of her icebergs, and it was pathetic to see how glad they were to be with her again. She thought that, on the whole, they were the better for their journey; but when she questioned Clifford, he told her that Alan had not cared to be with him.

"He is much happier since he has returned and is not alone with me," Clifford said.

"And you?" asked Knutty.

"I am much happier too, Knutty," he said thoughtfully.

And he looked in the direction of the foss, where Katharine had just gone with the Sorenskriver.

"Ah," said Knutty, "you are a strange pair, you and your boy."

He made no reply; but afterwards said in an absent sort of way:

"I think I will take a stroll in the direction of the foss."

"Yes, I should, if I were you," said Knutty, with a twinkle in her eye. "The Sorenskriver will be so pleased to see you, I'm sure."

He glanced at her a little suspiciously, but saw only a grave, preoccupied expression on her naughty old face.

But when he had gone, she laughed to herself and said:

"Yes, there is decidedly daylight, not through a leper's squint, but through a rose-window! Only I must be careful not to turn it into black darkness again. I must see nothing and hear nothing, and I must talk frequently of Marianne—or oughtn't I to talk of her? Nå, I wonder which would be the best plan. If I do speak of her, it will encourage him to remember her; and if I don't speak of her it will encourage him to brood over her in silence. She always was a difficulty, and always will be until——And even then, there's the other iceberg to deal with—ah, and here he comes—made friends with Jens, I see, and no difficulty about the language—Jens never speaking a word, and Alan only saying something occasionally, like his father."

The two boys parted at the Stabur, where Ragnhild was standing on the steps

holding a pile of freshly made Fladbröd. Alan looked up at her, took off his little round cricketing-cap, blushed, made his way over to the porch, and sat down by Knutty. And Ragnhild thought:

"That nice English boy. He shall have plenty of multebaer."

So she disappeared into the Stabur and brought out a plateful of multebaer, which she handed him with a friendly nod. He fell to without any hesitation, and Knutty watched him and smiled.

"Well, kjaere," she said, "and what do you think of this part of the world? Glad to be here?"

"Yes, Knutty," he answered. "And it is ripping to see you again."

"Am I so very 'bully'?" she said, in her teasing way.

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"Ah," she said, "I suppose I am!" And they both laughed.

"Jens and I are going fishing this afternoon up to a mountain lake over there," he said. "I wish you'd come too. Do, Knutty."

"Dear one," she answered, "I'll come with pleasure if you'll send over for one of the London cart-horses. Nothing else on this earth could carry me, and then I suppose he couldn't climb! You surely did not think of hoisting me up on one of those yellow ponies? No, I think I'll stop below and eat the fish you bring home. All the same, thank you for the invitation. Many regrets that age and weight, specially weight, prevent me from accepting."

There was a pause, and Alan went on eating his multebaer.

"Did you like your journey to America?" she asked, without looking up from her work.

"Yes," he answered half-heartedly, and his face clouded over. "But—but I was glad to come back."

"Well," she said, "that is what many people say. The New World may be good enough in its way, but the Old World is the Old World, when all is said and done. And you got tired of the Americans, did you?"

"Oh no," he said, "it wasn't that. But——"

He hesitated, and then he blurted out:

"I wish you'd been with us, Knutty. It would have been so different then."

"Nei, stakkar," she said. "You'll make old Knutty too conceited if you go on saying these nice things to her."

He had put down his plate of multebaer, and was now fiddling nervously with a Swedish knife that Knutty had given him. Knutty glanced at him with her sly little old eyes. She knew she was in for confidences if she conducted herself with discretion.

"Give it to me," she said, holding out her hand for the knife. "This is the way

it opens—so—and then you stick it through the case—so—and then it's ready to stick anybody you don't like—so—in true Swedish fashion, with which I have great sympathy—there it is!"

The boy went on fiddling with the knife, and then he took his cap off and fiddled with that.

"Du milde Himmel!" thought Knutty. "These icebergs! Why do I ever put up with them?"

"Knutty," the boy began nervously, "I want so dreadfully to ask you something—about—mother. Was she—very unhappy—do you think? I can't get out of my head what Mrs Stanhope said. I tried to forget it—but——"

He looked up hopelessly at Knutty, and broke off.

Knutty gave no sign.

"Twice I nearly ran away from father," the boy went on. "I—I wanted to be alone—not with father—once at New York—and another time at Chicago. There were two fellows going out West from there, and—I wanted to be alone, not with father—and I thought I could get along somehow—other fellows do—and then I remembered how you said that he only had me—-and I stayed—but——"

He looked up again at Knutty, and this time she answered:

"I know," she said. "I understand."

"You don't think it beastly of me?" he said.

"No," she said, "not beastly at all; only very, very sad."

"You won't let father know I—I nearly left him?" Alan asked.

"No; you may rely on me," she answered gently. And she knew that she was speaking the truth, and that she would have no heart to tell Clifford. With her quick insight she saw the whole thing in a flash of light. She guessed that Mrs Stanhope had got hold of the boy, and planted in his heart some evil seed which had grown and grown. The difficulty was to find out exactly what she had said to him; and Knutty knew that Alan would be able to tell her only unconsciously, as it were, involuntarily. Her kind old heart bled for the lad when she thought how much he must have suffered, alone and unhelped. His simple words about wanting to get away from his father spoke volumes in themselves. And he seemed to harp on this, for he said almost at once:

"You see, I shall be going back to school, and then to college, and then to work."

"And then out into the world to make your name as a great architect," she said.

He smiled a ghost of a smile.

"Yes," he said; "but far away, Knutty, out in the colonies somewhere."

"Alan," she said suddenly, "you asked me about your mother—whether I

thought she had been unhappy. I don't know; I never knew her well enough to be able to say. I thought she seemed happy when I saw her last—about two years ago, I think—and she was looking very beautiful. She was a beautiful woman your mother, and well set-up, too, wasn't she?"

"Yes," she boy said, and his lip quivered. He turned away and leaned against the pillar of the porch.

"Oh, Knutty," he said, turning round to her impetuously, "why did she die? Why isn't she here? There wasn't any need for her to die. She never would have died if father had been kinder to her, if we'd both been kinder to her; but—she was unhappy. Mrs Stanhope said she was unhappy: she told me all about it before we left England. I can't forget what she said—what she said about—about father being the cause of mother's death; that's what she meant—I know that's what she meant.... I can't get it out of my head. I never thought of it like that until she told me; but when she spoke as she did, then I knew all at once that—that—that there was something wrong somewhere about mother's death, and that I oughtn't to forget it, being her son—and—and she was fond of me—and——"

He broke off. Knutty had risen, and put her hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Kjaere," she said in a strained voice, "I did not know things were as bad as this with you. My poor boy."

She slipped her arm through the boy's arm and led him away from the courtyard, down past the cowhouse and the hay-barns and through the white gate.

Old Kari was grubbing about, singing her favourite refrain to call the cows back:—

"Sulla ma, Sulla ma, Sulla ma, aa kjy!
Sulla ma, Sulla ma, Sulla ma, aa kjy!**[K]**
Sullam, sullam, sy-y-y y-y-y!"

Bedstemor was in her garden, giving an eye to her red-currant bushes, of which she was specially proud, and casting a sly glance round to see what the Swedish artist-lady was doing perched on that rock in the next field. She was only looking towards the Gaard and measuring the cowhouse in the air. Bedstemor thought there was no harm in that; and any way, these people had to do something.

The Sorenskriver was coming down from the birch-woods, alone and apparently in a disagreeable mood, for he pushed roughly on one side the little golden-haired daughter of one of the cotters who was playing on the hillside.

"These wretched Englishmen," he said, frowning. "*Uff*, they are always in the

way, all over the world. And I was having such a pleasant time with her before this fellow came."

Katharine and Clifford were lingering near the foss. Katharine was making a little water-colour of the lovely scene. Through the trees one could catch a glimpse of the shining river and a bit of the bright blue sky.

"Yes," Clifford was saying, "my old Dane was wise to send us, and we were wise to come back. We were not happy together, Miss Frensham. But since we have returned the boy is happier, and—I am happier too."

Katharine, bending over her work, whispered to herself:

"And I—I am happier too."

But down by Knutty's mountain-ashes, near the black hay-barn, an old woman and a young boy sat, with pale, drawn faces.

CHAPTER VIII.

Gerda had pretended to hope that when Tante's English friends arrived on the scene, she would mend her strange ways, and no longer haunt the cowhouse and seek the companionship of old Kari and of Thea, who was so clever at making Fladbröd, and Mette, who had three fatherless babies and a dauntless demeanour which seemed to be particularly attractive to wicked old Knutty. But Tante was incorrigible, and would not for any one's sake have missed her evening visit to that august building. So after her sad talk with Alan, she stood and waited as usual, whilst Mette, that bright gay soul, called the cows down to the Gaard.

"Kom da, stakkar, kom da, stakkar!" ("Come then, my poor little dears!"), she cried merrily.

And Gulkind (yellow cheek), Brungaas (brown goose), Blomros (red rose), and Fjeldros (mountain rose) responded with varying degrees of bellowing and dilatoriness.

When they were safely in their stalls, the singing began. Thea had the softest voice, but Mette had a dramatic delivery. Old Kari acted as prompter when they forgot the words of the old folk-songs, and the cows went on munching steadily and switching their tails in the singers' faces, so that the music was mingled with strange discords of scolding and Knutty's laughter. And then Mette got up, and began to dance some old peasant-dance; and very pretty and graceful she looked, too, in her old cow-dress and torn bodice.

"Come, Thea!" she cried. "Let us dance the Spring-dance for the good Danish lady to see. Fjeldros and Brungaas can wait a few minutes."

"Nei, nei, nei!" cried old Kari. "It is not safe to dance in the cowhouse, Mette. Thou know'st the Huldre will come and throw stones in at the cows. Thou

know'st she will come. Ja, ja, I have seen her do it, and the cows were killed. Ak, I am afraid. The Huldre will come."

"Perhaps," said Mette, winking mischievously at Tante—"perhaps it *is* better to be on the safe side. All the same, I'm not afraid of the long-tailed Huldre."

"Have you seen her often, Kari?" asked Tante.

"Three times," said Kari, shuddering, "and each time she worked me harm. She is mischievous and ugly, not like the beautiful green-dressed Huldre. I saw her once up at the Saeter, when I was alone and had made a big fire. She came and danced and danced before the fire. But I must not waste my time with thee. I must milk Blomros."

"Kari has been taken away by the mountain people," Mette said, winking again at Tante. "Thou shouldst tell the Danish lady."

But Kari buried herself under Blomros; and so Mette, still anxious to entertain her visitor, struck up with the pretty little folk-song, "Home from the Saeter."

Sheet music of 'Home from the Saeter.'
[Listen]

We have done our many duties,
Cheese have made, have butter churned;
Now we'll lead our willing cattle,
Now we'll lock the saeter door;
Here no longer food can be found,
By the Hudre Folk or ourselves,
Glad are we that home we're going,
Gladder still the cows, I'm sure.

When they had finished, Knutty looked round and saw Gerda standing listening.

"Now," said Knutty, "you will understand why I come to the cowhouse. It is my concert-room. Well then, my good friends, good-bye for the present."

"Come back to-morrow," cried Mette. "The milking goes so merrily when thou art here."

"And mind, no dancing!" said Knutty, smiling and putting up her hand in warning. "Remember the long-tailed one!"

Mette's merry laughter sounded after them, and was followed by her finale, the mountain-call to the goats:

"Kille bukken, kille bukken, kille bukken! lammet mit!" with a final flourish which would have made a real prima donna ill for a week from jealousy.

"Mette has got a temperament," said Knutty, still smiling. "Thank Heaven for that! Anything is better than your dead-alivers, your decaying vegetable world. No disrespect to you, kjaere, for you look particularly alive this evening; a nice flush on your face—whether anger or joy, no matter—the effect is the same—life."

"Ejnar and I have found some dwarf-birch," said Gerda, pointing to her green wallet.

"Ah, that is certainly a life-giving discovery," remarked Knutty.

"We've had a lovely afternoon together," continued Gerda, "and we've discussed 'Salix' to our hearts' content."

"Ah," said Knutty, "no wonder you look so animated."

"But just by the group of mountain-ashes we met Fröken Frensham," said Gerda, "and Ejnar left me. And I was angry. But as she had the Sorenskriver and your Englishman with her, I didn't mind so much. Oh, it isn't her fault. She doesn't encourage him; and she cannot help being attractive. But Ejnar——"

"Why, my child," said Knutty, "who ever heard of a live woman being jealous, generous, and just? You can't possibly be an animal—nor even a vegetable—you must be a mineral. I have it—gold!"

"Tante," said Gerda, "wait until you have a husband, and then you won't laugh."

"No, I don't suppose I should!" replied Knutty. "Other people would do the laughing for me."

"No," said Gerda. "They should not laugh at you in my presence, I can tell you."

"Ah," said Knutty, "you're pure gold, kjaere. There, don't fret about that wretch Ejnar. If he ran away from you, we could easily overtake him. He'd be stopping to look at all the plants on the wayside; and the lady, no matter who she was, would leave him in disgust. No self-respecting eloping female could stand that, you know. Come. There's the bell ringing for smoked salmon and cheese."

But although Knutty kept up her spirits that evening, she was greatly disturbed by her talk with Alan, and distressed to know how to help him. When she went to her room, she sat for a long time at the window, thinking and puzzling. Not a single helpful idea suggested itself to her. Her heart was full of pity for the boy and concern for the father. She reflected that it was in keeping with Marianne's character to leave this unnecessary trouble behind her: that all the troubles Marianne ever made had always been perfectly unnecessary. And she worked herself into a rage at the mere thought of Mrs Stanhope, Marianne's

friend.

"The beast," she said, "the metallic beast! I'd like to see her whole machinery lynched."

After that she could not keep still, but walked up and down her big room, turning everything over in her mind until her brain was nearly distraught. Once she stood rigid for a moment.

"Had Clifford anything to hide about his wife's death?" she asked herself.

"No, no," she replied angrily. "That is ridiculous—I'm a fool to think of it even for a moment."

Her mind wandered back to the time of Marianne's death. She remembered the doctor had said that Marianne had died from some shock.

"Had Clifford lost his self-control that last night when, by his own telling, he and Marianne had some unhappy words together, and had he perhaps terrified her?" she asked herself.

"No, no," she said. "Why do I think of these absurd things?"

But if she thought of them—she, an old woman with years of judgment and experience to balance her—was it surprising that the young boy, worked upon by Mrs Stanhope's words, was thinking of them?

Knutty broke down.

"My poor icebergs," she cried. "I'm a silly, unhelpful old fool, and no good to either of you. I never could tackle Marianne—never could. She was always too much for me; and although she's dead, she is just the same now—too much for me."

She shook her head in despair, and the tears streamed down her cheeks; but after a few minutes of profound misery she brightened up.

"Nå," she said, brushing her tears away, "of course, of course! Why was I forgetting that dear Katharine Frensham? I was forgetting that I saw daylight. What an old duffer I am! If I cannot help my icebergs, she can—and will. If I cannot tackle Marianne, she can."

Her thoughts turned to Katharine with hope, affection, admiration, and never a faintest touch of jealousy. She had been drawn to her from the beginning; and each new day's companionship had only served to show her more of the Englishwoman's lovable temperament. They all loved her at the Gaard. Her presence was a joy to them; and she passed amongst them as one of those privileged beings for whom barriers are broken down and bridges are built, so that she might go her way at her own pleasure into people's hearts and minds. Yes, Knutty turned to her with hope and belief. And as she was saying to herself that Katharine was the one person in the world to help that lonely man and desolate boy, to build her bridge to reach the man, and her bridge to reach the

boy, and a third bridge for the man and the boy to reach each other—as she was saying all this, with never one single jealous thought, there came a soft knock at her door. She did not notice it at first; but she heard it a few seconds later, and when she opened her door, Katharine was standing there.

"My dear," Knutty exclaimed, and she led her visitor into the room.

"I have been uneasy about you," Katharine said, "and could not get to sleep. I felt I must come and see if anything were wrong with you. Why, you haven't been to bed yet. Do you know it is two o'clock?"

"It might be any time in a Norwegian summer night, and I've been busy thinking," said Knutty—"thinking of you, and longing for the morrow to come when I might tell you of some trouble which lies heavy on my heart."

"Most curious," said Katharine. "I had a strong feeling that you wanted me. I thought I heard you calling me."

"I did call you," Knutty said, "none the less loudly because voicelessly. I wanted to tell you that Mrs Stanhope did see Alan before he left England. Your warning to my poor Clifford came too late. She took the boy and made him drink of the poison of disbelief."

Then she gave Katharine an account of her painful interview with Alan. Katharine had previously told Knutty a few particulars of her own encounter with Mrs Stanhope at the Tonedales, and she now, at Knutty's request, repeated the story, adding more details in answer to the old Dane's questionings. Long and anxiously these two new friends, who were learning to regard each other as old friends, discussed the situation.

"I cannot bear that the boy should be suffering in this way," Knutty said. "And I cannot bear that my poor Clifford should know. For he has come back happier—ah, you know something about that, my dear. And I am glad enough to see even the beginning of a change in him. Only it is pathetic that he, without knowing it, should be steering for some happiness in a distant harbour, whilst the boy should be drifting out to sea—alone."

"He shall not drift out to sea," Katharine said. "He must and shall believe in his father again."

"But, my dear, how are you going to manage that?" Knutty asked sadly.

"By my own belief," Katharine answered simply.

"You believe in him?" Knutty said, half to herself.

"Absolutely," Katharine answered, with a proud smile on her face.

"How you comfort me!" said Knutty. "Here have I been wrestling with plans and problems until all my intelligence had gone—all of it except the very best bit of it which called out to you for help. And you come and give me courage at once, not because you have any plans, but because you are yourself."

They were standing together by the window, and Katharine put her arm through Knutty's. They looked a strange pair: Knutty with her unwieldy presence of uncompromising bulk, and Katharine with her own special grace of build and bearing. She was clothed in a blue dressing-gown. Her luxuriant hair fell down far below her waist. The weird Norwegian moon streamed into the room, and shone caressingly around her. It was a wonderful night: without the darkness of the south and without the brightness of the extreme north; a night full of strange half-lights and curious changes. At one moment dark-blue clouds hung over the great valley, mingling with the mists in fantastic fashion. Then the blue clouds would give place to others, rosy-toned or sombre grey, and these two would mingle with the mists. Then the next moment the moon would reassert herself, and her rays would light up the rivers and fill the mists with diamonds. Then there would come a moment when mists and clouds were entirely separated; and between this gap would be seen, as in a dream, a vision of the valley beyond, mysterious and haunting. Verily a land of sombre wonder and mystic charm, this great Gudbrandsdal of Norway, with its legends of mortal and spirit, fit scene for weird happenings and strange beliefs, being a part of that whole wonderful North, the voice of which calls aloud to some of us, and which, once heard, can never be lulled into silence.

The two women stood silently watching the beauty of this Norwegian summer night, arrested in their own personal feelings by Nature's magnetism.

"Behold!" cries Nature, and for the moment we are hers and hers only. Then she releases us, and we turn back to our ordinary life conscious of added strength and richness.

Katharine turned impetuously to Knutty.

"He must and shall believe in his father again," she said. "I know how helpless boys are in their troubles, and how unreachable. But we will reach him —you and I."

"With you as ally," said Knutty, "I believe we could do anything."

"Poor little fellow, poor little fellow!" said Katharine tenderly.

As she spoke she glanced out of the window and saw some one coming down from the birch-woods. She watched the figure approaching nearer and nearer to the Gaard.

"There is some one coming down from the woods," she said. "How distinctly one can see in this strange half-light!"

"One of the cotters, perhaps," suggested Knutty.

"No," said Katharine, "it is the boy—it's Alan."

They watched him, with tears of sympathy in their eyes. They knew by instinct that he had been wandering over the hills, fretting his young heart out.

They drew back, so that he might not see them as he passed up the garden.

They heard him go into the back verandah and up the outer stairs leading to his room.

They caught sight of his troubled face.

CHAPTER IX.

It was Katharine who proposed the expedition to a group of Saeters. She came down one morning in a determined frame of mind, and no obstacles could deter her from carrying out her scheme. F—— was about a day's journey distant from the Gaard, and Katharine had heard of its beauties from several of the guests, including the Sorenskriver. The difficulty was to get horses at the Gaard, for they were wanted in the fields, and when not required for work, they appeared to be wanted for rest. Solli did not like his horses to go for expeditions, and as a rule he was not to be persuaded to change his views. When asked, he always answered:

"The horses cannot go." And there the matter ended.

To-day also he said, "The horses cannot go;" and Katharine, understanding that entreaty was vain, made no sign of disappointment, and determined to walk. She invited Alan specially to come with her, and the boy, in his shy way, was delighted. Her manner to him was so genial that, spite of his trouble, he cheered up.

"The others may come with us if they like," she said to him; "but we are the leaders of this expedition. It is true that we don't know the way; but born leaders find the way, don't they?"

Ejnar declared he would go, and Gerda, still feeling injured, said she would stay behind. But Tante advised her to go and see that Ejnar did not run away with Katharine. The Sorenskriver refused rather sulkily, but was found on the way afterwards, having changed his mind and discovered a short cut. The little Swedish lady-artist accepted gladly, and the Swedish professor accompanied her as a matter of course, being always in close attendance on his pretty young compatriot. Clifford said he would remain with Knutty, but Knutty said:

"Many thanks. But I'm coming too. Do you suppose I've come to Norway to let others see Saeters? Not I."

"But, Knutty," he said, looking gravely at her, "you know we'd love to have you, but——"

"But you think it is not humanly possible," she answered, with a twinkle in her eye. "Well, I agree with you. If I walked, I should die; and if I rode, the horse would die! And as there is no horse——"

But just then Jens came into the courtyard leading Svarten, the black Gudbrandsdal horse, and Blakken, a sturdy little Nordfjording.[L] Jens hitched Svarten to the gig. Another pony was brought from the field hard by.

"The horses can go," said Solli, looking rather pleased with himself; and the little band of travellers, agreeably surprised, called out:

"Tusend tak, Solli!"

"Well, now, there *are* horses," Clifford said, turning to Knutty.

"Kjaere," she answered, "I may be a wicked old wretch, but I'm not as bad as that yet! I'll stay at home and read to Bedstemor out of the old Bible which Bedstefar bought in exchange for a black cow! Could anything be more exciting? But you go—and be happy."

"Happiness is not for me, Knutty," he said.

"No, probably not," she answered gravely. "But go and pretend. There's no harm in that."

"All the same," he said a little eagerly, "it is curious how much brighter and happier I do feel since we came here. It's the getting back to you, Knutty. That is what it is."

"Yes, I can quite believe that," replied Knutty. "There now. They are starting off."

But he still lingered in the porch.

"What sort of nonsense have you been telling Miss Frensham about my researches?" he said, smiling shyly.

"Oh," said Knutty, "I only told her you were engaged on some ridiculous stereo-something investigations. I didn't think it was anything against your moral character."

He still lingered.

"Do you know," he said, "I've been thinking that I shall enlarge my laboratory when I get back. I believe I am going to do a lot of good new work, Knutty."

"I shouldn't wonder," she answered. "A man isn't done for at forty-three."

"No, that's just it," he said brightly. "Well, goodbye for the present."

She watched him hasten after the others. She laughed a little, and congratulated herself on her beautiful discretion. And then she went over to Bedstemor's, and on her way met old Kari carrying a bundle of wood. Old Kari, who always plunged without preliminaries into a conversation, said:

"Perhaps that nice Englishwoman will find a husband here after all, poor thing. Perhaps the Englishman will marry her. What dost thou think?"

Meanwhile Clifford hurried after the Saeter pilgrims, and caught up with Gerda and Ejnar. Katharine and Alan were on in front, but he did not attempt to join them. But he heard Alan laugh, and he was glad. A great gladness seized

him as he walked on and on. She was there. That was enough for him. Ah, how he had thought of her when he was away. She did not know. No one knew. It was his own secret. No one could guess even. No one would ever know that Alan's unhappiness was only one of the reasons for their sudden return. There was another reason too: his own unconquerable yearning to see her. He had tried to conquer it; and he had not tried to conquer it. He had tried to ignore it; and he had not tried to ignore it. He had said hundreds of times to himself, "I am not free to love her;" and he had said hundreds of times too, "I am free to love her." He had said of her, "She is kind and pitiful; but she would never love me—a broken-spirited man—never—never." And he had said, "She loves me." He had said, "No, no, not for me the joys of life and love—not for me. But if only in earlier days—if only——" And he had said, "The past is gone, and the future is before me. Why must I turn from love and life?"

But he had ended with, "No, no, it is a selfish dream; there is nothing in me worthy of her—nothing for me to offer her—nothing except failure and a saddened spirit."

But this morning Clifford was not saying or thinking that. He remembered only that she was there—and the world was beautiful. For the moment, all troubles were in abeyance. He scarcely remembered that the boy shirked being with him and went his own way in proud reserve. He had, indeed, scarcely noticed it since his return. If Alan went off with Jens, it was only natural that the two lads should wish to be together. And for the rest, the rest would come right in time. So he strode on, full of life and vigour, and with a smile on his grave face. And Gerda said:

"And why do you smile, Professor?"

He answered:

"The world is beautiful, Frue.[M] And the air is so crisp and fine."

Gerda, who enjoyed being with Knutty's Englishman, was glad that Ejnar was lingering behind picking some flower which had arrested his attention. She did not mind how far he lingered behind alone. It was the going on in front with Katharine which she wished to prevent! She said to Clifford:

"Your countrywoman is very attractive. I like her immensely. Do you like her?"

"Yes," said Clifford.

"She is not fond of chemistry, I think."

"No."

"Nor is she botanical."

"No," said Clifford.

"Nevertheless, she has a great charm," said Gerda. "Tante calls it

temperamental charm. It must be delightful to have that mysterious gift. For it is a gift, and it is mysterious."

Clifford was silent. Gerda thought he was not interested in the Englishwoman.

"How blind he is!" she thought. "Even my Ejnar uses his eyes better. He knows that woman is charming."

Katharine was indeed charming that morning, and to every one. She had put little Fröken Eriksen, the Swedish artist, and the Swedish mathematical Professor, Herr Lindstedt, into the gig, so that they might enjoy a comfortable flirtation together. They laughed and greeted her pleasantly as they drove on in front.

"Tack!" they said, turning round and waving to her. They felt she understood so well.

Soon afterwards the Sorenskriver was found sitting on one of the great blocks of stone which formed the railing of the steep road down from the Solli Gaard.

"Good-morning," he said. "May a disagreeable old Norwegian join this party of nations?"

Katharine beamed on him, and spoke the one Norwegian word of which she was sure, "*Velkommen!*"

But she did not let him displace Alan. She kept the boy by her side, giving him the best of her kindness and brightness. She drew him out, heard something about his American journey, and listened to a long description of the ship which took him out and brought him home. He did not once speak of his father. And she did not speak of him. But she had a strong belief that if she could only manage to win the boy for herself, she could hand him back to his father and say, "Here is your boy. He is yours again. I have won him for you."

It was a joy to her to feel that she was working for Clifford Thornton. And with the pitiful tenderness that was her own birthright, she was glad that she was trying to help the boy. She knew she would succeed. No thoughts of failure crossed her mind. No fears of that poor Marianne possessed her. She made no plans, and reckoned on no contingencies. She had never been afraid of life. That was all she knew. And without realising it, she had a remarkable equipment for success in her self-imposed task. By instinct, by revelation, by reason of her big, generous nature, she understood Marianne: that poor Marianne, who, so she said to Knutty, could not be called unmerciful if she was ignorant—since mercy belonged only to true knowledge.

So she kept Alan by her side, and he was proud to be her chosen companion. She said:

"This is our show, you know. The other people are merely here on sufferance.

And if the Sorenskriver says anything disagreeable about England, we'll wollop him and leave him tied up to a tree until we return."

"Or shove him down into the torrent," said Alan, delighted. "Here it is, just handy."

"Yes; but he has not begun yet," she answered. "We must give the poor man a chance."

"Don't you feel beastly angry when these foreigners say anything against England?" he asked.

"Beastly angry!" she replied with gusto.

He smiled with quiet satisfaction. He loved her comradeship of words as well as her comradeship of thoughts.

They passed over the bridge leading to the other side of the Vinstra gorge, stopped to rest at the Landhandleri (store-shop), and then began their long ascent to the Saeters. Up they went past several fine old farms; and as they mounted higher, they could see the Solli Gaard perched on the opposite ridge. The road was a rough carriage-road leading up to a large sanatorium, which was situated about three-quarters of the way to F——. As they mounted, the forest of Scotch firs and spruces seemed thicker and darker, being unrelieved by the presence of other trees, as in the valley below. Leafy mosses formed the carpeting of the forest, and a wealth of bilberries was accumulated in the spruce-woods; whilst the red whortleberry showed itself farther on in open dry spots amongst the pines which crept up higher than the Scotch firs—"Grantraeer," as the Norwegians call them. Then they, in their turn, thinned out, and the lovely birches began to predominate; so that the way through the forest became less gloomy, and the spirits of the pilgrims rose immediately, and Gerda sang. But, being Danish, she sang a song in praise of her native beech-woods! And the Sorenskriver joined in too, out of compliment to Denmark, but said that he would like to recite to the English people the poem about the beeches of Denmark, the birches of Sweden, and the fir-trees of Norway. The beeches were as the Danes themselves, comfortable, easy; the birches were even as the Swedes, graceful, gracious, light-hearted; and the grim firs were as the Norwegians, gloomy, self-contained, and sad.

"Therefore, Fröken," he said, turning to Katharine, "judge us gently. We are even as our country itself, stern and uncompromising."

"But grand, Herr Sorenskriver," said Katharine, "with nothing petty."

"Nei da!" he said, looking pleased. "It would be nice to think that this was as true of ourselves as of our mountains."

Then they glanced back at the snow-clad Rondane in the distance; and they came out into the open country, and saw the Jutenheim (the home of the giants)

in front of them. They had left the region of the firs, pines, and birches, and reached the land of the dwarf-birch, the willow, and the persistent juniper. And here the rough carriage-road ended; for the sanatorium, where the fashionable Scandinavians were taking their summer mountain-holiday, was now only a few yards off. The saeter pilgrims had thought of dining there; but no one seemed inclined to face a crowd of two hundred guests. So the little company drew up by the side of a brook, and ate Mysost[N] sandwiches; the Sorenskriver, who continued in the best of good humours, assuring Katharine that this was an infallible way of learning Norwegian quickly. Alan was disappointed that he was not rude.

"Then we could go for him," he said privately to Katharine.

"Oh, perhaps he may even yet be rude!" whispered Katharine, reassuring him.

When they had lunched and taken their ease, they started once more on their journey, passing the precincts of the sanatorium in order to hire boats for crossing the beautiful mountain lake; for F—— was on the other side, perched high up on the mountain-slope. By rowing over, they would save themselves about two miles of circuitous rough road. Jens said that he would take the gig and the horses round by the road to meet the boat. Alan went with him, but he looked back wistfully at Katharine once or twice.

And now a curious thing happened. As Katharine and Gerda were standing waiting for their boat, the sound of English voices broke upon them.

"English," said Gerda. "That is a greeting for you."

"Well, it's very odd," said Katharine, listening; "but I've heard that voice before."

"Perhaps you think it is familiar because it is English," suggested Gerda.

"Perhaps," answered Katharine; but she was still arrested by the sound.

"I thought the Sorenskriver said that no English people came here?" she said.

"He said they came very rarely to these parts," Gerda replied. "One or two Englishmen for fishing sometimes; otherwise Swedes, Danes, Finns, Russians."

"I am sure I have heard that voice before," Katharine said. She seemed troubled.

"There they go, you see," Gerda said, pointing to two figures. "They were in the little copse yonder—two of your tall Englishwomen. How distinctly one hears voices at this height! Well, the Kemiker is waiting for us. Du milde Gud! Look at my Ejnar handling the oars! Bravo, Ejnar!"

"Come, ladies," called Clifford cheerily from the boat. "Let us be off before the Botaniker upsets the boat. He has been trying to reach a plant at the bottom of the lake."

When they had taken their places, Katharine turned to Clifford, who was

looking radiantly happy, and she said:

"Row quickly, row quickly, Professor Thornton. I want to get away from here."

"Do you dislike the great caravanserai so much?" he said. "Well, you have only to turn round, and there you have the Jutenheim mountains in all their glory. Are they not beautiful?"

She looked at the snow-capped mountains; but for the moment their beauty scarcely reached her. She was thinking of that voice. When had she heard it? And where?

"The mountains, the mountains of Norway!" cried Clifford. "Ah, I've always loved the North, and each time I come I love it more passionately, and this time ____"

No one was listening to him. Gerda and Ejnar were busy trying to see what was in the bottom of the lake, and Katharine seemed lost in her own thoughts. Suddenly she remembered where she had heard that voice. It was Mrs Stanhope's. The words rushed to her lips; she glanced at Clifford, saw and felt his happiness, and was silent. But now she knew why the sound of that voice had aroused feelings of apprehension and anxiety, and an instinctive desire to ward off harm both from the man and the boy.

For directly she heard it, she had been eager to hurry Clifford away, and relieved that Alan had gone on with Jens.

CHAPTER X.

So they rowed across the lake, he remembering nothing except the joy of being with her, and she trying to forget that any discord of unrest had broken in upon the harmonies of her heart. They landed on swampy ground, and made their way over rare beautiful mosses, ling, and low growth of bilberry and cloudberry. Ejnar and Gerda became lost to all human emotions, and gave themselves up to the joys of their profession. Long after all the rest of the little company had met on the rocky main road to the Saeters, the two botanists lingered in that fairyland swamp. At last Jens and Alan were sent back to find them, and in due time they reappeared, with a rapt expression on their faces and many treasures in their wallets. The country grew wilder and grimmer as the pilgrims mounted higher. The road, or track, was very rough, scarcely fit for a cariole or stol-kjaerre, and the Swedish mathematical Professor felt anxiously concerned about the comfort and safety of the little Swedish artist, who was a bad walker, and who therefore preferred to jolt along in the gig. But she did not mind. She laughed at his fears, and whispered to Katharine with her pretty

English accent:

"My lover is afraid for my safeness!"

And Katharine laughed and whispered back:

"I hope you are having a really good flirtation with him."

"Ja, ja," she answered softly, "like the English boy says 'reeping good!'"

Grimmer and wilder still grew the mountainous country. They had now passed the region of the dwarf-birch and willow-bushes, and had come to what is called the "lichen zone," where the reindeer-moss predominates, and where the bushes are either creeping specimens, growing in tussocks, or else hiding their branches among the lichens so that only the leaves show above them. It seemed almost impossible to believe that here, on these more or less barren mountain-plateaus, good grazing could be found for the cattle during the summer months. Yet it was true enough that in this particular district the cows and goats of about fifty Saeters found their summer maintenance, about fifty of the great Gaards down in the side valleys of the Gudbrandsdal owning, since time immemorial, portions of the mountain grazing-land. The Sollis' Saeter was not in this region. It was fifty miles distant from the Solli Gaard, and, as Jens told the pilgrims, took two whole days to reach, over a much rougher country than that which they had just traversed.

"This is nothing," said Jens smiling grimly, when the Swedish lady was nearly thrown out of the gig on to Svarten's back. "We call this a good road; and it goes right up to the first Saeter. Then you can drive no more. Now you see the smoke rising from the huts. We are there now."

Jens, usually so reserved and silent, was quite animated. The mountain-air, and the feeling of being in the wild, free life he loved so much, excited him. He was transformed from a quiet, rather surly lad into an inspired human being fitted to his own natural environment. Gerda, looking at him, thought immediately of Björnson's Arne.

"You love the mountains, Jens?" she said to him.

"Yes," he answered simply. "I am always happy up at the Saeter. One has thoughts."

They halted outside the first Saeter, and turned to look at the beautiful scene. They were in the midst of low mountains. In the distance, across the lake, they could see the snow-peaks of the great Jutenheim range—the home of the giants. Around them rose strange weird mountain forms, each one suggestive of wayward and grim fancy. And over to the right, towering above a group of castle-mountains, peopled with strange phantoms born of the loneliness and the imagination, they saw the glistening peaks of the Rondane caught by the glow of the sun setting somewhere—not there. And below them was another mountain-

lake, near which nestled two or three Saeters apart from the rest, and in which they could see the reflection of the great grey-blue clouds edged with gold. And above them passed in tumultuous procession the wonders of a Norwegian mountain evening sky of summer-time: clouds of delicate fabric, clouds of heavy texture: calm fairy visions, changing imperceptibly to wild and angry spectacle: sudden pictures of fierce and passionate joy, and lingering impressions of deepest melancholy,—all of it faithfully typical of the strange Norwegian temperament.

"One must have come up to the mountains," whispered Clifford to Katharine, "to understand anything at all of the Norwegian mind. This is the Norwegians, and the Norwegians are this."

And the grim old Sorenskriver, standing on the other side of Katharine, said in his half-gruff, half-friendly way:

"Fröken, you see a wild and uncompromising Nature, without the gentler graces. It is ourselves."

"And again I say, with nothing petty in it," said Katharine, spreading out her arms. "On a big scale—vast and big—the graces lost in the greatness."

"Look," said Jens, "the goats and cows are beginning to come back to the Saeters. They have heard the call. You will see them come from all directions, slowly and in their own time."

Slowly and solemnly they came over the fields, a straggling company, each contingent led by a determined leading lady, who wore a massive collar and bell. She looked behind now and again to see if her crowd of supernumeraries were following her at sufficiently respectful distances, and then she bellowed, and waited outside her own Saeter. The saeter pilgrims stood a long time looking at this characteristic Norwegian scene: the wild heath in front of them was literally dotted with far-off specks, which gradually resolved themselves into cows or goats strolling home in true Norwegian fashion—*largissimo lentissimo*! Even as stars reveal themselves in the sky, and ships on the sea, if one stares long and steadily, so these cows and goats revealed themselves in that great wild expanse. And just when there seemed to be no more distant objects visible, suddenly something would appear on the top of a hillock, and Jens would cry with satisfaction:

"See, there is another one!" He looked on as eagerly as all the strangers, very much as an old salt gazing fixedly out to sea. Then some of the saeter-girls came out to urge the lingering animals to hurry themselves, and the air was filled with mysterious cries of coaxment and impatience. At last the pilgrims went to inquire about food and lodging for the night.

"You may get it perhaps," Jens remarked vaguely. This, of course, was the

Norwegian way of saying that they would get it; and when they knocked at the door of the particular Saeter which Jens pointed out to them, a dear old woman welcomed them to her stue (hut) as though it were a palace. She liked to have visitors, and her only regret was that she had not known in time to prepare the room for them in best saeter fashion. Meanwhile, if they would rest, she would do her utmost; and she suggested that the gentlemen should go down to the Saeter by the lake and secure a lodging there, and then they could return and have their meal in the stue here. She was a pretty old woman. Pleasure and excitement lit up her sweet face and made her eyes wonderfully bright. She wanted to know all about her visitors, and Gerda explained that they were Swedes, Danes, and English, and one Norwegian only, the Sorenskriver. She was deeply interested in Katharine, and asked Gerda whether the English Herr and the boy were Katharine's husband and son; and when Gerda said that they were only friends, she seemed disappointed, and patted Katharine on the shoulder in token of sympathy with her. Gerda told Katharine, and Katharine laughed. She was very happy and interested. She had forgotten the sound of that jarring voice. All her gaiety and *bonhomie* had come back to her. It was she who began to help their pretty old hostess. It was she who sprinkled the fresh juniper-leaves over the floor, throwing so many that she had to be checked in her reckless generosity. Then Gerda fetched the logs, and made a grand fire in the old Peise (stone fireplace), and almost immediately the warmth brought out the sweet fragrance of the juniper-leaves. The old woman spread a fine woven cloth over the one bed in the room. Then she bustled into the dairy and brought out mysost—a great square block of it, and fladbröd, and coffee-berries, which Katharine roasted and then crushed in the machine. When the table had been set, the old woman brought a bowl of cream and sugar, and the "vaffle" irons, and began to make vaffler (pancakes). She filled three large plates with these delicious dainties, and her eager face was something to behold. Finally she signed to Katharine, who followed her into the dairy, and came back carrying two wooden bowls of römmekolle—milk with cream on the top turned sour.

"Now," she said triumphantly, "everything is ready. And here come the Herrer. And now you will want some fresh milk. The cows have just been milked."

"No, no, thou hast done enough. I will go and fetch the milk," said the Sorenskriver, who was in great spirits still, and almost like a young boy. "Why, thou dear Heaven, I was a cotter's son and lived up at the Saeter summer after summer. This is like my childhood again. I am as happy as Jens!"

So off he went to the cowhouse at the other end of the little saeter-enclosure. He began to sing a stev[O] with the milkmaids. This was the stev:—

Sheet music of 'Astri my Astri'
[Listen]

Astri, my Astri, who cared but for me,
time you were caring so warmly for me;
Weeping each Saturday night when I left,
Do you remember it, now that it's past?
That was the time when I out-shone them all,
Lawyer and priest in the valley were nought,
That was the time when I outshone them all,
Lawyer and priest in the valley were nought.

(*The milkmaids answered*)—

The time you were caring for Astri alone,
Was the time when that Svanaug you cared not to see;
The time when your steps were so active and brisk,
Hastening to greet me each Saturday eve.
That was the time when no riches on earth,
Fair could have seemed without my sweetheart's love.
That was the time when no riches on earth,
Fair could have seemed without my sweetheart's love.

He returned with two jugs of milk. A merry laugh sounded after him, and he was smiling too. The saeter-door was divided into two parts, and he shut the lower half to keep out the draught; and when the old woman tried to slip away, leaving her guests to enjoy themselves in their own fashion, he said:

"No, no, mor, thou must stay." And every one cried out:

"Thou must stay."

So she stayed. She tidied herself, folded a clean white silk kerchief crosswise over her head, and took her place at the table, dignified and charming in her simple ease of manner. Many an ill-bred low-born, and ill-bred well-born society dame might have learnt a profitable lesson from this old saeter-woman—something about the unconscious grace which springs from true unself-consciousness. And she smiled with pride and pleasure to see them all doing justice to the vaffler, the mysost, the fladbröd, and the römmekolle. She was particularly anxious that the English lady should enjoy the römmekolle.

"Stakkar!" she said. "Thou must eat the whole of the top! Ja, saa, with sugar

on it! It is good. Thou canst not get it so good in thy country? Thou hast no mountains there, no Saeters there? Ak, ak, that must be a poor sort of country! Well, we cannot all be born in Norway."

And she laughed to see Alan pegging away at the vaffler.

"The English boy shall have as many vaffler as he likes," she said. "Wilt thou have some more, stakkar? I will make thee another plateful."

It was a merry, merry meal. Every one was hungry and happy. The Sorenskriver asked for some spaeke-kjöd (smoked and dried mutton or reindeer) which was hanging up in the Peise. He cut little slices out of it and made every one eat them.

"Otherwise," he said, "you will know nothing about a Norwegian Saeter. And now a big piece for myself! Isn't it good, Botaniker? Ah, if you eat it up, you will be inspired to find some rare plants here!"

Then they all drank the old saeter-woman's health.

"Skaal!" they said.

And then Clifford said:

"Skaal to Norway!"

And the Sorenskriver said:

"Skaal to England!"

And the botanists said:

"Skaal to Sweden!"

And the Swedish professor said:

"Skaal to Denmark!"

Then the Sorenskriver added:

"Would that all the nations could meet together up at the Saeter and cry 'Skaal!'"

And at that moment there came a knock at the door, and a little man in English knickerbockers and Norfolk jacket asked for admittance.

"English, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, German?" asked the Sorenskriver.

"*Monsieur, je suis un peintre français*," said the little man, somewhat astonished.

"Then Skaal to France!" cried the merry company, draining their coffee-cups.

The Frenchman, with that perfect tact characteristic of his nation, thanked them in the name of his country, his hand on his heart; and took his place amongst these strangers, at their invitation. And then they gathered round the fire and heaped up the logs. Katharine never forgot that evening: the five nations gathered together in that quaint low room built of huge tree-trunks roughly put together, with lichen and birch-leaves filling in the crevices: the curious mixture of languages; the fun of understanding and misunderstanding: the fragrance of

the juniper: the delightful sense of good fellowship: the happiness of being in the presence of the man she loved: the mysterious influence of the wild mountains: the loosening of pent-up instincts and emotions. Years afterwards she was able to recall every detail of the surroundings: the Lur (horn) hanging on the wall, and in those parts still used for calling to the cattle; the Langeleik (an old kind of zither) in its own special recess, seldom found missing in real old Norwegian houses, silent now, but formerly playing an important part in the saeter-life of bygone days; the old wooden balances, which seemed to belong to the period of the Ark; the sausages and smoked meat hanging in the Peise; the branches of fir placed as mats before the door; the saeter-woman passing to and fro, now stopping to speak to one of her guests, now slipping away to attend to some of her many saeter duties. Then at an opportune moment the Sorenskriver said:

"Now, mor, if we heap on the logs, perhaps the green-dressed Huldre will come and dance before the fire. Thou hast seen the Huldre, thou? Tell us about her—wilt thou not?"

But she shook her head mysteriously, and went away as if she were frightened; but after a few minutes she came back, and said in an awed tone of voice:

"Twice I have seen the green-dressed Huldre—ak, and she was beautiful! I was up at the Saeter over by my old home, and my sweetheart had come to see me; and ak, ak, the Huldre came and danced before the fire—and she bewitched him, and he went away into the mountains and no one ever saw him again."

"And so," she added simply, "I had to get another sweetheart."

"Aa ja," said the Sorenskriver. "I expect there was no difficulty about that."

"No," she answered, "thou art right."

And she beat a sudden retreat, as though she had said too much; but she returned of her own accord, and continued:

"And the second time I saw the Huldre it was on the heath. I had gone out alone to look for some of the cows who had not come home, and I saw her on horseback. Her beautiful green dress covered the whole of Blakken's back, and her tail swept the ground. And Blakken flew, flew like lightning. And when I found the cows, they were dying. The Huldre had willed them ill. That was fifty years ago. But I see her now. No one can ever forget the Huldre."

So the evening passed, with stories of the Huldre, and the Trolds, and the mountain-people of Norwegian lore; for here were the strangers in the very birthplace of many of these weird legends, all, or most of them, part and parcel of the saeter-life; all, or most of them, woven out of the wild and lonely spirit of mountain-nature.

And then the little company passed by easy sequence to the subject of visions

and dreams. Some one asked Katharine if she had ever had a vision.

"Yes," she answered; "once—once only."

"Tell it," they said.

But she shook her head.

"It would be out of place," she answered, "for, oddly enough, it was about God."

"Surely, mademoiselle," said the Frenchman, "we are far away enough from civilisation to be considered near enough to God for the moment?"

But she could not be induced to tell it.

"You would think I was a religious fanatic," she said. "And I am neither fanatical nor religious."

"Ah," said Ejnar, "I hope I may have a vision tonight of what is in the bottom of that lake we crossed over."

"You did your very best, Professor, to include us all in that vision of the bottom of the lake," said Clifford quaintly.

"My poor Ejnar, how they all tease you!" said Gerda.

"I think," said Katharine, "the Kemiker ought to know better, being himself a scientific man. Probably if he were piloting us all down a mine, he would not care what became of us if his eye lit on some unexpected treasure of the earth-depths."

"Noble lady," said Ejnar, smiling; "I perceive I have a friend in you, and the Kemiker has an enemy."

Clifford Thornton looked into the fire and laughed happily.

Then Gerda said:

"Twice I have dreamed that I found a certain species of fungus in a particular part of the wood; and guided by the memory of my dream, the next day I have found it. Have you ever found anything like that in a dream, Professor Thornton?"

Clifford looked up with a painful expression on his face.

"I always try my very hardest never to dream, Frue," he answered.

"And why?" she asked.

"Because up to the present we appear to have no knowledge of how to control our dreams," he replied.

"But if we could control them, they would not be dreams," said Katharine.

"So much the better then," answered Clifford; "they would be mere continuations of self-guided consciousness in another form."

"But it is their utter irresponsibility and wildness which give them their magic!" cried the French artist. "In my dreams, I am the prince of all painters born since the world began. Mon Dieu, to be without that! I tremble! Life would

be impossible! In my dreams I discover unseen, unthought-of colours! I cry with rapture!"

"In my dreams," said the Swedish mathematician, "I find the fourth dimension, the fifth dimension, the hundredth dimension!"

"In my dreams," said the Sorenskriver, waving his arms grandiosely, "I see Norway standing by herself, strong, powerful, irresistible as the Vikinger themselves, no union with a sister country—nei, nei, pardon me, Mathematiker!"

"Why, you would take away the very inspiration of the poet, the very life of the patriot's spirit," said Katharine, turning to Clifford.

"You are all speaking of the dreams which are the outcome of the best and highest part of ourselves," said Clifford, speaking as if he were in a dream himself. "But what about the dreams which are not the outcome of our best selves?"

"Oh, surely they pass away as other dreams," she answered.

"But do you not see," he said, "that if there is a chance that the artist remembers the rapture with which he discovered in his dream that marvellous colour, and the patriot the joy which he felt on beholding in his dreams his country strong and irresistible, there is also a chance that less noble feelings experienced in a dream may also be remembered?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Mon Dieu!" he said. "We cannot always be noble—not even in our dreams. I, for my part, would rather take the chance of dreaming that I injured or murdered some one and rejoiced over it, than lose the chance of dreaming that I was the greatest artist in the world. Why, I have murdered all my rivals in my dreams, and they are still alive and painting with great *éclat* pictures entirely inferior to mine! And I am no worse for having assassinated them and rejoiced over my evil deeds in my dream."

"Probably because there were no evil consequences," Clifford said. "But supposing there had been evil consequences, what then?"

"But you do not seriously believe that there is any such close relationship between dream-life and actual life, between dream-cause and actual effect?" asked Gerda.

"I do not know what I believe about it, Frue," he answered. "Some day science will be able to explain to us the mysterious working of the brain in normal life, in dream-life, in so-called death: and the connecting links."

He had risen as he spoke, as though he, even as the old saeter-woman, had let himself go too much, and now wished to slip away quietly. But they all rose too, and the Sorenskriver said:

"We have spent a true saeter-evening, communing with mysteries. The spirit

of place has seized us, the mountain-spirit. But if we do not soon get to rest and sleep dreamlessly, we shall have no brains left us in the morning for yet another mountain mystery—the making of the Mysost!"

"Tak for maden" (thanks for the meal), he added, turning to the old saeter-woman.

"Tak for maden!" cried every one in a pleasant chorus.

"And tak for behageligt selskab!" (thanks for your delightful company), he said, turning to all his comrades.

"Tak for behageligt selskab!" cried every one.

Then the men went off to the Saeter down by the lake; and Katharine, Gerda, and the little Swedish artist arranged themselves for rest as well as they could in a rough saeter-stue. The two of them were soon asleep; but Katharine lay on her bench in the corner watching the fire, listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking of Clifford Thornton.

"Dreams, dreams," she thought. "Why should he dread to dream? And his face was full of pain when he said that he tried never to dream. Ah, if I could only reach him—sometimes we seem so near—and then——"

Katharine slept.

But in the morning she was up betimes, and out in the early freshness and crispness. She was alone on that wild expanse. There was deep stillness all around her. Silently, softly the magic mists were caressing the mountains. The stars were losing their own brightness in the brightening skies. The sun was breaking over the distant snow-peaks of the Giant range. She was alone with Nature. And Nature set her free.

"My belovèd!" she cried. "My life was as grey as this great dreary wild until your presence glorified it. You broke in upon my loneliness—the bitterest loneliness on earth—a woman's heart-loneliness,—you broke in upon it so that now nothing of it remains—scarcely the memory. Have no fear, my belovèd. I will gather up your past life and your past love with reverential tenderness. I have no fear. My love for you and my belief in you shall conquer everything."

Clifford Thornton was mounting from the Saeter down by the lake-side. He came out joyously into the freshness and crispness of the early morning. He was alone on that wild expanse. There was deep stillness all around him. Silently, softly the magic mists were caressing the mountains. The stars were losing their own brightness in the brightening skies. The sun was breaking over the distant snow-peaks of the Giant range. He was alone with Nature. And Nature set him free.

"My love!" he cried. "I fling the past behind me at last. There are no barriers—none—none. Fool that I was to think I was not free. Free! I am as free as these

vast stretches of wild country, free as this mountain air. Do you know, will you ever know, oh, you must know, my own belovèd, that I am yours—yours, unutterably yours. Shall I ever clasp you in my arms and know that you are mine?"

Then suddenly he saw Katharine in the distance, and she saw him. She was moving towards him as he was moving towards her. He hastened to meet her with a tornado of wild gladness in his heart.

But when they came face to face they stood in silence, as when they had first met on the evening of the quartette.

He was the first to find words.

"Don't let us go back," he said; "let us go on—let us go on—the morning is still young—and there is no gladness like the gladness of the early morning. What do you think?"

"No gladness like the gladness of the early morning," she repeated joyously.

So they passed on together, over the wild and stony heathland, in the direction of the Rondane mountains: he with a song in his heart, she with the same song in hers.

"Isn't it glorious to be up here?" he cried. "I feel like the Sorenskriver himself—a silent, surly fellow suddenly turned light-hearted and eloquent. Knutty always said I ought to have been a Norwegian."

"And I feel like Jens," said Katharine, "an inspired person, with grand, big thoughts in my mind, which I shall lose on my way down to the valley again. Ak, ak!"

"What was your vision?" he asked. "Will you not tell me?"

"If you wish," she answered; "but it is not worth telling, really. I have never told any one. I don't know how I came to let those words slip out last night."

"Tell me," he said, turning to her.

"Well," she said, "I was going to have a slight operation to my mouth, and some anæsthetic had been given to me. I was trying my very hardest to keep my consciousness to the last millionth of a minute, when I saw a look of great mental suffering and tension on the surgeon's face. And I said to myself, 'I will be merciful to the man, and I will make a sacrifice to him of what I value most on earth at this moment: the tiny remaining fragment of my consciousness. He will never know, and no one will ever know; all the same, from my point of view, it is a deed of infinite mercy.' So I let myself pass into unconsciousness an infinitesimal instant of time sooner than I need have done. I heard him say, 'Now!' Suddenly I found myself in a vast region, which seemed limitless, which seemed to consist of infinite infinities which one nevertheless could see were finities blending with each other imperceptibly."

Katharine stood still a moment.

"And I realised," she continued, "how little I had ever known about the proportion of things, how little my mind had ever grasped the true significance of finities, which here were certainly infinities. I felt entirely bewildered, and yet wildly excited. Ever since I can remember, great space has always excited me. And suddenly, whilst I was wondering where to go, what to do, whom to reach, I saw a woman near me—a beautiful woman of so-called ill-fame. And she cried out to me:

"'This is heaven, and I am straining upwards, upwards, upwards through all the infinities until I reach God. *For it takes the highest to understand the lowest.*'

"And I went with her, and a dim vision of God broke upon me, and I knew no more. But I came back to consciousness, saying, 'For it takes the highest to understand the lowest.'"

She paused a moment, and then said:

"If I had been thinking of God, I could better understand why I had that vision."

"You had been thinking of God," he answered. "You had thought of mercy and sacrifice, of an inappreciable quantity and quality from a finite point of view; and that led you to think unconsciously of the different aspect and value of things when seen and understood by an infinite mind unbounded by horizons. If there is a God, that must be God—the greatest and highest mind which understands the lowest grade of everything: religion, morals, morals, religion."

"But it is not you who should have a vision of that kind," he added. "You do not need it. It should come to those who cannot see beyond their prison wall. It might make them wish to break through it and see the open space, and still more open space, and still more open space. But you, who have the free spirit, you were surely born in the open space; no petty narrow horizon for you, but a wide and generous expanse."

"Alas!" she said, "you are imputing to me virtues which I have not!"

"They are not virtues," he answered. "They are part of your temperament; born with you, not acquired."

She smiled at his praise. It was very sweet to her. He smiled too. He was proud that he, a prisoner of silence, had had the courage to say those words to her. And on they went together, he with a song in his heart, and she with the same song in hers. Once she thought to ask him why he tried never to dream; but she glanced at his grave face lit up with happiness, and she grudged that even a passing shadow of pain should mar the brightness of the morning. And once, perhaps at that same moment, he himself thought of his dreams, and felt, by sudden inspiration, that one day, one day he would be able to open his heart to

her—the woman born in the open space—and tell her the history of his burdened mind. The thought flashed through him, and brought, not memories of the past, but hopes for the future.

At last they turned back to the Saeter, and realised they had come a long way: far away from the beat of the cows and goats. But after a spell of solitude, they met a few of the wandering creatures, who stopped to look at them and inquire in loud chorus what right they had to venture on these private pastures. And after a time they came upon more stragglers; and then they made out a black cow in the distance, immovable and contemplative; but, on closer inspection, it proved to be Ejnar examining some new-found treasure! As they approached he called out to them:

"What have you brought back from your long walk?"

"Nothing, nothing," they cried together.

"Well," he answered, looking at them pityingly, "how foolish to go for a long walk, then!"

They laughed, passed on, and found Gerda standing scanning the distance.

"Did you see my Ejnar?" she inquired. "It is time for breakfast, and the Sorenskriver has been singing in the Lur to call every one in. Listen, there it is again! The Sorenskriver is in great good spirits again this morning. He is like a big boy."

He was like a big, good-natured boy at breakfast too. Alan confided to Katharine that he thought the old chap was behaving awfully disappointingly well.

"He hasn't been disagreeable one single moment," Alan whispered. "And look here, he has given me this Lap knife. Isn't it jolly of him?"

"I think that we shall all have to give him a vote of thanks instead of wolloping him and tying him to a tree," whispered Katharine.

"Oh, but there's all the way back yet," said Alan quaintly. And then he added, "I say, you'll let me come along with you again, won't you?"

"Of course," she answered, her heart going out to the boy. "Of course; we are the leaders of this expedition, and must take our followers safely home."

He blushed in his boyish way, and slipped away with a happy smile on his young face. He did not know it, but he admired and liked Katharine tremendously. He did not realise it, but he always felt, after he had been with Katharine, that his old love and longing for his father began to tug at his heart. He went and stood by him now in front of the Saeter, and slipped his arm through his father's.

"It's splendid up here, isn't it, father?" he said.

"Yes, Alan," answered the man joyfully, as he felt the touch of his boy's arm.

It was the first time for many months that the boy had crept up to his father in his old chum-like fashion. Katharine watched him, and knew that for the moment they were happy together, and that she had begun and was carrying on successfully her work of love and healing for the boy as well as for the man.

"It is a morning of happiness," she said to herself; and when the merry little Swedish artist came into the saeter-hut and showed her the sketch which she had been making of the interior, she found the Englishwoman as gay as herself.

"Why," she said to Katharine, "you look as if you was having the flirts as well as me! What do you think of my sketch? Not bad? I give it perhaps to my lover." Then she danced round the room singing a gay Swedish melody.

The old saeter-woman laughed, clapped her hands, and cried:

"Ja vel, it is good to dance when one is young and happy!"

And then the Sorenskriver blew the Lur again to summon every one to the cheese-making.

"Mor," he said, "thou must show us everything, so that all these foreign people may remember the only right way to make the best cheese in the world."

So they went into the dairy, and saw all the different kinds of bowls and pans, and rows of square blocks of Mysost kept there to settle into solidarity. Each block weighed about ten pounds, and Katharine was amazed to hear that it took the milk of forty goats to make one of these cheeses a-day. Then they saw the infernal machine which separates the milk from the cream, and the Sorenskriver, still acting as general showman, poured a vessel of fresh rich milk into the iron ogre, whilst Katharine, under directions, turned the handle, and made the mighty beast to roar and screech. Every one's nerves were set on edge. Ejnar dashed wildly from the hut; but was collared by Alan and Jens, for the Sorenskriver cried out:

"Don't let the Botaniker go off by himself. We shall never find him, and our time is getting short."

And then they went to the other little hut where the cheese was being made. There were two large open caldrons over the great stone-oven, and two pretty young saeter-girls (saeter-jenter) were busily stirring the contents of the caldrons. They told Gerda that one caldron contained cream and the other milk, from which the cheese had first been taken by mixing it with yeast. And the pigs got the rejected cheese. Then the two liquids were heated slowly for about four hours, being stirred unceasingly, and when they were on the verge of boiling, they were mixed together. Meantime they both looked and tasted like toffee, and smelt like toffee too.

"And now you have seen the true and only Mysost, mine Damer og Herrer," said the Sorenskriver dramatically. "Now you know the two secrets of

Norwegian greatness—the Mountains and the Mysost!"

And he half meant it, too, although he laughed. And the old saeter-woman quite meant it.

"Ja, ja," she said proudly, and inclined her head with true Norwegian dignity.

Then they packed up and paid. The paying was not quite an easy matter. The old saeter-woman made no fixed charge, and appeared not to want to take any money. The Sorenskriver had a twinkle in his eye when he settled up. He knew that, in accordance with Norwegian peasant etiquette, she would appear to be indifferent to the money, accept it reluctantly, and then probably not consider it enough! However, he managed this delicate task with great skill, and began to arrange for returning to the Solli Gaard. But none of the company were anxious to be off. They lingered about, strolling, talking, laughing. The French artist was making a small water-colour of the picturesque interior of the stue. And he wanted to come with them too, if they could wait a little. The old saeter-woman gave Katharine a large cow-bell.

"It has rung on these mountains a hundred years and more," she said. "Thou shalt have it. It is for thee, stakkar. I like thee. Thou art beautiful and kind. It is a pity thou art not that Englishman's wife."

She beckoned to Gerda to come and translate her words, and the three women laughed together. Gerda said in a whisper:

"It is a good thing that the Kemiker is out of the way. He would be astonished, wouldn't he? I don't think love is much in his line, is it? Why, he is less human even than my poor Ejnar—if indeed such a thing is possible!"

But Katharine stooped down and kissed the old saeter-woman.

"Tusend, tusend tak!" she said. She rang the bell, and then pointed to the old woman and then to her own heart. She attempted some Norwegian words of explanation, too, most of them wrong—which added to the merriment. The Sorenskriver translated them.

"When I ring the bell, I shall think of you."

A few minutes later Katharine, Alan, and Clifford were sitting on the great blocks of stone outside the saeter-enclosure, when Alan said:

"Hullo! Here are two people coming up the road—two ladies. They have alpenstocks. What bosh! Any baby could get up here."

"Probably they are on their way to some real climbing," Clifford said. "You know the Norwegian women walk and climb a great deal in the summer. I always think of little Hilda Wangel in Ibsen's 'Master-builder' when I see them with their stocks and knapsacks. You remember she came straight from the mountains to the Master-builder's office—'the young generation knocking, knocking at the door.' Ah, and that reminds me about Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt.' We

must not leave the Gudbrandsdal without making a pilgrimage to Peer Gynt's home. Jens has been telling me about it. That ought to be our next outing. Will you come?"

"I am ready for anything," Katharine answered.

"Hullo!" said Alan; "English voices. We ought to get up and wave a Union-Jack."

The voices came nearer and nearer. Katharine heard that same hard, metallic tone which had distressed her on the previous evening. She was distressed now. She looked from father to son and son to father. They had not yet recognised that voice. But they understood instinctively that some disturbing element had come into their atmosphere. They stood up. Katharine rose. They were on either side of her. The next moment Mrs Stanhope and her companion appeared on the top of the ridge, and stood face to face with them. For one brief moment they were all too much astonished to utter even an exclamation of surprise. They merely looked at each other.

Then Mrs Stanhope stepped forward, and held out her hand to Alan. She ignored the presence of Clifford and Katharine, and made straight for the boy.

"Alan," she said in her kindest way, "who would have thought to find you up here?"

"This is my dear friend's son," she said, turning to her companion. "You know how often I have spoken of Marianne to you."

Slowly, reluctantly the boy left Katharine's side, and took the hand held out to him.

"I thought you were far away in America," Mrs Stanhope said.

"We have come back," the boy answered simply.

"Ah me," she said, with a glance at Clifford and Katharine. "The dead are soon forgotten."

And she added:

"Well, dear boy, some other time we must have another long talk together. And remember I am always waiting for you—for your dear mother's sake."

And she passed on, but they heard her saying aloud to her friend:

"And that is the woman I told you about. She amuses herself with men and throws them over, just as she threw over Willy Tonedale, my poor infatuated cousin. And now she is amusing herself with this widower. She might have had the decency to wait a little longer until poor Marianne——"

Katharine hurried after the two women.

"How dare you, how dare you speak of me in that way?" she said in a voice which trembled with passion. "Some day you shall answer to me for it. If we were not in a foreign country, you should answer to me for it now."

"It is good of you to put it off until we are in our own country," said Mrs Stanhope, with a forced laugh. But she looked uneasy, for Katharine's flushed and angry face was not reassuring.

At that moment the Sorenskriver, the Swedish mathematical Professor, the little Swedish artist, and the Frenchman came out of the stue.

"Well," asked the Sorenskriver, "are we all ready? Thou art not glad to leave the Saeter, Jens. Nor am I. But all good times must come to an end. Nei, da, Fröken Frensham! Are we leaving just when you have found compatriots? That is too bad."

"Oh, I think I can do without them for the present," Katharine said, with a laugh. She had composed herself outwardly, but inwardly she was consumed with anger and mortified pride. But her moral courage did not forsake her, although she knew that Mrs Stanhope had deliberately tried to put her at a disadvantage with that man and that boy. But she trusted them. She returned to them, and said, with a wistful smile on her face:

"I heard her voice down by the lake-side. That was why I felt distressed. I knew she would spoil our happiness—yours—the boy's—mine."

"She has always spoilt our happiness," the boy said.

"Always," said the man—"always."

Then Alan did an unexpected thing.

"Come along," he said impulsively, putting his arm through Katharine's. "Never mind what she says. Let's get away from her. Come along, father."

Clifford looked at his boy wistfully.

"You two go on ahead," he said. "I don't want you ever to see her, Alan. She has never been a friend to us. But I must see her—for our own pride's sake."

"Father," cried the boy, "I have seen her once since—since mother died; you didn't know it, but I have seen her—just before we left for America."

"I might have known it," said Clifford.

They watched him walk back to the stue. He turned and waved to them to move on. Gerda and Ejnar joined them, and the Sorenskriver called out:

"Do not wait for the Kemiker. He has gone back to help his compatriots, who cannot speak any Norwegian. Farvel, mor, and tak for alt!" (Thanks for everything).

"Farvel, farvel!" the old saeter-woman cried, waving to them all; and then she followed Clifford into her stue, where Mrs Stanhope and her friend were seated on the bench. She sank down in her chair, tired.

Clifford took off his hat, and stood, a tall proud figure.

"I have come back to tell you, Mrs Stanhope," he said very slowly, "that I have never even thought it worth my while to attempt to shield myself against

your malignant tongue. But I shall shield my friend whom you have just insulted. And I shall shield my boy. You shall not get hold of him and attempt to influence him against me. If you attempt to see him again, I warn you that I will make direct inquiry concerning all the damaging words you have said against me, and I will prosecute you to the bitter end for defamation of character; to the bitter end, Mrs Stanhope; at the cost of all the suffering to my pride."

She had never before confronted him, and a feeling of vague uneasiness about some of her indiscreet words seized her. For once in her life her ready tongue failed her.

"You have always been our evil genius," he went on. "Time after time my poor Marianne and I could have got nearer to each other but for you. But you shall not be my boy's evil genius. You shall not come between him and me."

Mrs Stanhope still did not speak. She was tired, bewildered.

"And," he said, "I would warn you, too, that it is unwise of you to try to belittle Miss Frensham in the presence of her friends."

Mrs Stanhope still gave no sign. His quiet, deliberate manner intimidated her. For one moment there was a painful silence, to which the saeter-woman put an end.

"Be so good as to tell them to go," she said to Clifford. "I do not want any more guests now. I am tired. Tell them to go to the third Saeter away from here."

He told them, with a ghost of a grim smile on his drawn face; and they could see for themselves that the old saeter-woman wished to be rid of them. She was pointing dramatically in the direction of the third Saeter. They rose to go.

"You do not appear to have much belief in your son's belief in you," Mrs Stanhope was able to say as they passed out of the stue.

"My dear Julia," her friend said, "I really advise you to remain speechless for the rest of our visit to a Norwegian Saeter! Surely you don't want two libel-suits! You know, my dear, I've always said your indiscretion——"

They passed out of hearing. Clifford took leave of the old saeter-woman, and went to join his companions.

"Alas!" he thought, "she was able to find the right weapon with which to wound me."

Meantime Katharine and Alan were waiting for him. The boy had thrown himself down on the ground, and seemed lost in his own thoughts. Suddenly he said to her:

"How did you know it was her voice? You have never seen her—have you?"

"Yes," Katharine answered. "I have seen her once before, Alan, when she said cruel and slanderous things against your father. Every one was shocked. No one believed."

"No one believed," Alan repeated to himself.

"No one could believe such things of a man like your father," Katharine answered without looking at him. "Even I, a stranger to him, knew they must be untrue. I thought to myself at the time what a curse it must be to be born with a tongue and a mind like Mrs Stanhope's. Much better to be a sweet old saeter-woman like the old woman up there."

"What was it she said about father?" the boy asked with painful eagerness.

"I think you know," Katharine replied gently.

And just then Clifford came towards them. Alan got up and ran to meet him.

"Father," he cried, "I want to tell you everything she said to me. I've tried dozens of times, but——"

"I know, Alan," Clifford said tenderly. "You are even as I have been all my life—a prisoner of silence. We will have a long talk when we get home."

It was a glorious day: with bright warm sunshine, cold, crisp air, and a sky of unbroken blue. And all around stretched the great and wonderful distances, less mysterious in the frankness of the morning, but always possessed of mystic influence and eloquent bidding. But the harmony of the day was gone for Clifford, Katharine, and Alan; the gladness of the expedition was over for them. Still, they took their part with the others, and did their best to hide their own sad feelings. The returning pilgrims passed over the wild heathland, through the low and luxuriant growth of brush, juniper, and stunted willow, through the birch-woods and pine-forests, and so downwards, downwards, their faces set towards the Rondane mountains and their backs to the great Jutenheim range. Gerda sang, Ejnar was rescued from swamps, the French artist sketched, and the little Swedish lady flirted with him, for a "changeling," so she told Katharine! The Mathematiker sulked, Katharine comforted him, and Alan kept close to her, whilst Clifford strolled along, sometimes with them, sometimes alone, and sometimes with Gerda, who loved to get him to herself. The Sorenskriver had left his geniality behind at the Saeter. He became quieter and quieter, until he reached his normal condition of surliness. Jens, however, remained in a state of mountain-exhilaration all the way home, and, encouraged by sympathetic listeners, told stories of frightful Trolds living in the mountains, and of the occasions when he himself had seen apparitions of men, women, and horses fading into nothing on near approach.

"Ja, vel," he said, "at this very water-trough where Svarten is now drinking, I have seen half a dozen horses standing and barring the road; but when I came near, they have disappeared. Ja, ja, I've even heard them being whipped, and heard the noise of their hoofs striking the ground."

He told a story of a man he knew who had once seen several men, all black

and all wearing top-hats, "just like church-people," standing on a stone-heap down in the valley. He shouted to them, but they did not answer, and then he was foolish enough to ask them to show him their backs.

"Now," said Jens, "you know they have not any backs, and he had scarcely pronounced the words when he fell in a dead faint. This was about six o'clock in the evening; and two hours later he regained consciousness and found himself lying near his own home. As it was in the valley that he met these people, they must have carried him up home. He is very grave and quiet now, and you will never hear *him* making fun of the Huldre-folk."

It was late in the afternoon when the travellers reached the Gaard. The flag had been hoisted and was flying at half-mast. Knutty came out to meet them, and said, "Velkommen tilbage" (Welcome back).

And then she added:

"Jens, Bedstefar is dead."

CHAPTER XI.

The silence of death rested on the Gaard, and every one went about softly in courtyard and house. The visitors had asked Mor Inga whether or not she wished them to leave; but her message was that they might stay if they pleased. Nevertheless, two or three of them, who resented the presence of death, took themselves off at once; but their places were filled up by a party of mountaineers who had come down from the Dovrefjelde. One of them, so Knutty told her dear ones, was a Finnish botanist, and he had found some rare flowers which had much excited him. Knutty had a great deal of news to give; and it was obvious that she had not been having a dull time.

"I began by reading the Scriptures to Bedstemor out of that remarkable book bought in exchange for a black cow," she said, with a twinkle in her eye. "That was truly enlivening, wasn't it? Then a lone, weird man and his dog came down from the mountains. He had been fishing. He had been on two Polar expeditions and his dog on one. The dog had just that superior look and manner about him which would seem to proclaim that he had been on the way to the North Pole. He seemed to be saying the whole time, 'Don't dare to stroke me in that familiar way. I have been on a Polar trip!' The man was more human, and told me a great deal. Then the old Foged (under-magistrate) from the valley came to inquire about Bedstefar. I flirted with him, and we drank aqua-vitæ in the arbour. Also I had my musical entertainment in my usual concert-hall, the cowhouse. Also, Mor Inga was good enough to tell the milkmaids that they might dance for me in the fladbröd-room. And beautifully they danced, too! Their feet scarcely touched

the floor! And then, dear ones, this morning I had a great joy—a joy of joys—an English book to translate, but not a novel, nor a problem play—nothing about the sexes for once. Dear heaven, what a relief!—no—a book defending and explaining the English people, written by a just and patriotic man, and to be translated into all the Continental languages. And I am to do it into Danish. Ah, I am a happy old woman—kille bukken, kille bukken, sullei, sulleima! Nå, I long to finish it at once, and throw it at the Sorenskriver's head!"

"We must deal gently with the Sorenskriver," said Katharine. "He has been an old dear. He has been the life and soul of the Saeter expedition. And he has not said one word against England."

"Because the old coward is afraid of the British lioness," Knutty said, smiling at her. "You should have seen her, my Clifford, in the early days here, standing up to the Sorenskriver and the fur-merchant from Tromsö and overcoming them. And as for Ejnar, she has quite quelled him too. We don't hear anything nowadays against Kew Gardens."

They all laughed, and handled the book each by turn almost lovingly. The author would have been touched if he could have seen that little group in a foreign land bending over his book, and thinking of him with pride and gratitude.

"And if we feel grateful," Katharine said, "we, merely temporary and willing exiles in a foreign country, imagine what the feelings of enforced and permanent British exiles will be. I always have a great sympathy with Britishers who have burnt their boats and are obliged to live under a foreign flag. I would like to ship them all home."

"You would ship home many broken hearts," Clifford said.

"Well, the place for broken hearts is home," Katharine answered.

"I cannot say that the Saeter expedition has exhilarated any of you," remarked Knutty. "And you have not told me anything about it yet."

"You have been talking so much yourself, Tante," Gerda remarked.

"Kjaere," returned Knutty; "surely thou dost not wish me to be a prisoner of silence like my Clifford?"

Her words brought Alan's impulsive outburst to the remembrance of both Clifford and Katharine. They looked at each other. The boy was not there.

"Knutty," said Clifford, "we saw Mrs Stanhope up at the Saeter."

"Well," she said, "you do say astounding things when you do speak."

He smiled gravely.

"Yes," he replied, "we saw Mrs Stanhope up at the Saeter."

But at that moment Ragnhild came into the verandah and touched Knutty on the shoulder. She had not been crying, but she had on her pretty face that awed

expression which the presence of death in a community gives to even the most unemotional. For death is a shock, and the mystery of it holds us under its influence whether we be willing or not.

"Fröken," she said, "Bedstemor is asking for thee. No one will do except only thee. And they have carried Bedstefar into the other house. And Mor is very tired. Thou wilt come, ja?"

Tante went off with Ragnhild, and she had no further chance that evening of talking with Clifford. But Katharine told her details of that strange encounter up at the Saeter, and ended up by saying naïvely:

"And you know, Knutty, part of what Mrs Stanhope said is true, for I have flirted tremendously in my time. At least, my brother always says so."

"Well, my dear," Knutty said, embracing her, "and a good thing too! A woman is not worth her salt if she does not know how to flirt. But all women do know, though they call it by different names—taking an interest in—making slippers for—embroidering waistcoats for—doing mission work for—and so on, in an ascending scale of intensity, you know, from the slipper business onwards and upwards to the postchaise, or, I suppose we ought to say, motor-car in these advanced days. Don't regret your flirtations! They have made you what you are—a darling! Believe the word of a wicked old woman."

"I don't regret them!" Katharine said, as she went off to bed, laughing quietly.

But the next morning Clifford gave Tante an account of the meeting with Mrs Stanhope; and in the gentlest way possible Knutty confessed to him that she knew Alan had been suffering and grieving over certain vague ideas which Mrs Stanhope had planted in his mind when she saw him a day or two before they sailed for America. Knutty did not tell him what these ideas were; and he did not ask. But she described to him how Katharine and she had seen the boy coming down from the hills in the middle of the night, and how they had yearned to help him back to happiness and ease of spirit.

"Then you knew that Alan had been worked on by Mrs Stanhope, and yet you never gave a hint to me?" Clifford said.

"Ah," Knutty answered, "I had no heart to tell you. You were happy. It is such a long time since I have seen you happy. I had no heart to wound you."

"Alas!" said Clifford, "I have been thinking only of myself."

And he turned away from Knutty.

"It was not so at first," he said, as he turned to her again. "At first I thought only about my boy, whom I had hurt and alienated by my selfish outbreak just before his mother's death. I did all in my power to woo him again. I grieved over his growing indifference to me. I said in the bitterness of my heart, 'Marianne is between us.' On our travels I tried to forget and ignore it. But I longed to return;

for there were no results of happiness to him or me from our journey and our close companionship. When we were on our way home, my heart grew suddenly lighter. And since that moment, I have been thinking only of myself—myself, Knutty. I have scarcely noticed that the boy did not want to be with me. I have not wanted to be with him. I have been forgetting him."

"But we have not been forgetting him, she and I," Knutty said gently. "Don't grieve. Every right-minded human being ought to have a spasm of self occasionally."

He smiled and stooped down to kiss her kind old hand.

"And you saw the little fellow wandering about in the silence of the night?" he asked sadly.

Knutty nodded.

"That stabs me more than anything," he said. "He is like me, Knutty. I have taken most of my own sorrows out into the stillness of the night."

"Yes, kjaere," Knutty answered. "He is like you. It is a good thing for me that I am not going to live long enough to know his grown-up son. Three of exactly the same pattern—ak!—I couldn't stand that in one lifetime!"

They were sitting on Tante's verandah, where she had established herself with her writing-materials, her English dictionary, and the book which she was translating.

"Have I really been such a burden to you?" he said a little wistfully, playing with her pen.

"Ja, kjaere," she said, with a charming old smile. "You have been one of those heavy burdens which are the true joy of silly old women like myself."

And then she added:

"But for you, my spirit would be like a piece of dried fish in the Stabur. Things being as they are, it is much more like one of those tender fresh mountain-trout which Jens and Alan are going to catch for poor Bedstefar's funeral. So be of good cheer, Clifford. You have done me only good. All the same, three of you, no thank you! But I have always yearned over the first—and I find myself yearning over the second—yearning over that little chap! Ak, that metallic beast of a woman! I'd like to break up her mechanism."

Clifford rose.

"Knutty," he said, "I have not asked you what she said, because I want Alan to tell me himself. I am going to find him now."

When he reached the door of the verandah he paused.

"At least there is one thing that she could not have put into his heart and head," he said, "because she did not know it—no one knows it—not even you, Knutty, although I have tried to tell you times without number. But it didn't

come; and so the weeks have worn into months."

"Kjaere," she said, in real distress, "have you still anything on your mind about poor Marianne?"

"Yes, Knutty," he answered, and he went away.

"Ak, ak," she said to herself, "It's just like that wretched Marianne to be immortal."

She sat there puzzled and grave, but eventually made a great effort to throw off worrying thoughts, and to focus her mind on the translation-task.

Meanwhile Clifford passed up to his room thinking of his boy. He saw him wandering on the hillside in the silence of the night. The picture which thus rose before his mind's eye, touched him to the quick.

"We must put it all right between us," he said, "once and for all."

Then his door opened, and Alan came in.

"Father," he began shyly.

"My boy," Clifford said—and he put his hand on Alan's shoulder—"I can't bear to think of you wandering about in the night alone, unhappy and uncomforted. What is it that you have against me? What is it that has been rankling in your mind? What is it that has made you drift farther and farther away from me—I, alas! doing nothing to help you back to me? I know Mrs Stanhope says unkind and unjust things against me; but I never cared what she said, until I knew that my boy had turned from me. Now I care."

"Oh, father," Alan cried, with a ring of distress in his voice, "I've been so unhappy. I've tried to tell you dozens of times. You don't know how I've longed to come and tell you."

"Yes, I do know," Clifford answered. "For I have tried to ask you time after time, and could not. One night, before we started for America, I bent over your bed, heard you sobbing in your dreams, and nearly woke you to ask you what was troubling you—but I could not. It is awfully hard for shut-up fellows like you and me to reach each other, isn't it? But let's try now, this very moment; let's break the ice somehow. Tell me everything, without fear and reserve; tell me everything; nothing can wound me so much as being without our dear chumship."

Then the boy told him everything, bit by bit, in detached fragments; now with painful effort, now with sudden ease. Clifford listened, his heart grey. He had not expected the story to be as bad as this. He heard that the boy had been terribly upset by his mother's death following immediately on their conversation that day, when Clifford told him that he intended to separate from Marianne. He had brooded over that. It was so sad to think that his father had wanted to get rid of his mother, and that she had died, alone, and no one caring. He had brooded over

that. Not at first, but after he had seen and spoken with Mrs Stanhope. He had tried to forget what Mrs Stanhope said about his father having been unkind to his mother, about his father having been the cause of his mother's death. He could not forget it. He did not understand exactly what she meant; but he had thought about it hours and hours, and he remembered he had seen in the papers that his father had said at the inquest that mother and he had had unhappy words together that very evening; and then—and then all sorts of dreadful thoughts had come into his mind, and he could not drive them away, and——

He stopped and looked at his father, who had begun to walk up and down the room.

"Go on, my boy," Clifford said gently.

And the boy went on pitilessly, with the ruthlessness of youth, which is unconscious, involuntary. As he gathered courage and confidence, he felt the wild relief of freeing himself from his pent-up condition. And he told his father he had begun to wonder more and more how his mother had died—how she had died—and then he had remembered what Mrs Stanhope had said to him about his sonship; he couldn't forget that—his sonship—and he did not feel he ought to go on loving his father if there was any doubt about the manner of his mother's death—no son could stand that—and yet he had always loved his father so awfully, so awfully, and he could not believe that he would have done anything to hurt his mother; and yet he did not know—everything seemed so strange and wrong—and he was so very unhappy, and the journey did not make things better for him, for these dreadful thoughts were at the back of everything he saw and heard—even on the sea, on that bully steamer; and twice he had nearly run away—he wanted to get away by himself, away from his father—yes, away from his father, because he could not bear to be with him and feel——

He stopped again. Clifford stood still. His face was ashen.

"Go on," he said, almost inaudibly.

And Alan went on, and told his father how he had tried to leave him and could not, and how he had tried to come and pour out his heart to him and entreat him to say that it was not true what Mrs Stanhope had said. But he could not. And old Knutty had urged him to come. But he could not. And then, he did not know why, but lately he had been feeling happier again, happier each day, and he had not been thinking so much about—about his mother's death. And they had all been so jolly up at the Saeter, until that beastly woman had come and spoilt everything; she always had spoilt everything for them, and he hated her when he saw her again, just as much as he ever used to hate her—and he hated her for saying those beastly things against Miss Frensham, who was such a brick, and——

A pang of jealousy shot through the man's heart.

"Ah," he said to himself bitterly, "he is up in arms for her."

"And, oh, father," cried the boy passionately, "I hate myself for believing what she said against you—I don't know how I could have thought anything bad of you; but I have, nearly the whole time since she spoke to me about—about mother's death; and, oh, I've been so unhappy."

He had been sitting on the edge of his father's bed; and now, as if he had suddenly come to an end of his powers of telling, he flung himself lengthwise on the bed and turned his face to the wall.

For one moment Clifford hesitated. He would have given anything on earth to have eased his mind then and there by telling the boy all the circumstances of poor Marianne's tragic death. The old conviction that he was responsible for Marianne's death assailed him once more. The old battle between common-sense and morbid sensitiveness raged within him. Was he responsible for Marianne's death? Was he not responsible for Marianne's death? Was it his duty to tell the boy? Was it his duty to spare the boy? Would it not be cruel to the boy to burden him with a knowledge which he could not understand, and cruel to himself to risk being hated and shunned by his own son? And for what—for what?—for a fiction woven from the fine, frail threads of morbid conscientiousness. But in spite of everything—oh, the luxury of opening his locked-up heart—now—this moment!

Then a vision of the boy wandering alone on the hill-side in the silence of the night rose before him.

He went and sat on the bed where the boy lay, with his face turned to the wall. He put his hand on Alan's arm.

"Alan," he said, "be comforted. There was nothing unnatural in your mother's death; nothing which I humanly speaking, could have prevented. Her heart was weak—weaker than she herself knew; but I knew—that was why——"

He paused; for the dead are despots, and must not be spoken against.

"That was why I had always tried to keep her tranquil," he said.

The boy did not stir.

"I know what you have been thinking," Clifford went on. "I understand. It was only right for you to have turned from me if such a terrible thought had taken possession of you. If you had not done so, you would not have been worthy to be called a mother's son. I know well how the thought grew in your mind. It grew imperceptibly until it reached this terrible size, didn't it?"

The boy moved his head in silent assent.

"But now you must get rid of it," Clifford said quietly, "because it is not true. Your mother and I were not always happy together; things were not always easy

for her, nor sometimes quite easy for me, and I made many mistakes, and I know I must have been very trying to her—often—often—one thinks of all those mistakes when it is too late. But, whatever I did do, or failed to do, I swear to you solemnly, that I never meant to be unkind to her."

Alan turned impulsively round, threw his arms round his father's neck, and whispered:

"Oh, father, I know you never were unkind to her."

CHAPTER XII.

Clifford was deeply wounded. It was all so much worse than he had expected. The injury to the boy, the injury to himself wrought by Mrs Stanhope, surpassed in reality his own vague anticipations of ill. But, as usual, he hid his feelings under his impenetrable manner, and to Knutty he only said:

"Knutty, Alan has been able to open his heart to me. And I have been able to tell him that—that I did not kill his mother."

"Oh, my dear one," she cried, "you have suffered, both of you."

"It will be all right now for him," Clifford answered.

"And for you?" she asked anxiously.

"It will be all right for me later," he said. "I am going for a long walk to think things over and pull myself together. And, Knutty, I want you to tell Miss Frensham that I thank her with my whole heart for urging the boy to come to me this morning. I cannot speak of it myself just now. But you will tell her."

Knutty watched him climb up the steep hillside, pass the different barns, and disappear into the birch-woods.

"Nå," she said, "it is the best plan for him to go and have it out by himself with Nature, which he loves, to help and sustain him."

Later on she found Katharine, and gave Clifford's last message.

"Those were his last words, kjaere," she said. "I don't grudge them to you one little bit. If you had not bewitched that boy, we should not be one single step forrader. It was all too much for me. Seventeen stone cannot bewitch any one. I know my limitations as well as my weight."

"Seventeen stone can stand solidly by like a fine old fortress," said Katharine, giving her a hug.

"That metallic beast!—that metallic beast!" Knutty exclaimed. "She is fifty times worse than poor Marianne. Marianne was merely an explosive substance. She was a pretty bad explosive substance, I will own. But she had some kind of a heart. Mrs Stanhope has only some sort of artificial clockwork contrivance. But I'd like to tear even that out. Ak, ak, how hot it is! Fat people will go to heaven

when they die, I feel sure; for they've had all their roasting on earth!"

"There is thunder in the air," Katharine said, as she fanned Tante with an English newspaper. "I am sure we are in for a storm. I hope Professor Thornton will not go far. Alan is out, too. He went off with Jens a few minutes ago, down to the valley, to the Landhandleri. He has been talking to me about his mother, Knutty. We had a stroll together before breakfast, and then it was I told him that ——"

Katharine paused.

"That he would never forgive himself if he were to lose his father before he had told him what his trouble had been."

Knutty put down her knitting.

"Why did you say that?" she asked.

"I don't know," Katharine answered. "It came into my head, and I felt something had to be done to help the boy through the barrier of silence at once."

"Before it was too late, you meant?" Knutty said, looking distressed.

"Yes," replied Katharine simply.

"Well," said Knutty, in her own generous way, "I am glad he knew you did it."

But they were not to be allowed to have further private conversation that afternoon; for Bedstemor, now recovered from the first shock of Bedstefar's death, came across from her own house to the Gaard. Ragnhild hurried out to the porch, and begged Fröken Knudsgaard to keep Bedstemor by her side and prevent her from making a descent on the kitchen, where already great preparations were going on for the funeral feast.

"Bedstemor is going to give trouble!" Ragnhild whispered. "Thou knowest she likes to have everything very, very grand. She wants us to do twice as much as we are doing. Ak! There she comes now. Wilt thou not keep her and talk with her? Let her tell thee again about her marriage, and how she danced her shoes through on her wedding-day."

Knutty captured Bedstemor, and the old lady sat in the porch and talked of poor Bedstefar.

"A ja," she said quaintly, "he is dead at last, poor man. He was two years dying. It seemed a long time." Then she added mysteriously:

"God has been very good to me. And I feel very happy."

"Aha, that is a good thing," said Knutty. "Nei, nei, Bedstemor, don't go and make yourself hotter in the kitchen. It is terribly hot this afternoon. Stay here with me and tell me about your wedding. Tell me the history of this old, old family. And is it true, Bedstemor, that when you were fifteen, you were carried off by the mountain-people? Tell me all about it. You can trust me. I won't

breathe a word to any one."

So in this way Bedstemor was kept quiet, entertained and entertaining by speaking of herself and old days, and old ways. She told Knutty about Föderaad, the legal dues paid to the parents by the eldest son who takes over the management of the Gaard. Knutty learnt that Föderaad varied in different families; but in the Solli family it meant the possession of five cows, eight sheep, sixteen sacks of grain annually, a two-year-old calf for killing each autumn; also a pig, and a potato-field, or else the payment of 60 kroner a-year. Bedstefar's death would deprive Bedstemor of rather less than half this Föderaad; she would have three cows, five sheep, half the quantity of grain, half the value of the potato-field, and, of course, pig and calf entire; and the dower-house with all its belongings undisturbed.

But the moment arrived when Bedstemor could no longer be deterred from going into the Gaard which had once been hers, and making straight for the kitchen, in a masterful manner born of reawakened memories of ownership. Then Mor Inga came out and had a cry; but Tante patted her on the back and whispered cheering words which brought a smile to Mor Inga's tearful face.

"Ja," said Mor Inga, "thou art right, thou. One can never please one's relatives. It is stupid to expect to do so. It was a wise remark. Thou good Danish friend of mine!"

She told Tante that the old order of things was passing away, even in the more remote parts of the valley; but as Bedstefar belonged to the old order, he was to be buried according to the "gammel skik" (the old custom). But they intended to reduce the number of feast-days to the lowest number compatible with the dignity of the family and due honour to the dead—about four days; only in that case it would be necessary to show more than ordinarily lavish hospitality, so that none of the guests might feel that the family had not the means nor the desire to entertain them right royally. The kitchen had already become the scene of increased industry; and Ragnhild would soon be cooking countless jellies and innumerable fancy biscuits. No cakes were to be made; for, according to custom, the guests would bring them on the day of the funeral, or send them the day before. A sheep, an ox, and a calf were to be killed that very evening, and some one would be sent to bring back fresh Mysost from the Saeter. And two days before the burial, Jens and a fair-haired cousin Olaf would go up into the mountains to bring back a good supply of trout from the lake. Mor Inga reckoned that they would need about two hundred pounds. Then the main dwelling-house and all the brown houses would have to be thoroughly scoured and put in order.

"The guests must not see one speck of dust nor one unpolished door-handle,"

Mor Inga said. "For they will walk over the whole house and notice everything."

"Now remember," enjoined Knutty, as Mor Inga rose to go back to domestic difficulties, "do your best, and don't waste time trying to please any relation on earth; for it is an impossibility."

Solli passed by afterwards, and paused to say a few words to Tante. He did not often talk.

"We are in for a thunderstorm," he said. "I wish we had more water. Rain has been so scarce that we have no water with which to put the fire out, if the Gaard should be struck by lightning. There has not been such a dry season for years."

Old Kari paused a moment on her way to the house, where Bedstefar lay in sublime unconsciousness of life, the things of this world, and the bustling preparations which were being carried on for his funeral feast. He lay there decorated with scented geranium-leaves. The entrance-door of his resting-place was guarded by two young fir-trees, which Karl had cut down from the woods above. He was visited from time to time by different members of the family, and old Kari went in continually, sprinkling the ground with water, and strewing fresh sweet juniper-leaves on the floor which Bedstefar would never tread again. She held some juniper in her apron now.

"God morgen," she said, nodding to Tante. "Ak, ja! I knew Bedstefar would die yesterday. Lisaros was so restless. And there is still more trouble to come, for Fjeldros has a very sore throat!"

Then Jens and Alan came back in the gig.

"We are going to have an awful storm, Knutty," Alan said. "It is suffocating down in the valley. Where's father?"

"He went out," Knutty answered, pointing vaguely in the direction of the birch-woods.

"I'll go and meet him," Alan said.

"Don't go, Alan," Knutty said a little anxiously. "You don't know which way he will come back."

"Knutty," the boy asked shyly, "did he tell you we'd—we'd—we'd——"

"Yes," answered Knutty, with a comforting nod. "I know all about it."

"I feel quite a different fellow now," Alan said. "And father was so awfully good to me. He wasn't angry or upset or anything. And he was just splendid about mother, and—and, Knutty, I—I shall always hate myself."

"You may do that as much as you like, so long as you love him," Knutty said. "Now help me up, stakkar. I am going to take another lesson in the making of fladbröd. And Mette is beckoning to me that she is ready to begin."

As they strolled together across the courtyard to the hut where Mette was making the fladbröd, Knutty said:

"I feel ten stone lighter to-day to think that my darling icebergs have come together again. They must never drift apart any more."

"Never," said Alan eagerly; and Knutty, glancing at him out of the corner of her sharp little eyes, was satisfied that Clifford had won or was winning his son

back to their old loving comradeship.

"Ah," she thought, "how unconscious the boy is of the wound he has inflicted on his father. Well, that's all right. It is only fair on the young that they should not realise the limits of their own understanding."

So they went in and watched the bright and dramatic Mette, with whom Tante had an affinity, making fladbröd for the funeral guests. She explained that she was making the best quality now: cooked potato, barley and rye, finely powdered and mixed, without water. Gaily she rolled this mystic compound until it was as thin as a sheet of paper, and she whipped it off with a flourish on to the top of the fladbröd-oven, known as a "Takke," a round, flat iron oven placed for the time being in the Peise. Then she turned it at the right moment on to its other side, and whisked it off with another flourish on to the top of a great pile of fladbröd, which looked like a ruined pillar of classic times.

"Certainly," said Tante, nodding approvingly, "thou art a true *artiste*, Mette."

"I do it best when I'm watched," said Mette, laughing. "Then I get excited."

"An *artiste* should get excited," said Knutty.

Then Knutty learnt that there were other kinds of fladbröd, the coarsest quality being made of beans, barley, and water. And she was still acquiring accurate knowledge on this important subject, and listening delightedly to Mette's animated explanations, when a clap of thunder was heard.

"Nei da!" cried Mette, "we are in for a storm. I must go and call my poor cows home. It is nearly milking-time."

Tante found Gerda, Katharine, and Alan standing together in the courtyard.

"Here comes my Ejnar," Gerda exclaimed, as a lone figure came into view on the hillside. "I am thankful he has not strayed far. Solli says we are in for an awful storm."

"And I see some one yonder," Katharine said. "I daresay that is Professor Thornton."

But it proved to be the Sorenskriver. He hastened back to the Gaard, hurrying the loitering Ejnar on with him. Every one had now returned except Clifford. The sky grew blacker and more threatening. There was no rain. Hesitating claps of thunder were heard. Knutty, Katharine, and some of the others gathered together on the verandah, which commanded the whole view of the valley, and watched the awe-inspiring exhibition of Nature's anger. The fury of the storm broke loose. The lightning was blinding, the thunder terrific. Time after time they all thought that the Gaard must have been struck. At last the rain fell heavily and more heavily. Every one was relieved to hear it; for the turf on the roofs of all the black houses and barns was as dry as matchwood. Every one in different corners of the Gaard was keeping a look-out for Clifford.

Knutty pretended to be philosophic, and said at intervals:

"He is quite safe, I am sure. He has taken shelter somewhere. Besides, he loves a thunderstorm, the silly fellow! Isn't it ridiculous? Now, *I* think the only pleasant place in a thunderstorm is the coal-cellar. I've found it a most consoling refuge."

And when Alan said:

"I'm getting awfully anxious about father, Knutty," she answered:

"Now, really, kjaere, don't be foolish. He can take care of himself. He was not born yesterday."

They all tried to reassure and divert the boy, all of them, including even Ejnar.

"If the Kemiker does not bring some treasure back from his long expedition," he said, "I, for one, will have nothing to say to such a contemptible wretch."

Mor Inga came to add her word of comfort.

"No doubt the Professor has taken shelter at that little lonely Saeter in the direction of F——," she said.

"He will be comfortable there; and the old woman makes an excellent cup of coffee."

The storm died down. The early evening passed into the late evening; and still Clifford did not come. Ten o'clock struck, and still he did not come. At twelve o'clock the storm broke loose again and raged with redoubled fury. Knutty, Katharine, and Alan watched together, in Knutty's room. They could not induce the boy to go to bed. He was in great distress.

"If father would only come back," he kept on saying; "if he'd only come back. If he does not come soon, I must go and look for him."

"He will not return to-night," Katharine said. "And it would be useless to go out and look for him. As Mor Inga says, he has probably taken shelter in some Saeter, and there he will stay until the morning comes. Cheer up, Alan dear. It will be all right to-morrow."

It was she who finally persuaded the boy to go to bed; and when she looked into his room ten minutes later, he was fast asleep, worn out with the emotions and anxieties of that day. Then Knutty and she watched and waited.

"I should not be feeling so miserable about my poor iceberg," Knutty said, "if he had gone off in a happier mood. But he was quite knocked over by his interview with the boy. It was all so much worse than he had anticipated. That was what I had feared."

"But you see it is past now," Katharine said, reassuring her,—"I mean, the telling of it. He will come back, strengthened and soothed; while Alan's anxiety for his father's safety will help to put things right."

"My dear, I never thought of that," Knutty exclaimed, with a faint glimmer of

cheerfulness on her old face. "You leap out to those things. You're an illuminated darling. That's what you are."

Gerda came to see them.

"Ejnar is fast asleep and dreaming of 'Salix,'" she said; "but I could not sleep, Tante. I have been thinking how dreadful it would be if the Professor had been struck by lightning."

"That is what we have all been thinking, stupid one," answered Tante gravely, "but we've had the sense not to say it. Go back to bed and dream of 'Salix' too. Much better for you."

"But I came to comfort you," Gerda said "You must not send me away. Do you know, I have been thinking of that song you love so much, 'Thou who hast sorrow in thy heart.' Shall I sing to you now?"

Knutty nodded.

Gerda sang, softly, softly this Danish song:—

Sheet Music of 'Thou, who hast sorrow in thy heart.'
[Listen]

Thou, who hast sorrow in thy heart,
Go out to field and copse;
Let the cool winds breathe on thee
To make thee strong and whole.
Go over hill and over dale,
Go by the shining sea and hearken intent,
To the tale of sad-ness in the woods,
And the gentle answer of the brook.

Knutty slept.

CHAPTER XIII.

But Katharine did not sleep. Hour after hour she watched by the window, straining her eyes into the distance. And as he still did not come, and the suspense became intolerable, she went out to find him. It was five o'clock when she left the Gaard, and nearly nine when she returned.

"Has he come back?" she asked eagerly of Gerda, who was standing in the porch. Gerda shook her head.

Just then Ole Persen, the mattress-maker, arrived at the Gaard on his annual

round to repair the mattresses or make up new ones from the year's accumulation of wool. Ole was the newsbringer of that part of the Gudbrandsdal, and, for a mattress-maker, was considered to be rather reliable. He would therefore have been quite useless on the staff of an Anglo-Saxon evening newspaper. He brought the news that over at Berg, about ten miles away, an Englishman had been struck dead by the lightning, and his body had been brought down from the mountains to the nearest Skyds-station (posting-station). Ole said that the people over there were sure he was an Englishman, and the doctor had said that the letters in his pocket were all from England. Ole had not seen him; but they had told him that the dead stranger was a tall thin man, with thin, clean-shaven face.

Mor Inga and Solli looked grave.

"Art thou sure he was an Englishman, Ole?" Mor Inga asked abruptly.

"I can only tell thee what they said," answered Ole. "The doctor declared only an Englishman would have so much money in his pocket."

Then Mor Inga told Knutty exactly what she had heard, neither more nor less.

"It may not be our Englishman," Mor Inga said gently, "but——"

And then Knutty told the others, first Gerda and Katharine.

"It may not be our Englishman," Knutty said, looking at them bravely, "but ——"

She told Alan.

"Kjaere," she said, "it may not be your dear father, but——"

In a few minutes Knutty, Katharine, and Alan were on their way to Berg.

Solli whipped up the horses unsparingly, and admonished them with weird Norwegian words. His voice and the roar of the foss below were the only sounds heard; for at the onset no one of that anxious little company spoke a single syllable. They sat there with strained faces; they glanced at each other with silent questionings, and then as quickly turned away to look with sightless eyes at the country which was growing sterner and grimmer as the valley became narrower and shut them in from all generous share of sky and space. Suddenly there came a break in the valley, and a flood of light broke upon the travellers; they breathed a sigh of relief, and even smiled faintly, as though that unexpected blessing had, for the moment, eased the overwhelming burden of their hearts. They passed the place where the church had stood before it was swept away in the great avalanche of a hundred years ago; and on they went, skirting a fine old Gaard built near a great mound, said to be the resting-place of some renowned chieftain; on they went, in their silence and suspense. The two women glanced from time to time at the drawn face opposite, and the boy felt the silent comfort of their sympathy. When at last he spoke, the relief to them was as great as if there had been a second break in the valley. He bent forward and put his hands

on their knees.

"I don't know what I should do without you both," he said simply, and he drew back again.

"Stakkar," Knutty said, "two or three miles more, and we shall know."

"Oh, Knutty," the boy cried in a sudden agony, "and I've been saying such cruel things to him, and never thinking about hurting him; and he went off all alone, and I can't bear to think that——"

Alan broke off; and once more Knutty saw before her the solitary figure of her beloved Englishman climbing up the steep hillside and disappearing into the birch-woods. She heard his words, "It will be all right for me later." Her eyes became dim; and she would have given way to her grief then and there, but for Katharine, who, notwithstanding her own great need, lent half her youthful courage, strength, and hopefulness to the old Danish woman.

"Tante," she said in her impulsive way, "for pity's sake don't forget that you are of Viking descent—a heartless, remorseless pirate, in fact."

There came a faint smile on the old Dane's face.

"Thank you for reminding me of my ancestors, kjaere," she said.

"And besides," continued Katharine, "we may yet find another break in the valley. We may find that all our fears have been only the fears of love and anxiety."

"Do you really, really think that?" the boy cried, turning to her with passionate eagerness.

"Yes, Alan," she answered, without flinching.

So she buoyed them up, and heartened herself as well, although she was saying to herself all the time:

"Oh, my love, my love, if it be indeed you lying there in the silence of death, then my womanhood lies buried with my girlhood."

At last the horses drew up at the entrance of an old Gaard which was also the Skyds-station of that district. Solli had called out immediately, and a young woman in the Gudbrandsdal dress stepped into the courtyard.

"Yes, yes, stakkar, he lies upstairs," she said, glancing sympathetically at the three travellers. "Come, I will lead the way."

They passed up the massive stairs outside the old house, and reached the covered verandah. She pointed to a door at the end of the passage.

"That is the room," she said gently; and with the fine understanding of the true Norwegian peasant, she left them.

Katharine put a detaining hand on Knutty and Alan.

"Shall I go in first and come and tell you?" she asked. "I am the stranger. It should be easier for me."

But they shook their heads, clung to her closer, and so all three passed into the room together. The room was not darkened; but sweet juniper-leaves had been spread over the floor. Katharine led them like two little stricken children to the bed of death: one of them a child indeed, and the other an old woman of seventy, childlike in her need of protecting help.

Then Katharine bent forward, and with trembling hands reverently lifted the covering from the dead man's face—and they looked.

A cry rose to their lips.

The dead man was not their beloved one.

CHAPTER XIV.

Like children, too, Katharine led them from the room and took them into the old Peise-stue below. Tante had for the time being forgotten her Viking origin. Her nerve completely forsook her; and she cried abundantly, from the strain and the merciful loosening of the tension. Once she smiled through her tears as she pressed Katharine's hand and gave Alan a reassuring nod.

"Ak," she said, "this is not the correct behaviour of an abandoned sea-robber, is it?" And to Alan she added quaintly:

"Don't I make a beautiful comforter, kjaere? Ought not I to be proud of myself?"

He made no answer, but came close to her, to show that she was a comforting presence. He was painfully quiet—indeed, he seemed half-bewildered; and Katharine, glancing at his ashen face, knew that he was still under the spell of death's mysterious majesty. She wished that they had not suffered him to go into that room of death; and yet he would never have been satisfied to remain outside and take their word; it was perhaps his own father lying there, and he had to see for himself. But that part of it was over, and she felt she must break the spell for him at once. She thought of scores of things to say; but nothing seemed suitable. Suddenly, without thinking, she said:

"I know it sounds dreadfully prosaic; but I believe we should all be better for some food. I am famished. Do go and ask that nice woman if we can have breakfast, Alan."

The old Peise-stue in which they were sitting was a typical old Norwegian room, with its quaint painted furniture, its sideboard adorned with inscriptions, its Peise in the corner, fitted up in true old fashion with a shelf on the top, which was furnished with carved and painted jugs and bowls. There was, of course, a recess in the wall for the Langeleik, and a queer little cupboard for the housewife's keys. Old carved and painted mangles (manglebret), marriage gifts

to several generations, hung on the walls. The Kubbe-stul,[P] made from a solid block of wood, stood in the corner. At any other time Katharine and Knutty would have been deeply interested in seeing this characteristic old place. But now they scarcely noticed it. They sat together looking at nothing, and awaiting in silence the boy's return.

He came back with a different expression on his face.

"It's all right," he said. "We can have breakfast. I'm awfully hungry too."

"So am I," said Tante; and in a few minutes the servant, in her pretty costume of red bodice, white sleeves, and black skirt edged with green, served them a good meal of trout, fladbröd, and admirable flödemelk (milk with cream).

"Ripping, isn't it?" Katharine said, nodding approvingly to Alan.

"Ripping," he answered, always so glad and proud of her *camaraderie*.

"And now you'll go back to the Gaard," she went on, "and I believe you will find your father waiting for you there, Alan. This was a false alarm of danger, and I cannot think there is any more trouble in store."

"Do you really think that?" they both said to her.

"Yes," she answered, touched beyond words by their pathetic dependence on her. "I believe he will come down from the mountains, and that you will find him safe and sound."

"But you will be there too?" Alan said anxiously. And Knutty also said:

"But you will be there too?"

"I shall be with you in spirit," Katharine said; "but, you see, my place is here, upstairs, Knutty, with that dead Englishman, lying lonely and uncared for in a strange land. I could not go away until I, as an Englishwoman, had done something on his behalf: watched by him a little, written to his people, done something to show him that our gratitude to him for not being—ours—had passed into gentle concern for him and his."

Her voice faltered for the first time that morning when she paused at the word "ours."

"So you will go back without me," she said; "but you will tell Professor Thornton why I stayed behind. He will understand."

"Ah," said Knutty, looking at her lovingly, "you English people have the true secret of nationality."

So they left her there, sadly enough; yet knowing that for the moment her place was not with them, to whom she had already been so much, but with her dead countryman upstairs. Knutty, with many tender instructions, gave her into the charge of the people of the house. Solli's last words as he drove off were:

"Take care of the English lady. Send her safely back in your best cariole."

Katharine stood watching the carriage until it was out of sight; and then a

great longing and loneliness seized her. The music and words of Gerda's Swedish song suddenly came into her remembrance:

"The lover whom thou lov'st so well,
Thou shalt reach him never—ah ... ah ...!"

And the wail of despair at the end of the verse smote as a piercing blast on her spirit.

"Yes," she said, "he will come down from the mountains, and the joy of reunion will be theirs; and I shall be outside of it—outside of it as always. Always outside the heart of things."

She went slowly up the stairs; but when she reached the threshold where the dead man was lying alone and as yet unmourned, she had forgotten herself and her own personal life.

She uncovered his face once more. There was the burnt mark where the lightning had passed through his brain. She tried to hide it with his hair. His eyes were closed; but she laid her gentle hands on each of them, so that his own countrywoman, and not a foreigner, should be the one to put the last seal of sightlessness on them. She drew a soft little handkerchief from her satchel and spread it over his face. Then she glanced through the letters and papers which had been found on him, and she discovered his name and his home address in Cornwall. He was a soldier, captain in one of the line regiments. Probably he had been out in South Africa. Yes, there was a letter addressed to him at Bloemfontein. Katharine's sympathy deepened.

"Even more willingly do I watch by him," she said.

As there was no evidence of where he had come from in Norway, and as the people of the Skyds-station had not even begun to make active inquiries, she telegraphed to his Cornish address, and also to two or three of the sanatoria in the more mountainous part of the country. No answer came; and meantime she watched by his side, weaving from some forget-me-nots and berries a garland, which she placed at his feet. It was no strain to her to be giving her companionship to the dead. Katharine was fearless of life and fearless of death, fearless of the living, fearless of the dead. Her mind wandered back to her own dead: her mother whom she had loved passionately and lost as a young girl; her girlhood's lover, whom she had lost when she was scarcely twenty; her school-friend, whom she had laid to rest ten years past. When each of them had died, she had said, "This is the end of everything for me." But she knew that those words had been no truer for her at thirty than at thirteen, and that the only end of life itself, and therefore of life's thrill, was death itself; *and then was that the*

end? Was there immortality?—and what was immortality? Was it, as some one had once told her, merely the natural persistence under different conditions of the temperamentally strong? Not necessarily the persistence of the good, but of the masterful? She thought of all the forceful people she had known, and she could not believe in their obliteration; somehow, somewhere they would surely continue their individual processes for good or for bad. She thought of all the half-toned, colourless people she had known, who scarcely seemed to have any life in them in this life. Was it reasonable to suppose that there could be any continuance of their feeble outlines?

She recalled a conversation she had had with an embittered man in Arizona. He had scoffed at everything: at life, at love, at patriotism, at death, at immortality.

"Belief in immortality!" he had cried. "Why, it is just a typical bit of selfishness, that's all. We want immortality for ourselves and for those we love. But we do not want it for those we hate. We do not want it for those who interfere with us. We may pretend to have the principle of it implanted in our hearts; but all we really care about is the offshoot—the personal application of it to our own individual needs."

She remembered she had said to him:

"Yes, but the people hated by us are loved by other people; so that all the thousands and thousands of personal applications create the great principle, surely?"

She remembered his answer:

"That is not logical," he had said.

"Logical!" she had replied. "What a word to use about the great mysteries of life and death! Learn to love some one. Then you will not crave to be logical about immortality; you will only crave to believe in it."

He had laughed at her; but two years later he wrote:

"Since seeing you, I have loved and have lost my love. I buried her in the little canon not far from my ranch. I find myself turning, spite of myself, to a belief in immortality, whatever that may be."

Whatever that may be. That was the whole mystery which the reasoning of all the finest brains in the world's history had failed to unravel. Love, itself a great mystery, had done more. Was it possible that love, itself a mystery, and yet a key to many of life's perplexing problems, might prove to be the only key to the problems of death?

These thoughts passed through Katharine's mind as she watched over the dead.

Once she turned in her impulsive way to that silent companion.

"If you could only tell us what you have found!" she cried.

And then she recalled to her mind something which a great thinker had said in her presence.

"Some day," he had said, "we may stumble across the natural means of communication with the dead, and, like all other great discoveries, it will seem simple. The difficulties are insuperable in the present state of knowledge among the living; and the dead have to recover from the shock of death, and to find readjustment to altered conditions of existence. But there is all Time in which to work out the discovery; and there is always the chance that we may find out the great truth by an accident of detail in our researches and reflections."

"*But the dead have to recover from the shock of death.*" What was it he meant? Death was a shock to the nervous system of the living; but to the dead themselves surely it was——Ah, that was just the whole mystery; and the chemist, the philosopher, the poet, the musician, the explorer, the priest, and herself, an ordinary unilluminated person of average intelligence,—all were mere surmisers—mere surmisers....

Then the door was gently opened, and Katharine, leaving with a sigh of relief the regions of surmise, came back to actual life; for, first and foremost, she was human, and the earth was her territory. The woman of the Gaard said something to her, and beckoned to her. Katharine followed her out of the room, and tried to understand what she was saying, but could only gather the words, "To Engelske" (Two Englishmen). The woman, who seemed greatly harassed, took her straight to the "Peise-stue," pointed in a despairing way to two men, said, "Engelsk," and hurried off, holding her hands to her head, as though things were too much for her. Katharine saw two Englishmen sitting warming themselves before the fire. They turned round as she came in, and she noticed at a glance that the elder of the two was the exact image of the dead man upstairs.

"Then you got my telegram," she said, thinking at once of the telegram which she had sent off to three of the mountain sanatoria.

"Telegram?" said the elder man, looking at her in a puzzled way. "What telegram? I've had no telegram; could have had no telegram. I, my friend, and my brother have been out in the mountains fishing; but my brother left us. The storm came on; he did not return, and we made our way down here, hoping to find him or get some news of him. Perhaps you can tell us something; for the woman of the house does not understand a word we say, and we don't understand her. We are quite bewildered, and so is she."

Katharine looked at the two Englishmen, and saw that they were worn out, wet through, and hopelessly at a loss. Her protective instincts for those who were in trouble leapt up within her. She was not going to suffer these tired fellows to

have any unnecessary shock, and so she took the precaution of asking the elder man his name.

It was the name of the dead man upstairs.

Then in the gentlest manner possible, as though she had known this stranger years instead of minutes, Katharine broke the sad news to him.

CHAPTER XV.

When Clifford said good-bye to Knutty and passed out of sight into the birch-woods, he had no intention of going in any definite direction. He wished to get on to the heights somewhere and be alone with Nature, that tender nurse who is ever waiting to hold out her healing hands to the sick of body and of spirit. She had never failed him, and he knew that she would not fail him now; that she would minister to him in her own beautiful, strengthening way, until she had made him whole; putting balm on stinging wounds, and exchanging his cup of bitterness for a phial of courage. He had always loved her, always sought her out, always laid everything before her, and learnt from her, over and over again, the relative value and the actual size of the difficulties which life presented to him. He had carried out to her some burden which seemed enormous, and brought it back from her so shrunk that he would scarcely have known it for his burden; rather for some one else's load, which is always deemed lighter. So he went to seek her help. He strolled through the birch-woods, scarcely noticing where he trod; gained the open slopes, and then climbed slowly in the direction of a little isolated Saeter which commanded a view of the fine Rondane mountains. He paused now and then, and dug his stick into the springy moss and the stunted juniper-bushes.

"The boy always loved me," he said bitterly. "And now?"

And Nature said:

"He will love you again."

"Ever since the little fellow could find his way about he wanted to be with me," he said bitterly. "And now?"

And Nature said:

"He will want to be with you again."

"It is all so much worse than I thought," the man said bitterly. "At the very worst I thought that he might have believed I had been unkind to Marianne. But ____"

And Nature said:

"He did not know what he did believe. The tiny cone of disbelief had grown into one of my giant forest-trees. But now we have hewn down that giant tree,

used it to defeat itself, and made a strong bridge of it, over which the boy passes to reach you again."

"Passes back to me as he was before?" the man asked.

And Nature said:

"No, no, passes forward, onward to meet you at another point. For you, too, have passed on."

"Ah," cried the man, "I have been forgetting him. All my thoughts have been for her—and this is my just punishment, that in the midst of my selfish happiness I should be wounded in my tenderest affections, and reminded of the bitter past—reminded of the manner of Marianne's death and my share in it."

"Morbid conscientiousness, morbid conscientiousness," Nature said. "Often have you and I fought out that battle together—fought it out at midnight on the moors and on the mountains, and along the lonely country roads. And now we must fight it out again; here, this very moment, with the Rondane in front of us, and the snow-peaks in the distance, and the great Gudbrandsdal spread out below us."

So they fought it out, and it was a hard battle, a hand-to-hand fight; for the man was stubborn, and prepared to defend his fortress of self-reproach and sadness to the bitter end. But Nature gathered together all her forces—and conquered.

And when the dire battle was over, she held out her hands to him, and ministered to him; at her bidding the bracing mountain air sent currents of fresh life into the man's body; the great expanse sent a thrill of freedom into his soul; the magnificence of earth and sky sent a thrill of gratitude and gladness into his spirit.

"The earth is beautiful and life is splendid!" he cried, as he lifted up his head and passed on his way.

"Ah," said Nature softly.

"The boy loves me!" he cried. "We shall have a closer friendship than before."

"Ah," said Nature gently.

"I have the right to love her!" he cried. "I shall seek her out and tell her everything."

"Ah," said Nature softly.

"Yes," the man cried. "I shall tell her everything about my poor Marianne's death. She has a great heart and a noble mind. She will understand. My beautiful love——"

"Ah," said Nature tenderly. "I can safely leave him now—conquered and renewed."

And yet she paused for a moment, fearful to leave his side until she was certain that the child whom she had always loved had reached a firm foothold of healthy human instincts.

"My beautiful love!" he cried. "You understood from the very beginning, and came to warn me of Mrs Stanhope's slanderous tongue. I little guessed what she was capable of saying to my boy; but you knew, and did not shrink from me."

Then, as his thoughts turned to Mrs Stanhope, anger and indignation took possession of him.

"I will go and find her now," he cried. "I will find my way over the mountains somehow, and see her face to face."

"Ah," said Nature, smiling, "I can leave him now in the safe keeping of human love and healthy human anger."

So she left his immediate presence, and he became unconscious of his surroundings, and tramped across the rough mountainous country determined to reach Mrs Stanhope. He did not notice the signs in the heavens; the gathering storm gave him no warning; or at least no warning reached him. The storm broke loose at last, and aroused him to the knowledge that he was miles away from the Gaard, lost on the mountains, and alone with Nature in her wildest mood. The heavens were in raging tumult; the thunder was terrific; the lightning appalling. At first there was no rain. The man leaned against a rock and watched the awful splendour of the scene; watched the opening of the clouds and the passing of the lightning. It held him spellbound, entranced. He had always loved to be out in a great storm. He stood there, an unconscious target for its fury, and nothing harmed him; the lightning played around him, tore up the ground within a few yards of his feet, withered up a stunted juniper-bush within reach of his arm. Nature, working harm and bringing sorrow in other directions, spared him to those who loved him and were waiting for him.

So he stood, confronting the storm, with all personal thoughts and emotions in abeyance. But when the rain poured down in torrents, he began to think of finding shelter, and remembered that he had passed a lonely little Saeter. He had only a vague idea of his bearings; and, indeed, without knowing it, as he tried to retrace his steps he was wandering farther away, both from that Saeter and from the Gaard.

He became distressed about the anxiety which his prolonged absence would be causing to his friends: to dear old Knutty, who had seen him start off so sadly: to his boy: to Katharine. He knew that they were waiting for him, and wanting him, and that they were watching the storm, and watching the evening fading into the night. He knew so well that Knutty would pretend not to be troubled, and would scold every one who even suggested that there might be cause for

anxiety. He almost heard her saying:

"He loves a thunderstorm. The silly fellow, I know him well!"

He smiled as he thought of her.

"My dear old Dane!" he said. "My dear old brick of a Dane!"

He wandered on and on trying to find the Saeter, changing his direction several times, but in vain. But at last he caught sight of a habitation at some distance, and made straight for it, thankful to have found a haven. There was a light in the hut. Clifford knocked, and the door was instantly opened. There was a fire in the stove.

"Ak," said the old woman who opened the door, "I thought it was my son. But you are welcome. It is a fearful night. Many times I thought the hut was struck. I am glad for company."

The son came in a few minutes afterwards, and she made hot coffee for them both, whilst they dried themselves before the crackling logs. And overcome by the genial warmth and his long wanderings, Clifford slept.

And he dreamed of Katharine. He dreamed that he, who had always found speech difficult, was able to tell her the story of Marianne's death. He dreamed that he went on telling her, and she went on listening; and it was such an easy matter to tell, that he only wondered he had been silent so long.

"And that is all," he said, and he waited for her to speak as she turned her dear face towards him. But when she was beginning to speak, he awoke.

He awoke, glad and strong. He who had come out broken and embittered, was going back made whole and sound. He thought of his last words to Knutty:

"I shall be better later."

They had come true. The long wrestle with morbid conscientiousness, his defeat, his wanderings, the great storm, the safe arrival at a haven, his dream, and now his glad awakening had made him whole.

The storm had died down about two in the morning, and it was nearly six before he awoke. He could scarcely wait to drink the coffee which the old woman prepared for him; scarcely wait to hear her directions for getting back to the Gaard. He was off like some impatient boy before she had finished telling him.

His step was brisk, his heart was light, his grave face was smiling. He sang. He did not notice that the way was long and rough. Everything in life seemed easy to him. He trod on air. At last, after several hours, he saw the smoke of the Solli Gaard. He hastened through the birch-woods, down the hillside, and into the courtyard. There was a group of people standing round the carriage, which had evidently just come back from a journey. Mor Inga and Gerda were helping Knutty out of the carriage. Ejnar, Alan, and the Sorenskriver, Solli, Ragnhild,

and every one belonging to the Gaard, including old Kari, crowded round her.

"Thank God, thank God, it was not he," she was saying.

Then old Kari looked up and saw Clifford. She firmly believed him to be dead and thought this was his ghost.

"Aa Jösses!"[Q] she cried, falling down on her knees and folding her hands in prayer.

They all turned and saw him. Alan rushed forward to meet his father.

"Oh, father," the boy cried, "we thought you were dead—killed by the lightning."

Then his pent-up feelings found their freedom in an outburst of passionate, healing tears. Clifford folded him in his arms and comforted him.

"And you cared so much?" the father asked, with a thrill of gladness.

"Yes, yes!" the boy whispered, clinging close to him.

Then arm-in-arm they came to Knutty, who in her unselfishness had stood back, wanting her two icebergs to have their meeting to themselves.

"Dear one," she said, with tears in her eyes, "I have done all my crying, and every one can tell you that I have behaved disgracefully. And now I can do my scolding. How dared you give us so much anxiety? Ak, it is all too much for me. I'm going to cry after all."

He stooped and kissed her hand.

"Don't scold me, and don't cry, dear Knutty," he said. "I have come back from the mountains strong and glad."

They all pressed round him, greeting him warmly. Every one belonging to the Gaard seemed to him to be there, except Katharine. And he hungered for the sight of her.

"Knutty," he asked, "where is she—where is Miss Frensham?"

Knutty led him away and told him in broken words the history of the morning, and their fearful anxiety, and Katharine's tender kindness.

"And she stayed there with the dead Englishman," Knutty said gently. "She said she could not leave him alone, and that you would understand. She said you would come down safely from the mountains, and the joy of reunion would be ours, and that she would be with us in spirit. I know, kjaere, she suffered greatly in staying behind."

The man's lip quivered.

"I will go to her," he said.

And the next moment he had prevailed on Solli to change the horses and let Jens come with him. It was all done so quickly that Solli had no time to relent. Clifford sprang in, signed to Alan to follow him, and they were off. Old Kari, rather sullen at having been done out of the ghost, retired crestfallen to the

cowhouse.

But Gerda and Tante, Mor Inga and Ragnhild, stood watching the carriage until it had wound round the hill and was out of sight.

"Nå," said Gerda, turning to Tante, "I begin to think that your Englishman is going to fall in love with Fröken Frensham. Who would have imagined such a thing?"

"Every one except you," replied Tante, giving her a hug.

"And why not myself?" asked Gerda.

"Because you are an unilluminated botanical duffer!" answered Tante.

CHAPTER XVI.

Katharine lingered a little while longer at the Skyds-station to comfort, by her sympathetic presence, the brother and friend of the dead Englishman. To the end of their lives they remembered her ministration. She gave out to them royally in generous fashion. It was nothing to her that they were strangers; it was everything to her that they were in trouble and needed a little human kindness. They themselves had forgotten that they were strangers to her. It was a pathetic tribute to her powers of sympathy that they both spoke of the dead man as if she had known him.

"You remember," the brother said, "he never did care for fishing. It always bored him, didn't it?"

"Yes," said Katharine gently.

"Do you remember him saying a few years ago," the friend said, "that he should love to die on the mountains? He always loved the mountains."

"Yes," said Katharine gently.

She scarcely had the heart to leave them; but at last she rose to go, telling them there was an Englishman at the Solli Gaard who spoke Norwegian well, and who would come to help them.

"He is the one for whom we came to seek here," she said, looking away from them. "We are not yet sure that he is safe; but if he comes down from the mountains, I know he will hasten to help you about——"

They bowed their heads silently as she broke off.

"We shall take him home to England," the brother said.

"I am glad he will rest in his own country," Katharine answered.

The people of the Skyds-station fulfilled their promise to Solli, and put Katharine in their best cariole. The two strangers helped her to get in, and then stood watching her. They could not speak. But when she held out her hand in farewell greeting, each man took it and reverently kissed it. She was touched by

their silent gratitude, and the tears came into her eyes.

"I am so thankful I stayed behind," she said.

Then the driver, a little fellow of about twelve years old, whipped up the yellow pony, and the Skyds-station was soon out of sight.

"And now, if indeed he has come back, I shall see him," Katharine thought, with a thrill of happiness.

At the Skyds-station, when, by her own choice, she was left alone, she had for the moment felt the bitterness of being outside everything. She remembered her own words:

"He will come down from the mountains, and the joy of reunion will be theirs, and I shall be outside of it—outside of it as always. Always outside the heart of things."

That moment had been only one of the many times of passing sadness and bitterness in Katharine's life, when she had said and felt that she was outside everything: outside the inner heart of friendship which never fails, outside ambitious achievement, outside the region of great gifts, great talents, outside the magic world of imagination, outside love. Her friend had died, her girlhood's lover had died, her brother had failed her. She was alone, a solitary spectator of other people's close friendships, passionate love, successful work, absorbing careers; alone, outside the barrier which separates all restless yearning spirits from that dim Land of Promise; alone, outside. She, ever unconscious of her own genius of giving, had no means of knowing that, by a mysterious dispensation, those who give of themselves royally, without measure, are destined to go out alone into the darkness of the night; alone, outside everything in life.

But no such sad reflections came to Katharine now, as she sped along the narrow valley, by the side of the glacier-river. Her thoughts turned to Clifford and Knutty and Alan in loving unselfishness.

"The boy will have seen his dear father, and will now be comforted," she said.

"Knutty will have seen her Englishman, and will now raise her old head again," she said.

"Ah, how I hope and hope he was there to receive them when they got back to the Gaard," she said.

"And now I shall see him, and the joy of reunion will be mine," she said.

But in the midst of her happy thoughts and yearnings, she did not forget those two lonely compatriots and that silent companion in the bedroom of the Skyds-station.

"My poor strangers," she said, "we will not forsake you."

They had come to the place where the sudden break in the valley had cheered them during that terrible drive of the morning.

"Yes," thought Katharine, "that gave us hope this morning. I should recognise this spot anywhere on earth. It was here I began to have a strong belief that it could not be he lying dead at the Skyds-station."

"Oh," she thought, with a shudder, "if it had been he!—if it had been he!"

And her own words echoed back to her as an answer:

"My womanhood would be buried with my girlhood."

Then she looked up and saw a carriage in the distance, in the far distance. The boy also saw it. As it approached nearer he said:

"It is from the Solli Gaard. That is Jens driving."

Katharine's heart gave a sudden bound.

"Haste, haste!" she said excitedly to the boy; and he, moved by her eagerness, urged on the little yellow pony, which rose to the occasion and flew over the ground.

Carriage and cariole drew up at the same moment, and Katharine saw face to face the man whom she loved.

"We came to fetch you," he said.

CHAPTER XVII.

Bedstefar had been dead for three days, and it had been arranged that the funeral was to take place a week after the night of his death. Preparations had been going steadily forward, interrupted only by the anxiety and excitement caused by Clifford's long absence in the mountains and his supposed death. Bedstemor herself had been much troubled about him, and had spent a good deal of time watching for him. But when he returned safely, she felt free to continue her persecutions in the kitchen; and it took a great amount of Knutty's craftiness to entice her into the porch and keep her there. Bedstemor was astonishingly well, seemed in excellent spirits, and in answer to questions as to how she felt, she always said briskly:

"Bra', bra,' meget bra'" (Well, very well).

Indeed, she was not a little gratified to be once more the central figure of circumstances, as in the old days, before she and her husband had retired to the dower-house. But, spite of her cheerfulness, she looked a pathetic old figure wandering about, relieved from constant attendance at her sick husband's bedside, and thus thrown on the little outside world for distraction and company. Tante was endlessly kind to her, but had many a secret laugh over the old widow's unfunereal attitude of mind, and over her stubborn determination to go and bully every one in the kitchen. Tante herself was in great form again. She had recovered from her fears and tears, and had, so she told Katharine, regained

her usual Viking bearing.

"Never shall I forget your tenderness, dear one," she said to Katharine. "If I loved him even a hundred times more than I do, I should not grudge him to you. He loves you, and you are the right aura for him. And some day he will tell you so, although it will not be very soon, stupid fellow! He will try and try many times, and leave off suddenly. I know him well, my prisoner of silence. These reserved people! What a nuisance they are to themselves, and every one else! But to themselves—ak, ak, poor devils!"

Katharine, who was standing at the time on Knutty's bedroom-balcony, looked out into the distance. She herself had been somewhat silent since that sad morning at the Skyds-station.

"The end of it all will be, dear one," Knutty continued recklessly, "that you will have to help him. This sort of man always has to be helped, otherwise he goes on beginning and leaving off suddenly until Doomsday. I know the genus well."

Katharine went away.

"Aha," said Knutty to herself, "I have said too much. And, after all, it is premature. Oh, these parish-clocks! Why, Marianne has only been dead about a year. How like her, only to have been dead about a year! Oh, oh, what a wicked old woman I am!"

She called Katharine, and Katharine came.

"Kjaere," she said, as she stroked Katharine's hand lovingly. "I have always been a free-lance with my naughty old tongue. No one with any sense takes any notice of me. And am I not funny and human too? All this time I have only been thinking that you are the right aura for my Clifford. Not once have I asked myself whether my Clifford were the right aura for you! I should have been an ideal mother, always on the alert to snatch up all the best things for those I loved, regardless of other people's feelings and interests. Ah, that is right, you are smiling, and not angry with your Viking friend. And, dear one, that reminds me again of how you comforted me when I was not behaving like a Viking. Do you remember assuring me that his absence, and Alan's anxiety for him, were working for their complete reconciliation? Your words have come beautifully true, haven't they? Well, you have the great heart that knows."

They were a small party at the Gaard now. Ejnar had gone off to Kongsvold in the Dovre mountains, a district specially interesting to botanists as the habitat of certain plants not found elsewhere. Gerda would have gone with him, but that she had sprained her ankle. She fretted for her Ejnar, although she pretended that his absence was a great relief.

"It is grand to be free at last!" she said to Tante. "Free at last. I can now take a

long breath."

"Yes," said Tante, smiling mischievously, "freedom is delightful when it does not make your nose red and your eyes moist!"

Alan had gone off with Jens to a mountain-lake to catch trout for the funeral, and would not be back for a day or two; and Clifford was away at the Skyds-station, helping the two strangers to make the necessary arrangements for taking their sad burden home to England. All the other guests except the Sorenskriver had left, and he was in a thoroughly disagreeable mood, grumbling about the food, and annoyed because there was going to be a funeral at the Gaard.

"Then why not go away?" Katharine suggested on one occasion, when his martyrdom had reached an acute stage.

"Thank you, I choose to stay," he answered in his gruffest tone of voice.

Katharine laughed. She liked the Sorenskriver even at his worst.

"Read this German newspaper, with a whole column of abuse against England," Katharine said, teasing him. "That will make you feel cheerful, Sorenskriver."

"Sniksnak!" said the Sorenskriver, a little less roughly.

"Or come out for a walk with me and help me pick multebaer," she added. "Mor Inga was saying she had not half enough as yet."

"Perhaps I will come," he answered, with a grim smile on his face. He took pleasure in Katharine's company, and was secretly delighted that Clifford was busy helping those Englishmen over at the Skyds-station. In this way he got Katharine to himself, and he sat smoking his long pipe in the porch, grumbling and disagreeable, but, in justice it must be owned, gentle to Bedstemor. Tante declared that he was courting Katharine.

"I am given to understand, dear one," she said, with a twinkle in her eye, "that the Norwegian way of courting is to be extremely disagreeable, and almost rude to the person whom you adore. In a day or two you will have a proposal—and what then?"

"Tante thinks only about marriages," Gerda said reproachfully.

"Well, what else in the world is there to think about?" Tante asked defiantly.

"Oh, Tante, you know you do not think that," Gerda said. "If you really thought that, why didn't you get married yourself?"

"Because, kjaere, no one would have me, except a sea-captain, and he was mad," Knutty answered. "And he killed his mate soon afterwards. I was always glad I was not his mate!"

"It is not true," Gerda said, turning indignantly to Katharine. "She had lots of admirers and lovers. You ask her Englishman. He knows."

"Ah," said Knutty, "perhaps I did have a few admirers in my time! You may

be sure no sane woman would ever say she had never had any, unless there was some one at hand to deny her statement."

When Clifford came home that evening, Knutty herself broached the subject again.

"Kjaere," she said, "did I have a few admirers in my time, or did I not? I have forgotten. Not that a woman ever does forget, but tell me!"

"You had numbers, Knutty," Clifford answered, smiling at her; "and I was jealous of them all. At nine I was jealous of the sea-captain, and at ten I was jealous of the clergyman in Jutland, and at twelve of the English architect, and at thirteen of the Swedish officer, and so on and so on."

Later in the evening, when he and Katharine were sitting alone near the great hay-barn, Katharine spoke of Knutty.

"She is the dearest old woman I have ever met," she said warmly. "I don't wonder that you all love her."

"I can never tell you what she has been to me," he answered. "It was always a great grief to me that——" He broke off.

"It was a great grief to me that——"

Again he broke off. He was trying to speak of Knutty's indifference to Marianne; and even this was too hard for him to say. Up in the mountains, he had felt that it would be easy for him to tell Katharine everything that he had in his heart, beginning with the story of Marianne and Marianne's death, and ending with himself and his love for her. But now that he was near her, he could say nothing about his own personal life and inner feelings. He could only bend forward and scratch a hole in the ground with his stick. Katharine remembered how Knutty had spoken of his "beginnings" and "breakings off," and she said:

"Knutty understands you through and through, Professor Thornton. Doesn't she?"

"Yes," he answered simply. "But why should you say that just now?"

"Oh, I don't know," Katharine answered. "I was thinking of her, and it came into my head. And I was so touched by her grief when she feared that she—we—had lost you."

"I do not know what she and the boy would have done without you," he said, still working with that stick.

Katharine was silent.

"And I cannot think what those men over at the Skyds-station would have done without you," he said. "Their last words to me this afternoon were, 'Tell her we shall always be wishing to serve her.'"

Katharine remained silent.

"There was this little packet which I was to give you," he said, after a pause.

"It was the poor fellow's South African service-medal. You were to have it."

He watched her as she opened the packet and touched the medal. He watched her as she put it in the palm of her hand and looked at it with dim eyes. It would have been easy for him to have opened his heart to her then and there, if he could only have known that she was saying to him with speechless tongue:

"My own dear love, whilst I am looking at this soldier's medal, my heart is giving thanks that the lightning spared you to me."

But he could not guess that, and the moment passed.

The next day, when they were again alone, he attempted to speak.

"Do you remember my saying up at the Saeter that I tried never to dream?" he began.

"Yes," she said. "I have always wished to ask you why you should feel so strongly about dreams."

"I should like to tell you," he said eagerly. "I want to tell you. But——"

He broke off again, and turned to her with a pathetic smile on his face.

"Speech has never been easy to me," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.
BEDSTEFAR'S FUNERAL.

The day before Bedstefar's funeral Jens and Alan came down from the mountain-lake laden with nearly two hundred pounds of trout, and the cotters' children finished their task of bringing in all the multebaer they could find; for no Norwegian entertainment, taking place at this season of the year, would have been considered complete without this much-loved fruit; and certainly it would seem that multebaer had a softening effect on the strange and somewhat hard Norwegian temperament. As Tante said, from her own personal observations of the previous days, multebaer spelt magic!

"Ibsen has not done justice to his country," she told Gerda. "He ought at least once to have described them as being under the influence of these berries. Then a softer side of their nature would have been made apparent to all. Why, the Sorenskriver himself becomes a woolly lamb as he bends over his plate of cloudberries-and-cream. He ought to have his photograph taken. No one would recognise him, and that is what photographs are for!"

They all helped to decorate the Gaard inside and out with branches of firs and birches. Bedstefar's black house was decorated too, and the whole courtyard was covered with sprigs of juniper and fir. A beautiful arch of fir and birch was raised over the white gate through which he would pass for the last time on his way

down to the old church in the valley.

Katharine, together with Ragnhild and Ingeborg, spent many hours making strips of wreathing from twigs of the various berry-shrubs up in the woods. Karl used these for lettering; so that stretched from side to side of the arch ran the words, "Farvel, kjaere Bedstefar."

When he had finished, every one came out to see his work, and Mor Inga, turning to Tante, said proudly:

"My Karl is clever, isn't he?"

And she whispered:

"Three years ago he did that for our eldest son, and bitterly we were weeping then. I go about thinking of that now."

Then Tante and Mor Inga took a little stroll away from the others, outside the gate and down the road towards the great cowhouse. Part of this road, too, had been planted with tall fir-branches, so that Bedstefar would pass under the archway and through an avenue of green until he reached the outer white gate, which was the entrance to the Gaard enclosure. And here Mor Inga and Tante lingered, whilst the proud Norwegian heart gave vent to its sadness, and the kindly Danish heart beat in understanding sympathy, and the dead son's dog Jeppe came and whined softly in token that he too was mourning in remembrance of the past.

So the night, the bright Norwegian night, beginning to realise that its brightness was being threatened, seeing that the birches were counting their yellow leaves, even as we, no longer young and not yet old, count our grey hairs, this summer night passed almost imperceptibly into morning, and the activities of the next day began early.

Bedstemor, reinstated in her former *rôle* of leading lady of the Gaard, was in a state of feverish excitement. She was dressed in black, and wore over her bodice a fine black silk shawl one hundred years old. Her head was encased in a sort of black silk night-cap, edged with old white lace: so that her pretty face was framed in white. A slight flush on her cheeks made her look strangely youthful. She sat in the porch waiting to receive the guests; and by special request of Mor Inga and Solli himself, Tante, Gerda, and Katharine sat there too. They felt awkward at first, knowing themselves to be there in the capacity of sightseers rather than that of mourners; but Bedstemor's cheerful spirits put them at their ease. She was much interested in Katharine's dress-material, feeling the texture and comparing it with her own.

"It is very good," she said thoughtfully, "but not so good as mine!"

All the same, that dress-material worried her; she fingered it several times, nodded mysteriously, and seemed lost in thought; whether about Bedstefar or the

dress-material, no one could of course decide. But, later, she spoke of some wreaths which had been sent, and she said quaintly:

"Min mand did not want any flowers. But it does not matter much what he wanted. He won't know, stakkar, will he?"

At last the guests began to arrive, some in carioles, some in stol-kjaerres, and some few in ordinary carriages. They all brought funeral-cakes in large painted baskets. As each conveyance drove up into the courtyard, one of the daughters, either Ragnhild, or Ingeborg, or Helga, went out to meet it, greeted the guests, and bore away the cake into the kitchen. It seemed to be the etiquette that the cake should be received in person by one of the family. The horses, most of them the knowing little Norwegian yellow Nordfjord pony, or else the somewhat bigger Gudbrandsdal black horse, were unharnessed and led away by the cotters. The guests advanced awkwardly to the porch, greeted Bedstemor, and turned to the strangers shyly, but were at once reassured by Tante's genial bearing and Katharine's friendly smile. Gerda, too, was at her best, and was feeling so cheerful that Tante feared she was going to break into song. Quaint, strange-looking people crossed that threshold, shook hands with every one in the porch, and passed into the house to find Bedstemor, who had disappeared into the hall, and was seated in a corner drinking port wine with an old friend. Wine and coffee were served at once, as a sign of welcome to the Gaard. The flag, which had been lowered to half-mast since Bedstefar's death, was now hoisted full-mast to welcome the guests to the proud Solli homestead. The women, some of them beautiful in feature, were ungraceful in form and bearing; they dressed no longer in the picturesque Gudbrandsdal costume, but were all clothed in ill-fitting black dresses, with no remnant of the picturesque anywhere: queenly-looking women, some of them born, one would think, to be mothers of Vikings; and most of them with proud pedigrees which would excite envy in many a royal breast: shy and awkward, most of them, even with each other. The men had perhaps a little more *savoir faire*, but it was easy to see that they all led lonely lives, and were part and parcel of that lonely land on which Nature has set a seal of mystic melancholy. Some of the men were fine fellows, but none as handsome as Solli, Karl, and Jens; but the Solli tribe had long been celebrated for their good looks, and old Bedstefar in his time had been voted the best-looking man in the whole of the Gudbrandsdal. The guests were nearly all Bönder (landowners), representing the best blood in the valley; most of them having the largest Gaards, and the best-decorated pews in the churches of the different districts. Then there was the Lensmand (bailiff), a weird old man, rather feeble of gait, but acute in wit. He seemed much taken with Katharine, and came several times to shake hands with her, pretending to be a newcomer each time. But he had to keep more

in the background when his superior officer, the Foged (under-magistrate), appeared on the scene. This gentleman was, of course, a local personage, and he brought a very large wreath and wore an important black satin waistcoat. There was also the doctor, Distriktslaege[R] Larsen, famous for his rough ways and disagreeable temper, but also for his skill in mending broken arms and legs during the "ski" season. He seemed rather scornful of the whole scene, but not of the port wine. And there was a Tandlaege[S] (dentist), from Christiania, a nephew of the Sollis, who wore a very long black frock-coat and the most fashionable pointed boots. He was their representative man of the world and fashion, and they prized him greatly. There were yet two other precious persons—a member of the Storthing,[T] Bedstemor's nephew, and his wife, rather a fine lady, who at first kept herself in 'splendid isolation,' but soon forgot that she was a Storthingsmand's wife with a Parisian dress, and threw her lot in with her un-Parisian-clothed relations. She was a little suspicious of the Englishwoman, perceiving indeed a formidable rival in well-cut garments; but directly Katharine and she began to speak to each other in an ingenious mixture of German and broken English, suspicions gave way to approbation, and she said to her husband:

"Surely the English cannot be such brutes if this is a specimen of them?"

"Pyt!" he said scornfully. "They are barbarians and brutes, all of them."

Nevertheless he found his way over to the Englishwoman, and was not at all eager to leave her company to join the cheerful contingents of guests who were now strolling over to the black house to take leave of poor Bedstefar's face. When at last he was obliged to go, he even asked her to come too; but as Tante bravely said, they had all seen poor dead Bedstefar often enough to satisfy the most punctilious Gaard etiquette. Soon the Praest arrived, a short man, with a kindly, uninspired countenance. He was accompanied by his wife and two daughters and the Klokker (clerk), who carried in a bag the Calvin ruff and gown still used by the Norwegian and Danish clergymen. For it was due to the position and dignity of the Sollis that most of the funeral service should be conducted in the Gaard itself. If Bedstefar had been of no special standing, he would have been taken without any preliminaries to the churchyard, and in the absence of the clergyman, the clerk would have said the prayers and sung the hymns, and when the clergyman had returned from his parochial duties in some other quarter, he would have thrown the earth and said the final words of committal over perhaps five or six patiently waiting coffins. But Bedstefar being who and what he was, had all possible honour shown him in his death, as in his marriage and at his birth.

The Praest took port wine, chatted with his friends, and went with Bedstemor to say farewell to Bedstefar. And then, at last, at last the coffin was closed and borne through the great hall into the inner sitting-room, preceded by the Praest, now in his vestments, and Bedstemor, who walked bravely by his side. The nearest relations were grouped round the coffin. The women-guests sat in the outer room; the men stood together in the hall. The cotters, their wives, and the servants of the house stood, some on the stairs, and some in the porch. Tante, Katharine, and Gerda, not remembering the custom that the men and women should be separate, sat in the hall, and were able to see through into the inner room, where Bedstemor, still gallantly comporting herself, joined in the dismal singing led by the clerk, and Mor Inga, thinking of the last time that the clerk led the singing in that very room, wept silently, and drew little Helga closer to her side. When the singing and prayers were over, the Praest gave a long funeral discourse, dwelling on poor Bedstefar's virtues, which he was known not to have possessed in overflowing measure: nevertheless tears flowed, and grim old men said, "Ja, ja," and the Praest was considered to have preached appropriately, and Bedstemor seemed gratified. Then the cotters raised the coffin, bore it out, and placed it on the low cart which had been painted black for the occasion; and Svarten, the clever black horse who never slipped, never failed in duty or

intelligence, and knew every inch of that winding and awkward way down to the valley, Svarten drew his burden through the decorated gate.

"Farvel, Bedstefar," said every one.

Bedstemor stepped briskly into the carriage, together with the Praest, Solli, and Mor Inga. The daughters remained at home to preside over the final preparations for the feasting. The sons followed in a cariole, and all the other men-guests helped to harness their horses and started off leisurely in the procession, a long, straggling, dust-raising line of about fifty conveyances. The women stayed behind, drank coffee, and strolled about the house, examining everything, as Ragnhild predicted; peering into the huge old painted and decorated chests full of fine linen, looking at the old painted sledge and cradle, dating back from 1450, precious Solli possessions, and casting an eye on the old silver tankards, and on the famous old carved door and sides of a pulpit, formerly belonging to an old church which had been swept away by the falling of an avalanche some hundred and fifty years previously. Then there were the old painted cupboards and the queer-shaped old Norwegian chairs and stools, and the old-fashioned, richly-carved mangles, and the old-world slit of a recess in the wall for the Langeleik, and a fine old Hardanger violin which Bedstefar was reported to have played with uncommon skill; having been specially clever at giving descriptive improvisations of Nature in her many moods, and of things mystic, such as the song of the Huldre, and things human, such as the ringing of marriage-bells. Alas, alas, that old-world ways were dying out and old-world music too! Still there was much of the old atmosphere in the Solli Gaard, and no other homestead in the whole valley could boast of so many old-time treasures curiously mixed up with modern importations. So that the lady funeral-guests had much with which to amuse themselves, and they roamed into the different bedrooms, examined Tante's possessions, and Katharine's belongings, and did not seem at all abashed when Tante and Katharine discovered them in the very act. Of course not, for it was a day of entertainment; and as a sweet little old lady, a pocket edition of Bedstemor, said, with a twinkle in her eye:

"Thou knowest we are here to enjoy ourselves. We have come a long way. And there have not been many funerals or weddings in the valley lately."

Knutty of course understood perfectly, and exerted herself heroically to amuse every one, drinking coffee with every one in a reckless fashion, and even flirting with the one man who was left behind, an aged Gaardmand (landowner) of about ninety years. So the time passed away cheerily for all; and when Bedstemor, Solli, and the Praest arrived home from the churchyard, followed in due time by the others, the feasting began. It seemed to be the etiquette that the women should eat separately from the men. They gathered together in the

parlour, where rich soup was served to them sitting; and after this opening ceremony, they were expected to stroll into the great dining-room, where a huge table, beautifully decorated with leaves, was spread with every kind of food acceptable to the Norwegian palate: trout, cooked in various ways; beef, mutton, veal, sauces, gravies, potatoes, even vegetables (a great luxury in those parts), *compots*, and of course the usual accompaniment of smoked mysteries. The plates, knives, and forks were arranged in solid blocks, and the guests were supposed to wait on themselves and take what they wished. They walked round the table on a voyage of inspection and reflection, carrying a plate and a fork; and having into this one plate put everything that took their fancy, they retired to their seats, and ate steadily in a business-like fashion. There was scarcely any talking. When the women were served, the men came and helped themselves in the same way, retiring with their booty either into the hall or the adjoining room. All of them made many journeys to the generous table, returning each time with a heaped-up plate in their hands, and in their minds a distinct, though silent, satisfaction that the Sollis were doing the thing in a suitable style. Every one made a splendid square meal; but Bedstemor took the prize for appetite. She was very happy and excited. Hers was the only voice heard. As Knutty said, it was refreshing to know that there was at least one cheerful person amongst those solemn one hundred and twenty guests! Knutty herself rose to the occasion with characteristic readiness. She ate nobly without intermission, as though she had been attending Norwegian peasant-funerals all her life; and she gave a mischievous wink to Gerda and Katharine every time Bedstemor rose from her seat and strode masterfully to the table in search of further fodder. No one offered any courtesy to any one else. It seemed to be the custom that each person should look after herself; and there was a look of puzzled amusement on some of the faces when Katharine attempted to wait on one or two of the guests. Nevertheless, the attention, once understood, was vaguely appreciated; and the pretty little old lady whom Katharine had found in her bedroom, soon allowed herself to be petted and spoiled by the visitors. Indeed she abandoned all her relatives, and always sat with Knutty.

This meal came to an end about four o'clock, when there was another relay of coffee. Some of the guests strolled about and picked red-currants off the bushes in Bedstemor's garden. Knutty found her way to the cowhouse and learnt from her favourite Mette that all the servants and cotters were having a splendid meal too.

"Ja, ja," Mette said, "I have eaten enough to last for two years. And the young ox tasted lovely! Didst thou eat of him? Ak, there is old Kari crying her heart out because the young ox had to be killed. Thou knowest she was fond of him. Ak,

nobody has cried for Bedstefar as much as old Kari has cried for the young ox. And she wouldn't eat an inch of him—only think of that, Fröken, isn't it remarkable?"

"It certainly is," said Knutty, with a twinkle in her eye. "For most of us generally do eat up the people we love best—beginning with the tenderest part of them."

For one moment Mette looked aghast, and then light broke in upon her.

"Nei da," she said brightly, "but as long as we don't really eat them, it doesn't matter, does it?"

"It is supposed not to matter," answered Knutty, moving off to comfort old Kari, who was not only mourning for the young black ox, but also continuing to feel personally aggrieved over her disappointment about Clifford's ghost.

"Ak, ak, the young black ox!" cried Kari, when she saw her Danish friend. "Eat him? Not I, dear Fröken, I was fond of him. Ak, ak!"

"Be comforted, Kari," said Knutty soothingly. "You loved him and were good to him and didn't eat him up. What more do you want?"

"Will you tell me whether he tasted good?" asked Kari softly. "I should like to know that he was a success."

"He was delicious," said Knutty, "and I heard the Praest and the doctor speaking in praise of him. Of course they must know."

Kari nodded as if reassured, and disappeared into the cowhouse, Tante's concert-room, wiping her moist eyes with her horny hands. She came back again, and stood for a moment in the doorway.

"I cannot believe that it was not the Englishman's ghost," she said, shaking her head mysteriously. "I felt it was a ghost. I trembled all over, and my knees gave way."

"But you surely believe now that my Englishman is alive, don't you, Kari?" asked Tante, who was much amused.

"I cannot be sure," replied Kari, and she disappeared again; but Tante, knowing that she always carried on a conversation in this weird manner, waited for her sudden return.

"That is Ragnhild's sweetheart," she said in a whisper, pointing to a tall fair young man who had come down with another guest to take a look at the horses. "Nei, nei, don't you tell her I told you. He is a rich Gaardmand from the other side of the valley."

"But I have seen them together, and they don't speak a word to each other," Knutty said.

"Why should they?" asked old Kari. "There is nothing to say."

And she disappeared finally.

"My goodness!" thought Knutty, "if all nations only spoke when there was anything worth saying, what a gay world it would be."

Then Tante took a look at the guests' horses, some of them in the stable, and others tethered outside, and all eating steadily of the Sollis' corn. For the hospitality of the Gaard extended to the animals too; and it would have been a breach of etiquette if any of the guests had brought with them sacks of food for the horses; just as it would have been a breach of etiquette not to have contributed to the collection of funeral-cakes which were now being arranged on the table in the dining-room, together with jellies, fancy creams, and many kinds of home-made wines. Alan was sent by Mor Inga to summon Tante to a private view of this remarkable show. Some of the cakes had crape attached to them and bore Bedstefar's initials in icing. They were of all imaginable shapes, and looked rich and tempting. Tante's mouth watered.

"Ak," she cried, "if I could only eat them all at one mouthful!"

Every right-minded guest had the same desire when the room was thrown open to the public. And all set to work stolidly to fulfil a portion of their original impulse. Bedstemor again distinguished herself; but Alan ran her very close. Katharine and Gerda did not do badly. In fact, no one did badly at this most characteristic part of the day's feasting. Then every one went up and thanked Solli and Mor Inga, saying, "Tak for Kagen" (Thanks for the cakes). Indeed, one had to go up and say "Tak" for everything: after wine and coffee, dinner, dessert, and supper, which began about nine o'clock. No sooner was one meal finished than preparations were immediately made for the next, etiquette demanding that variety should be the order of the day. The supper-table was decorated with fresh leaves arranged after a fresh scheme, the centre being occupied by all the funeral gifts of butter, some of them in picturesque shapes of Saeters and Staburs.

Cold meats, dried meats of every kind, cold fish, dried fish, smoked fish, and cheeses innumerable were the menu of this evening meal. The guests did astonishing justice to it in their usual business-like fashion; perhaps here and there Knutty remarked 'an appetite that failed,' but, on the whole, there was no falling off from the excellent average. Bedstemor was tired, and was persuaded to go to bed. But she said up to the very end that she was bra', bra', and had had a happy day. Her old face looked a little sad, and Knutty thought that perhaps she was fretting for Bedstefar after all. Perhaps she was.

So the first day's feasting in honour of Bedstefar came to an end. The second day was a repetition of the first, except that the guests began to be more cheerful. Those who lived in the actual neighbourhood, had gone away over night and returned in the morning; but most of them had been quartered in the Gaard itself. Knutty talked to every one, and continued her flirtation with the ancient

Gaardmand of ninety years, who, so she learnt, had been noted as an adept at the Halling dance. She had made him tell her of the good old times and ancient customs, and once she succeeded in drawing him on to speak of the Huldre. She had to use great tact in her questionings; but, as she always said to herself, she had been born with some tact, and had acquired a good deal more in dealing with two generations of icebergs. So she sat amongst these reserved Norwegians, and little by little, with wonderful patience and perseverance, dug a hole in their frozen heart-springs. They liked her. They said to Mor Inga:

"The fat old Danish lady is bra', bra'."

And Mor Inga whispered to her:

"Thou art a good one. They all like thee. There was a calf born last night. We have settled to call it after thy name—Knuttyros."

"I am sure I do not deserve such an honour," Tante said, trying to be humble.

"Yes, thou dost," Mor Inga answered with grave dignity, as she went off to her duties as hostess.

But Tante did not understand until Clifford explained to her that a great mark of Norwegian approval had been bestowed on her.

"Then I suppose it is like your new order of merit in England," she said; "'honour without insult.' Ah, Clifford, I hope some day, in the years to come, that your name will be found amongst the favoured few."

"Not very likely, Knutty," he said. "I belong only to the rank and file of patient workers and gropers, whose failures and mistakes prepare the way for the triumph of brighter spirits."

"Sniksnak!" said Knutty contemptuously. "Don't pretend to me that you are content with that. And don't talk to me about patience. I hate the word. It is almost as bad as balance and self-control. Balanced people, self-controlled people, patient people indeed! Get along with them! The only suitable place for them is in a herbarium amongst the other dried plants."

"But, Tante," said Gerda, who always took Knutty seriously, "there would and could be no science without patience."

"And a good thing too!" replied Knutty recklessly, winking at Katharine.

"Tante's head is turned by the unexpected honour of being chosen as god-mother to a Norwegian cow," Clifford said. "We must bear with her."

Knutty laughed. She was always glad when her Englishman teased her. She watched him as he went back into the hall and sat down near the doctor and clergyman.

"My Clifford begins to look younger again," she thought.

She watched him when Alan came and stood by him for a moment, and then went off with Jens.

"Yes," she thought, "it is all right with my icebergs now."

She glanced across to Katharine, who was doing her best to make friends with the women in the parlour.

"Dear one," she thought, "will you remember, I wonder, that I told you he will never be able to speak unless you help him?"

She watched her when Alan came in his shy way and sat down near her.

"Dear one," she thought, "the other iceberg is in love with you too, and I am not jealous. What a wonderful old woman I am! Or is it you who are wonderful, bringing love and happiness to us all? Ah, that's it!"

So the second day's feasting in honour of Bedstefar came to an end; and on the third day the men played quoits in the courtyard, and smoked and drank more lustily. The Sorenskriver, who had had various quiet disputes on the previous days with the doctor, the Foged, and the Storthingsmand, now broke forth into violent discussions with the same opponents, and was pronounced by Knutty to be at the zenith of happiness because he was at the zenith of disagreeableness! All the men were enjoying themselves in one way or another; but the women sat in the big parlour looking a little tired and bored. It was Katharine who suggested that Gerda should sing to them.

"Sing to them their own songs," she said. "You will make them so happy. If I could do anything to amuse them, I would. But if one does not know the language, what can one do?"

"You have your own language, kjaere," Gerda answered, "the language of kindness, and they have all understood it. If Tante was not so conceited, she would know that you have really been sharing with her the approval of the company."

"Nonsense," laughed Katharine. "Why, they think I am a barbarian woman from a country where there are no mountains and no Saeters! Come now, sing to them and to me. I love to hear your voice."

"So does my Ejnar," said Gerda. "Ak, I wish he were here! He would pretend not to care; but he would listen on the sly. Well, well, it is good to be without him. One has one's freedom."

So she sat down and sang. She began with a little Swedish song:

"Om dagen vid mitt arbete" ("At daytime when I'm working").

Sheet music of 'At day-time when I'm working.'

[Listen]

At the day-time when I'm working,
Thou reignest in my thoughts;

At night when I am sleeping,
Thou reignest in my dreams;
At dawn when I a-wak-en,
I yearn with long-ing sore,
For my be-lov-ed sweet-heart,
So far, so far a-way.

"That is one of my Ejnar's favourites," she said, turning to Katharine.

The company began to be mildly interested. It was not the Norwegian habit of mind to be interested at once. Still, one or two faces betrayed a faint sign of pleasure; and one of the men peeped in from the hall. Then she sang another Swedish song, "Oh, hear, thou young Dora." It was so like Gerda to feel in a Swedish mood when she ought to have been feeling Norwegian.

The company seemed pleased. They nodded at each other.

Another man peeped in from the hall. Bedstemor strode masterfully into the room, and sat down near the little pocket edition of herself.

"That is another of my Ejnar's favourites," Gerda whispered, turning to Katharine again.

She paused for a moment, thinking. No one spoke.

Then she chose a Norwegian song—Aagot's mountain-song. This was it:

Sheet music of 'Aagot's mountain-song.'
[Listen]

"O'er the hills the sun now glides,
Shadows lengthen out;
Night will soon come back again,
Folding me in her embrace;
In the stable stand the cattle,
At the Saeter door stand I.

There was a stir of pleasure in the company. Mor Inga and Solli slipped in. Then she sang one of Kjerulf's songs, "Over de höje Fjelde."[U]

"Fain would I know what the world may be
Over the mountains high.
Mine eyes can nought but the white snow see,
And up the steep sides the dark fir-tree,

That climbs as if yearning to know.
Ah! what if one ventured to go!"

"Up, heart, up! and away!
Over the mountains high.
For my courage is young and my soul will be gay,
If no longer bound straitly and fettered I stay,
But seeking yon summit to gain,
No more beat my wings here in vain."

The Sorenskriver came in and sat down by Katharine.

"Yes," he said, more to himself than to her, "I remember having those thoughts when I was a young boy. What should I find over the mountains? Ak, and what does one find in exchange for all one's yearning?"

Gerda had sung this beautifully. The natural melancholy of her voice suited to perfection the weird sadness of Norwegian music. The company was gratified. They knew and loved that song well, and some of them joined in timidly at the end of the last verse. The old Gaardmand crept into the room and sat near Knutty.

"I could sing as finely as I could dance the Halling," he said to Knutty, with a grim smile.

"Thou shouldst have heard me sing," said Bedstemor to Knutty. "I had a beautiful voice."

"And so had I," said the pocket edition of Bedstemor, clutching at Knutty's dress.

"Yes," answered Knutty sympathetically, "I can well believe it."

And she added to herself:

"We all had a voice, or think we had. It amounts to the same when the past is past. A most convenient thing, that past—that kind of past which only crops up when you want it!"

Then Gerda sang:

"Come haul the water, haul the wood."

This time the audience which, unbeknown to Gerda, had grown to large proportions, joined in lustily, led by Bedstemor's cracked old voice. She beat time, too, still playing the *rôle* of leading lady. Katharine, sitting by Gerda's side, but a little in front of the piano, saw that the hall was full of eager listeners, and that at the back of the guests were the servants of the Gaard, including Thea and the dramatic Mette, and some of the cotters, and old Kari. The music which they knew and loved had gathered them all together from courtyard, kitchen, and

cowhouse. There was no listlessness on any face now: an unwilling animation, born of real pleasure, lit up the countenances of both men and women—an animation all the more interesting, so Katharine thought, because of its reluctance and shyness. It reminded her of Alan's shyness, of Clifford's too; she remembered that Clifford had said to her several times:

"I believe I am a Norwegian in spirit if not in body; I have always loved the North and yearned after it."

She glanced at him and caught him looking fixedly at her. He was thinking:

"To-morrow, when she and I go off to Peer Gynt's home together, shall I be able to speak to her as I spoke to her in my dream up at the Saeter?"

He turned away when he met her glance, and retired at once into himself.

Then Gerda sang other Norwegian songs, every one joining in with increasing enjoyment and decreasing shyness: songs about cows, pastures, Saeters, sweethearts, and Huldres, a curious mixture of quaint, even humorous words, and melancholy music.

Finally the Sorenskriver, scarcely waiting until the voices had died away, stood up, a commanding figure, a typical rugged Norwegian, and started the national song:

"Yes, we cherish this our country."

Long afterwards Katharine remembered that scene and that singing.

No voice was silent, no heart was without its thrill, no face without its sign of pride of race and country.

CHAPTER XIX.
PEER GYNT'S STUE.

The next morning all the guests went away. They were packed in their carioles, gigs, and carriages, and their cake-baskets were returned to them, etiquette demanding that each guest should take away a portion of another guest's funeral-cake offering. Ragnhild's sweetheart was the last to go. Knutty watched with lynx eyes to see if there was going to be any outward and visible sign of the interest which they felt in each other; but she detected none.

"Well, they must be very much in love with each other," she said to Gerda, "for there is not a single flaw in their cloak of sulkiness. Ak, ak, kjaere, I am glad the funeral is over. I have not borne up as bravely as Bedstemor; but then, of course, I have not lost a husband. That makes a difference. Now don't look shocked. I know quite well I ought not to have said that. All the same, Bedstemor's strength and spirits and appetite have been something remarkable. I

believe she would like a perpetual funeral going on at the Gaard. And how lustily she sang last evening! That reminds me, you sang beautifully yesterday, and were most kind and gracious to the whole company. I think Mor Inga ought to have made you the godmother of the calf. I was proud of my Gerda. I am proud of my Gerda, although I do tease her."

"Never mind," said Gerda, "was sich liebt, sich neckt. And I am not jealous about the calf. I am a little jealous about the Englishwoman sometimes. Tante loves her."

"Yes," said Tante simply, "I love her, but quite differently from the way in which I love my botanical specimens. My botanists have their own private herbarium in my heart."

Gerda smiled.

"I like her too, Tante," she said. "You know I was not very jealous of her when my Ejnar began to pay her attentions."

"Because you knew they would not last," laughed Knutty. "You need never be anxious about him. He is not a sensible human being. He won't do anything worse than elope with a plant. Any way, he cannot elope with Miss Frensham just now, as he is safe in the Dovre mountains making love to the Ranunculus glacialis!"

"She told me she was going to Peer Gynt's stue with the Kemiker," Gerda said after a pause. "I wish I could have gone too. But my ankle is too bad."

"Ah, what a good thing!" remarked Knutty. "That gives them a chance. How I wish he would elope with her! But he won't, the silly fellow. I know him. If you see him, tell him I said he was to elope with her instantly. I am going off to the cowhouse to have a talk with my dramatic Mette and to learn the cowhouse gossip about the funeral-feast. So farewell for the present."

"I cannot think why Mette is such a favourite with you, Tante," Gerda said. "You know she isn't a respectable girl at all."

"Kjaere, don't wave the banner; for pity's sake, don't wave the banner," Tante said. "Who is respectable, I should like to know? I am sure I am not, and you are not. That is to say, we may be respectable in one direction; but that does not make up the sum-total. There, go and think that over, and be sure and keep your ankle bad; and if you see Alan, tell him to follow me to the cowhouse, for I want him to do something for me."

And so it came to pass that Clifford and Katharine were able to steal off alone to Peer Gynt's stue. They had tried several times during the funeral-feasting to escape from the company; but Mor Inga liked to have all the guests around her, and it would have seemed uncourteous if any of them had deliberately withdrawn themselves. But now they were free to go where they wished without

breaking through the strict Norwegian peasant etiquette. They had long since planned this Peer Gynt expedition. It was Bedstemor who originally suggested it to Clifford. She was always saying that he must go to Peer Gynt's stue; and her persistence led him to believe that there really was some old house in the district which local tradition claimed to be Peer Gynt's childhood's home; where, as in Ibsen's wonderful poem, he, a wild, idle, selfish fellow from early years upwards, lived with his mother Ãse. Clifford had not been able to find out to his entire satisfaction whether or not this particular stue had been known as Peer Gynt's house before the publication of Ibsen's poem. Bedstemor had always known it as such, and gave most minute instructions for finding it. The old Gaardmand with whom Knutty had flirted said he had always known it as Peer Gynt's actual home; and even old Kari, when questioned, said, "Ja, Peer Gynt lived up over there." Bedstemor had a few vague stories to tell about Peer Gynt, and she ended up with, "Ja, ja, he was a wild fellow, who did wild things, and saw and heard wonderful things."

So apparently Peer Gynt was a real person who had had his home somewhere in this part of the great Gudbrandsdal; and Ibsen had probably caught up some of the stories about the real man, and woven them into the network of his hero's character. But, as Knutty said, the only thing which really mattered was the indisputable fact that Ibsen had placed the scene of three acts of his poem in the Gudbrandsdal and the mountains round about, and that they—herself, Clifford, Katharine, every one of them—were there in the very atmosphere, mental and physical, of the great poem itself.

"And the stue stands for an idea if not for a fact," she said, "like Hamlet's grave in my belovèd Elsinore. Go and enjoy; and forget, for once, to be accurate."

He thought of Knutty's words as he and Katharine left the Gaard and began to climb down the steep hillside on their way to the valley; for Peer Gynt's home was perched on another mountain-ridge, and they had first to descend from their own heights, gain the valley, walk along by the glacier-river, and pass by the old brown church before they came to the steep path which would lead them up to their goal. He said to himself:

"Yes, Peer Gynt's stue stands for an idea in more senses than one. Day after day, when I have not been able to open my heart to her, I have thought that perhaps I should be able to break through my silence on our pilgrimage to Peer Gynt's stue."

The morning was fair and fresh; summer was passing; there was a touch of crispness in the air which suggested frost and 'iron nights,' dreaded by the peasants before the harvest should have been gathered in. Katharine and Clifford

kept to the course of the stream, which was a quick, though a steep, way down to the saw-mill, beautifully situated near a foss of the glacier-river, the roar and rush of which they heard up at the Solli Gaard. There was a bridge across this river, and they stood there watching the tumbling mass of water, and recalling the morning when they had passed over to the other side on their way to the Saeters. The little Landhandleri across the bridge was being besieged by no less than four customers. Their carioles were fastened to a long rail outside the queer little shop which contained everything mortal man could want, from rough butter-boxes and long china pipes to dried cod and overalls.

"I never see these places without thinking of the isolated shops dumped down in lonely districts out in the west of America," Katharine said. "Some of them were kept by Norwegians too."

"They have had their training in isolation here, you see," Clifford said, "and so go out knowing how to cater for isolated people. And they make a small fortune quickly and return. At least some of them return, those in whom the love of country outweighs everything else in life."

"I should be one of those," Katharine said. "I should always yearn to return."

"I remember your saying you would like to bring all the broken-hearted exiles home," he said.

"Yes," she said, "I would."

"You have a heart of pity," he said, turning to her.

"I am sorry for those who have lost their country," she said. "I have seen them suffer. If I were a millionaire, I would find out some of the worst cases, and give them back their country and the means to enjoy it, or the opportunity of dying in it."

So they talked or were silent as the mood seized them. They were happy, and frankly glad to be together alone. They left the bridge, passed along the main road, through fragrant fir-woods, and came to a most picturesque spot where two rivers, one of them the glacier-river, met and rushed on together as one. They crossed this long bridge, and found themselves on the other side of the main valley. Here they looked back and could discern the big Solli Gaard, perched proudly on the opposite mountain-ridge. Then their way lay along the easy road by the winding river. It retreated from them, returned, retreated. The sun jewelled the clear part of it with diamonds, and the strange milky glacier part of it with opals. Finally it left them, and they could scarcely reconcile themselves to its departure, but strolled back once more to enjoy its gracious company. But at last they said farewell to it, and went on to the old brown church, at the back of which they expected, from Bedstemor's instructions, to find the steep path leading up to Peer Gynt's stue. They halted, to see the sunburnt old church, and

to rest. Katharine was struck by its beautiful proportions. Rough and without any features of special architectural interest, it presented a harmony in itself which was arresting. She made the remark; and Clifford, who knew many things about the North, was able to tell her that this was characteristic of the Norwegian churches of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The date of this church was the middle of the eighteenth century. It was rather a rich, well-cared-for church from a Norwegian point of view, and it was full of interest for strangers. The painted and decorated pews, with the rich peasants' names in floriated design, attracted Katharine. The Sollis' pew was, of course, one of them. The pulpit was elaborately carved, and was painted and gilded in generous fashion. There was a rood-screen which bore the arms of Norway, painted also in flamboyant style; and a shelf on the top supported eight or ten figures of personages in Scripture lore, with their symbols. Some of these figures were almost grotesque. It was difficult to believe that they were of the same recent date as the church. The altarpiece, the Last Supper, carved and painted, bore the date 1740; yet in conception it looked like a piece of work from the Middle Ages, and Dutch in character. Quainter still were the weird pictures hanging on the walls, all of them gifts of pious people. The subjects were of course religious ones: Jacob wrestling with the Angel, the Passage of the Red Sea, the Garden of Gethsemane. They all dated back to the early part of the eighteenth century, and were most primitive in idea and execution, testifying silently, not only to the piety of the donors, but to the uninfluenced isolation of the interior of Norway. One of them had the inscription, "To the honour of God and for the ornament of the church is this picture given by a rich and pious girl at a cost of three dollars of the realm!"

Katharine and Clifford examined these queer things, and finally sat down in the Sollis' grand pew. The world was beginning to be even as this old brown church—empty, save for them. He was thinking, as he sat by her side, how little she, with her free, open-hearted nature, could guess at the grim and almost insurmountable difficulties of a prisoner of silence like himself. She would never know how many times he had tried to begin the story which he wished passionately to tell her. But each time that he had failed, he at least knew that he was gaining courage. He did not realise that Katharine had retreated into herself since that anxious day at the Skyds-station; for Mrs Stanhope's words up at the Saeter had been echoing in her ears. She was not the woman to allow her own impulses to be checked by the opinion of Mrs Stanhope. Her most accentuated feeling about Mrs Stanhope was indignation; nevertheless, the malignant words of that bigot had engendered a vague shyness in Katharine's mind, which held her back from helping Clifford. And also, she was passing through a phase of

emotional passiveness, which Nature, in her wisdom, insists on, after any great and generous giving out of sympathy, love, and anxious concern. At such moments even the most reckless spendthrifts of self can give nothing. They wait. And if no one ministers to them, they pass out into the darkness of the night to find recovery. So Katharine waited; and they sat on together in the Sollis' decorated pew, cut off from the outside world, and silent. The moment of liberty did not come to the prisoner then in the old brown church. It almost came, but not quite.

When they left the church, they took the steep path accurately described by Bedstemor. It was steep and rough, and Clifford turned to help Katharine over some of the difficult bits; but she was as active as he, and not at all breathless. She was astonished that there should be no easier road than this one up to several old Gaards which they skirted in their ascent. It seemed impossible for the farm-people to bring any heavy loads up or down such a rough path. Clifford told her that it was characteristic of the Norwegians of a previous generation.

"In former days," he said, "they made a road, any kind of road, straight to their goal, over and through any difficulties. The Sorenskriver thinks it a bad sign that they now make easy and circuitous ones. He would like this uncompromising one. He would think that there still remained some of the old rugged stubbornness in the Norwegian character, and some of its simple hardihood."

"We can tell him about it," Katharine said, smiling at the thought of the Sorenskriver. She was thinking what great good luck they had had in getting off without him!

So they mounted higher and higher, pausing now and then to look down at the valley, which on this side had a different appearance from that to which they were now affectionately accustomed from the Solli Gaard. Here the valley was much narrower, and the view, though beautiful, was less comprehensive, but more intimate. From the Solli Gaard they saw the great Gudbrandsdal as a vision. From the hillside behind the old brown church they saw it as a human reality. They noticed, too, that the land was more encumbered with rocks and stones in this district than in the region round about the Solli Gaard; although there also were outward and visible signs of the patient labour with which the Norwegians struggled against a hard nature to make their country productive. But here the battle proclaimed itself even more eloquently; and Katharine, who noticed everything, spoke of it.

"No wonder they are a melancholy people, if they have had to struggle so hard to get so little," she said.

"It is not that which has made them melancholy," Clifford replied. "It is the

loneliness."

He was silent for a moment, and then went on:

"Certain nations seem set apart for loneliness, even as certain people. Nature has willed it so. Have you not seen how in active bustling communities there are always several detached persons who prefer to go away into the wilderness? They belong there. It is their native soil, even if they have been born in crowded cities. I believe my father was one of those persons."

"I have seen them out in Colorado," Katharine said. And she added impulsively:

"But you are not one of them."

"No," he said without looking up at her; "I am not one of them. I was forced into my wilderness."

And again she could not help him. For the very life of her, she could not have said to him:

"Tell me about your wilderness, and I will tell you about mine."

In a few minutes they came to a Gaard hanging over the hillside, which Clifford thought, from Bedstemor's description, must be Peer Gynt's homestead. He hurried on to inquire, and soon came back to the great rock where Katharine was resting.

"Yes," he said, "we have reached our destination. And that is supposed to be Peer Gynt's house—that old stue there. The other buildings making up the Gaard are newer, as you can see. The Gaardmand's wife says many people come to visit it."

So there they were, at last, at Peer Gynt's home, perched up on high, looking straight down on the valley and the river—a wild, isolated spot, fit abode for a wild, restless spirit. The Gaardmand's wife showed them over the old stue, which was very much like others they had seen, built of great tree-trunks, and black with age outside, and mouldy with age within; and when they had looked and looked, each of them remembering Knutty's injunction to enjoy, believe, and to be seized by the "spirit of place," she took them into the courtyard, and pointed out another old building used as stables.

"Peer Gynt was buried here," she said. "He was too wicked to be buried in the churchyard."

They lingered there for a long time, held in very truth by the spirit of place. Clifford knew his 'Peer Gynt' well, and Katharine, who had read it in English, understood a little of its real significance. He, knowing its whole scope from beginning to end, was able to make the poem real to her. He told her that Peer Gynt, brought up by his mother Ãse on legends and fairy tales, was typical to Ibsen's mind of the Norwegian nation, brought up on Sagas, and at the moment

when the poem was written, not able to put away phantasms, and awake to the realities of life. He admired the poem intensely, and seemed delighted that she was interested in all he had to tell her about it. And he was moved at being in its very atmosphere. He had forgotten his doubts about the genuineness of the place.

"Cannot you see him coming down from the mountains after one of his escapades," he said, "his mother standing scolding him, and then listening entranced to his fantastic stories? Can't you see him seizing his mother when she was a nuisance to him, carrying her over the river and putting her on the grass-roof of the corn-house, where she could not interfere with him? Was there ever such a fellow? And there is the river—the very river!"

He pointed to it with almost a child's eagerness.

"He must have crossed there, you see, on his way to the wedding at which he stole the bride and took her away into the mountains," he said. "And where was it, I wonder, that he used to lie in the woods, dreaming his dreams of action and achievement which never came to anything? Perhaps yonder, sometimes, in that little copse over there."

Then he turned once more to the stue.

"And to think that there, actually there, poor Ãse died," he said. "Don't you remember how, even at her deathbed, he could not face the reality of the moment, but buoyed her and himself up with pitiful romancing? I can see the whole scene as I never saw it before."

It was a long time before they tore themselves away, and then they did not go far. They sat down by some stones outside the Gaard enclosure, still talking about Peer Gynt.

"The poem always stirs me," said Clifford. "I know nothing in literature which ever took a greater hold on me. It may be partly because Knutty taught me to know and understand the Northern mind. But the more I read it, the more I see that it is not typical of the Northern temperament only. Peer Gynt stands for us all, whether we hail from the North, the South, the East, the West; for all of us who cover up realities with fantasies."

"But do we not all have to help ourselves with make-believe, more or less?" Katharine said. "If we went through life doing nothing but facing facts, we should be intolerable to ourselves and other people. Surely now and then we need to rest on fantasy?"

She was silent a moment, and then went on:

"We make a fantastic picture to ourselves that we are wanted in the world, that we have work to do, a call to answer, things and people needing us, and us only. If we did not do that where should we be?"

He turned to her suddenly:

"Have you felt that too?" he said.

"Yes," she answered.

"So have I," he said.

"But you had, and have always had, your work," Katharine said, "your own definite career, which no one, nothing, could take from you."

And as soon as the words had left her lips, she remembered that Knutty was always saying that if ever a man had had his career marred and checked by others, that man was Clifford Thornton. She could have bitten her tongue out. She did not know that she had helped him by what she had said.

He drew a little nearer to her.

"There is a passage from 'Peer Gynt' which has always haunted me," he said:

'"We are thoughts,
Thou shouldst have thought us....'
'We are a riddle,
Thou shouldst have solved us....'
'We are songs,
Thou shouldst have sung us....
A thousand times hast thou
Crushed and choked us.
In thy heart-depths
We have lain and waited
Vainly for thy summons....'

That is the true picture of my career."

"Every humble-hearted person with gifts would think that," Katharine said impulsively.

It was as though she were defending him from some accuser; as though she imperiously wished to sweep all regrets and grievings out of his horizon. He felt her tender sympathy enfolding him, and it gave him courage. With one tremendous effort he broke down the wall of reserve. The long-imprisoned thoughts came tumbling out. At first they freed themselves with effort, and then with natural ease. Katharine listened wonder-struck. He spoke of the years which had gone, of Marianne, of her strange attitude to his work, of the battle which he had always been fighting between bitterness and self-reproach, of the inroad which it had made on his powers of thought and concentration, of his contempt for himself that he had not been able to deal more successfully with difficulties which spoilt her life and his.

Katharine, knowing from Knutty something of the daily difficulties which had beset him, was touched by his gentle chivalry of heart and spirit; for he did not say one single ungentle word of Marianne, nor give expression to one single ungenerous criticism. His criticism was of himself, not her. He said repeatedly that if he had cared enough to find the key to a good understanding, it could have been found.

"I can tell you all this so easily now that I have once begun," he said. "I have been longing to lay it all before you; time after time I have tried to speak to you of my poor Marianne, of her death, of the boy's disbelief in me, of my own disbelief in myself, of the secret trouble which has gnawed at my heart, and which, in spite of reason, will gnaw at my heart until I have told it to you. You are the only one in all eternity to whom I could tell it."

"Tell it," Katharine said gently.

Then he told her.

And as he told her Peer Gynt's stue faded from her eyes—the river: the birch-wood: the distant mountains: the valley: Norway. She was back in England once more. She saw a lonely man sitting dreaming by his fireside. She saw him go slowly up the staircase and hasten his step as he heard Marianne's voice calling to him in alarm. She saw the expression of shock and pain on Marianne's face. She heard him saying:

"It was only a dream—your dream and my dream—let it go the way of all dreams."

She saw him go down to the stable and saddle his horse. She saw him ride out into the darkness of the night. She saw him throw himself on the bed, worn out in body and spirit. She heard Alan calling to his father. She saw Marianne leaning back, dead, and with that terrible look of shock and pain on her poor dead face.

The very simplicity and directness of the man's story added to its significance. That he could tell it at all, showed his terrible need of telling it. That he could tell it thus unreservedly, showed his entire trust in her, and his entire freedom from any desire to give the impression that he had suffered without having inflicted suffering.

The directness was almost more than Katharine could bear. More than once she could have cried out to him to stop. But she had not the heart to check him; and on he went, his intensity, his frankness increasing the whole time.

"Yes," he said, "she left me; she died in that terrible way, and I was alive to fight with and face the possibility that I had caused her death. Hundreds of times I said that if I could have tuned myself to be more in harmony with the best that was in her and in me, my dreaming thoughts of her would never have broken through the bounds of kindness, would never have attained to that fierce acuteness which penetrated to her so ruthlessly in her own defenceless state of dreaming. By what force, by what process they reached her, I, in my ignorance, cannot pretend to know. I only know that our minds met each other then as they had never met in normal life."

He paused a moment. Katharine thought that he had come to the end of his power of telling. But before she had finished thinking that brief thought, he had begun again.

He said he had been tortured and puzzled by that dream until his reason nearly left him. There was no one to whom he could have confided it. He could not have told it to Knutty, for he never had been able to speak with her about Marianne. He could not talk it out with any one who might have given time and

serious thought to such phenomena. Perhaps that might have helped him more than anything at the time: to have talked it out, analysed it, found the relative meaning of it, and satisfied his intelligence about it by means of some one else's intelligence. But that was an impossibility to him; and so it remained locked in his heart, gnawing at his heart whilst he battled with it alone.

"When the boy began to turn from me, it gnawed more and more," he said. "When I learned that Marianne's friend was openly condemning my conduct to her, it gnawed more and more. For I said to myself, 'If the boy knew the awful thought which is haunting me, if Mrs Stanhope knew it, if they all knew it, what then?' So I kept my secret to myself. I had the sense to know that I was justified in doing that. And I turned to my work and tried to forget. I turned to my work, which had always been a haven when I was able to keep it uninvaded by—by outside influences. It was invaded now. I could not forget. I went as usual to my study and laboratory, and I tried to continue my neglected investigations; but I failed from the first. Time after time I tried. You would scarcely believe how often—and always in vain. For my mind was filled with the one imperious thought from which there was no escape—not even for a moment: Was I guilty of Marianne's death? Time after time I found myself saying aloud, 'Have I killed Marianne, or have I not killed Marianne?'"

Katharine had been leaning forward gazing fixedly into the distance, but she stood up now, and turned to him.

"Don't go on," she said in a stifled voice. "I cannot bear any more."

Then he saw the keen distress on her face.

"Oh," he cried in an agony of remorse, "I have been thinking only of myself—forgive me——"

"No, no, it isn't that," she said. "But you have suffered so much, and you are suffering now in telling me, and I cannot bear it."

"Forgive me, forgive me," he pleaded almost inaudibly. "It was my soul's necessity to tell you—to lay it all before you—so that you might know me and judge me."

"Judge you!" she cried.

And there was a world of love and understanding in her eyes, in her voice, and on her face.

She turned to him with outstretched hands; but as she turned, she saw a vision of Marianne leaning back in the arm-chair, dead, and with that expression of alarm on her poor dead face.

Katharine's hands fell.

"Let us go home," she said in a voice which was full of pain.

So in silence they descended the steep hillside.

In silence they went along by the river, and over the bridge, through the fir-woods, and up towards the Solli Gaard.

CHAPTER XX.

Katharine went straight to her room and threw herself on her bed. All her thoughts were of Clifford. Her heart was flooded with love and pity for him, a hundredfold intensified now that she knew his secret history. The manner of Marianne's death and the long-continued silent suffering of the man appalled her. She had known from the beginning that he had suffered acutely; but when she had called him the man with the broken spirit, she had little realised the torture which his gentle and chivalrous spirit was undergoing day by day, hour by hour. He had fought and conquered. She knew that. She knew that she, coming into his wilderness, had helped him to do that; even as he, coming into her wilderness of loneliness, had brought her a new life and a new outlook.

Judge him—judge him! The words rang in the air and echoed back to her.

"My belovèd!" she cried, "I shall yet be able to tell you all that is in my heart. You suffered—and she suffered too—that poor Marianne—and I saw her face before me when I turned to you—and, oh, my belovèd, we could only go home in silence."

Her genius of sympathy did not leave that poor Marianne out in the cold. Marianne's turbulent temperament, Marianne's jealous rages, all the impossibilities resulting from a wrong aura, were reverently garnered into Katharine's tender understanding. For she knew Marianne had suffered too; and that in that strange dream, that heart-breaking final communication between husband and wife, Marianne had learnt the truth, and the truth had killed her. She had gone to her death with a knowledge which was too much for her life. The truth and not Clifford had killed her: the truth, spoken in a defenceless moment.

In the midst of her serious musings there came a knock at the door. Katharine answered, "Come in," and Alan appeared. His manner was, as usual, shy, and he blushed a little. He was always greatly pleased to see Katharine. He brought two English letters for her. His young face and young presence broke in upon her as a song of spring.

"Don't go," she said, holding out her hand to him. "What have you got there?"

"Oh, it's only a drawing I've been doing of the cowhouse," he said in his shy way. "Knutty wanted it. She says it isn't bad."

"It is very good, I think," Katharine said. "I wish it were for me."

"Oh, I am going to do something ripping good for you before I go back to school," he said. "I've begun it."

She smiled her thanks to him.

"Shall you be glad to go back to school?" she asked, as she broke open her letters.

"I shall not like to leave father," he said, without looking up. "But he has promised to come and see me."

"Ah, that's right," Katharine said, and she glanced at one of the letters.

"Will you come and see me?" Alan said with a jerk.

"Of course I will," she said.

Then she turned to her letters. Alan did not go away. He sat in the window recess cutting at a model of a Laplander's pulk (sledge) which the Sorenskriver had given him. Katharine forgot about him, forgot for the moment about everything, except the contents of her letters.

Ronald wrote in great trouble begging for her return. As she had guessed, money matters had been going wrong with him; he had been gambling on the Stock Exchange, had lost heavily, had taken money from the business, crippled it, compromised it, compromised himself, compromised her, but he could and would retrieve everything if she would stand by him.

"Stand by you; of course I'll stand by you," she said staunchly.

In his hour of happiness he had shut her out; and now in his hour of need he opened the door to her, and she went in gladly, without a thought of bitterness in her heart.

"Stand by you; of course I'll stand by you," she repeated. "Poor old fellow! In trouble, and through your own fault entirely—the worst kind of trouble to bear, too, because there is no one to blame except your own self."

The other letter was from Margaret Tonedale, Willy's sister. She wrote that Willy had been very ill from pneumonia, and they had nearly lost him. He was still ill and dreadfully low, and asked repeatedly for Katharine. His intense and unsatisfied yearning to see her was retarding his recovery, and Margaret felt that she must let Katharine know, so that if she were thinking of returning soon, she might perhaps be inclined to hasten her steps homewards.

And the letter ended with these words:

"Although you do not want to marry him, Kath, you love and prize him, as we all do, and I know you would wish to help him and us."

"Dear old Willy," she said. "Faithful old fellow. Of course, I must go and see after you."

She had been living her own personal life, focusing on the present and the sad and sweet circumstances of the present, slipping away for the time from home affairs, home ties, deliberately pushing aside any passing uneasy thoughts about Ronald's extravagant mode of life, letting herself go forward untrammelled into a

new world of hopes and fears.

But now voices from the old world of a few short weeks ago, the old world grown strangely older in a few swift days, loved voices, with all the irresistible, exacting persuasion of the past, called to her.

She rose, determined to go home at once, and then she saw Alan.

"Alan," she said, "I must go and find out about the trains and the boat. I must return at once."

"Go away from us?" the boy asked. And he looked as though he heard of some great calamity.

It was he who broke the news to his father.

"Father," he said, "she is going away. Can't we go too?"

Clifford made no answer. He seemed stunned. His face was ashen when he sought Katharine out, and said in a voice that trembled:

"Is it I who am driving you away?"

"No, no," she answered. "I shall write to you. I shall write to you. I cannot trust myself to speak. If I began, I——"

It was she who broke off this time.

"I have so much I want to say to you," she went on. "Up at Peer Gynt's stue, when I turned towards you, I——"

She broke off again.

The news spread about that the Englishwoman was returning to England the very next morning. It caused general dissatisfaction.

"Going away!" said Bedstemor. "Why doesn't she stay in Norway? That is the only place to live in."

"Going to leave the Gaard!" said Solli reproachfully; "before the harvest is gathered in too."

"Going to England!" said the Sorenskriver sulkily; "to that barbarous country, which scarcely exists on the map."

"Going away!" exclaimed old Kari, "and before the cows come down from the mountains."

"Going away!" said Gerda, "before my Ejnar brings us 'the Ranunculus glacialis.'"

"Going to England!" said Knutty, "leaving us all in the lurch here, alone, without you. Leaving me, my icebergs, and my botanists—and for the sake of a brother and a sick friend: people whom you've known all your life! I never heard

of anything so inhuman. Brothers indeed; sick friends indeed! Let them take care of themselves. Bah, these relations! They always choose the wrong time for crises; and as for friends, they are always sick when you want them to be well, and well when you want them to be sick. Ignore them all, kjaere, and stay with us."

But in spite of their loving protests, Katharine tore herself away: from the beautiful Gudbrandsdal, from the quaint and simple peasant life, from the surroundings which were hallowed for ever in her memory.

Her departure took place so quietly that no one realised that she had gone. Knutty sat on the verandah trying to work at the Danish translation; but, discovering that her nerves were out of order, she found it a relief to pick a quarrel with the Sorenskriver, who had sulkily refused to go to the station, and then was angry with himself and consequently with the whole world.

At last Clifford came back from the station. He sat down by Knutty's side.

"Knutty, she has gone," he said forlornly.

"Kjaere," she said, comforting him as she put her hand on his head. "My poor iceberg."

Alan came. He, too, sat down by Knutty's side.

"Knutty, she has gone," the boy said sadly.

"Kjaere," Knutty said, and she put her hand on his head too. "My poor other iceberg."

Then she turned to them with a smile on her face.

"I see daylight!" she cried. "Go after her!"

PART III.
IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

"Maccaroni of my native land!" said Signor Luigi one day whilst sitting in Katharine's private room at the organ-factory—"Maccaroni of my native land! And so the Signorina have become a real business-personage, helping 'brother' to build the best organs in the world. But the Signorina must not work too hard. She must not depart the roses from her cheeks. And she must eat her lunch lentissimo largissimo, as now. Ha, this coffee is very good. And the rolls and butter is adorable."

Katharine laughed, and poured out another cup of coffee for the merry little Italian.

"No," he repeated, "she must not depart the adorable roses from her cheeks."

"Oh, I am not too tired," Katharine said. "Of course it was a little trying at first to get accustomed to routine work. But after a time it goes swimmingly, Signor Luigi; and I assure you I should be quite lost now if I did not come down to the factory every day. Let me see. I have been at it three months. You all said I should give it up after three days."

"We all thought the Signorina were made to have all the time to herself and to command her faithful servants," the little violoncellist answered gallantly.

"But I can still command my faithful servants, I suppose?" Katharine asked with a smile.

"Always, always!" he replied, waving his spoon in the air.

"You see," Katharine continued, nodding at him approvingly, "I was bent on filling up my life with something which was worth doing. Even before I left England, I had got tired of the ordinary leisured woman's life. And when I came home again and went amongst my friends and acquaintances, I saw it was going to be impossible to me to take such a life up once more and even pretend to myself that I was enjoying it. The whole thing bored me, wearied me. But here I am not bored. Moreover, I am delighted with myself, and proud to find myself developing all sorts of unexpected abilities!"

"I have always said that the Signorina have the abilities of all the cleverest and beautifullest personages in all the centuries and all the countries," said

Signor Luigi. "Light of mine eyeballs, light of mine eyeballs! I have always said she could build organs for 'brother,' play on the trombone, on the adorable drums, do anything and everything—except one thing."

"And what is that?" Katharine said.

"The Signorina could not leave off being her adorable self although she have become the busy, busy business-personage," he answered, with a nourish of the coffee-cup. "But now I go. I dare not stay one leetle minute longer. I have not the wish to be deported like the Pomeranian dog. Ah, he have gone away with the other grand things of 'brother's' grand house. But 'brother' looks happier. And every month 'brother' will be happier. Not so many illustrious expenses, not so much animato agitato of the spirits! I know. I am calmer since I cut down the half of my native maccaroni. For the times is bad, Signorina. No one is pining himself to learn the violoncello or listen to it. No, he prefer to dash away in a motor-car, and the poor musician—well, he must cut down his maccaroni and play to himself and give lessons to himself. Or he must change his profession and be motor-car driver. I have the serious thoughts about it, Signorina. But I will not drive you and 'brother' till I have practised on other people. Ha, here is 'brother.'"

Ronald came in looking pleased.

"We have got the order for that organ in Natal," he said, nodding to Signor Luigi. "I am awfully glad about it. Don't go, Luigi."

"Noble 'brother,' I must go," the little Italian answered. "I have a pupil at twelve o'clock, and it is now two. She go out in the motor-car, and I allow her three whole hours for being late for her lesson. Ah, the times has indeed changed. The enthusiasms has gone to sleep. Never mind. Vive le quartette! Remember, 'brother,' there is a meeting next week at Herr Edelhart's, and an audience of one is expected."

He looked at Katharine as he spoke, put his hand to his heart, and was gone. But he returned immediately, and added:

"Monsieur Gervais begged the Signorina would be careful not to get the brain fevers over her hard work. He will come next week to pay his compliments. He says he now has the inflammations of the lungs himself."

Ronald, left alone with Katharine, put his hand on her arm.

"Kath," he said gently, "you must not work too hard. You are looking tired. I know well that my shameful behaviour has ploughed into you awfully. You have been a brick to me, old girl. You shall never regret that you stood by me with your money and your kindness. I shall never forget how you hurried back from Norway, and came to the rescue, and saved me and the good name of the firm. I can't say much about it to you now, for I am still too ashamed. But——"

"We went through bad times, Ronald, you and I and Gwendolen," Katharine answered; "but we are coming out of it with our chins well up in the air and a better understanding in our hearts. I had lost you, Ronnie; but I have found you again. I had never won Gwendolen, but—but I am winning her. And there is nothing to thank me for. This crisis in your affairs was my salvation. I never forget that. There are other crises than business crises, Ronnie. And I have been very thankful to turn away from inner troubles to outside difficulties. I begin to see why life is far easier to men than to women. The fight with the outer world braces men up. They go forth, and pass on strengthened. But the women are chained to circumstance—or chain themselves."

"You are in trouble, Kath, and have not told me?" he asked reproachfully.

"There was nothing to tell, dearest," she said, touched by his old loving manner.

"In the old days you would have told me that nothing," he said sorrowfully.

She looked up from the letters which she had suddenly begun to arrange. There were tears in her eyes. There was a grey sadness spread over her face. She was not the old Katharine of a few months ago.

"Kath," he said, "I have been thinking only of myself. I have not been noticing. But I see you are in trouble. May not a selfish fellow know even at the eleventh hour?"

She shook her head as she took his hand and fondled it.

"Some day, Ronnie," she said, almost in a whisper; "not just now."

She could not tell him. She could not tell any one. She owed it to her own self-respect, her own wounded pride, to keep silent about Clifford Thornton's strange silence to her. When she had left the Gaard, she had come home by the overland route, *viâ* Copenhagen and Hamburg. At Hamburg she had rested for a few hours, and in the hotel facing the lake she had written to Clifford. She poured her whole heart, all her longing and love, all her understanding tenderness into that letter. She wrote it feverishly, with emotional abandonment of all restraint. She loved him, believed in him, and what she could not tell him face to face up at Peer Gynt's stue she told him in that letter. And she received no answer to it. More than three months had passed since she wrote it, and still no sign had come from him, no signal across the vast, nothing. She had offered all she could offer, her best self—and his answer was silence. She suffered. She did not regret her impulsiveness. Throughout her life Katharine had been willing to take the consequences of her emotional temperament. She had never shrunk from paying the due price exacted by life from those who do not pause to think and weigh. Nevertheless her heart was chilled, her pride was wounded. But she said to herself time after time that she would not willingly have written one

sentence, one word less. She was impelled to write that letter in that way. No other way would have been possible to her. But she believed that, from his point of view, she had said too much, let herself go too far, frightened the reserved man, lost his respect perhaps, touched him perhaps too roughly on the painful wounds which the chances of life had inflicted on him.

It was great good luck for her that she had work to do, and pressing matters and anxieties which demanded her time and intelligence. She turned herself into a business woman with that remarkable adaptability which men are only beginning to recognise and appreciate in the other sex. From her pretty flat across the water she sallied forth day after day to the organ-factory. The manager and the workmen welcomed her. They were willing to teach her. She was willing to learn. Her quick brain dealt with difficulties in a surprising fashion. Mr Barlow, the manager, had always believed in her business capacities; and it was encouraging to her to know that he was not disappointed. Moreover, she had stepped into the thick of things at a serious crisis, and by her generous action had safeguarded the honour and position of the firm; for she had sold out many of her own investments to meet Ronald's Stock Exchange debts, which otherwise might have been enforced against him as a partner of the firm. She had covered up his extravagant recklessness and his indifferent husbanding of their united interests. She knew that he had yielded to dishonourable recklessness as many another man had yielded before—for love of, and at the importunity of, a woman. She knew that as the months had gone on, he must have been increasingly harassed and torn between his passionate love for Gwendolen and his own natural feelings of what was upright in his business relationships. She was very pitiful with him: yearning as a mother over him. But on one point she was adamant. Ronald had sent Gwendolen to rich friends in the North. Katharine insisted that she should return and take her part at once in Ronald's altered circumstances; for the luxurious house in South Kensington had to be given up, and a more modest home sought for and found in Chelsea. Ronald fought this. He wished to spare his goddess.

"She has never been accustomed to having things in a small way," he said.

"Then she must learn," Katharine answered determinedly.

"You are hard on your own sex," Ronald had said, stung by her decided manner.

"I believe in my own sex," Katharine replied, flushing. "Most women are bricks, Ronnie, if men will allow them to be so. You men make fools of women in the early days of your passionate love, and then later, when it is too late, expect them to behave as sane and reasonable human beings. Gwendolen must come, and at once."

It was in vain that he pleaded.

"She is so young and beautiful, Kath, and she is having such a happy time up North," he said. "I cannot bear to bring her back to worries."

"She must come," Katharine answered.

So Gwendolen came rustling back in her silks and satins, and astonished every one, including herself, by her delighted behaviour.

"Dear old Kath!" she said. "You did not think I was a monster of selfishness and iniquity, but believed in me. You will see how fearfully economical I shall be in the future. I shall sell all my jewels, dress in brown holland, and take in all the darning of the neighbourhood!"

So Katharine had reason to be a little comforted. If she had lost some joys in life, she had gained others.

But she fretted. She had not much leisure, but in her spare time she went down to the Natural History Museum and hung over the cases in the Mineral Department. That was a mournful sort of consolation to her: to be where she had been with Clifford. Once or twice she started off to see Alan. But she turned back. If the father had given no sign, it was not fitting for her to seek out the boy. Several times she wrote long letters to Knutty, and tore them up. The letters she did send to Knutty contained no allusion to Clifford. When the old Dane read them, she said, "Great powers! Is she becoming an iceberg too, or am I mad?"

She sat constantly in the Abbey. She listened to the organ, to the singing. She thought of the gracious day in the summer when Clifford and she had passed along by the glacier-river, and stopped to rest in the old brown church where they sat silently. There was no organ. There was no singing. The music was in their own hearts.

One day she met Herr Edelhart in the Poet's Corner. He was looking grave.

"Yes," he said, "the times are wunderbar bad for great souls, great artistes like mineself. No one wishes to hear me play. And, lieber Himmel, when I think of it, what a tone I have! In this Abbey I could make my little violino into a great orchestra. Ach, Fräulein, but you know. You, with the wunderbar charm, know. But you yourself are sad. 'Brother's' troubles have been too much for you?"

Katharine smiled to herself.

"Poor 'brother'!" she thought. "I am letting him be held responsible for all my sadness."

Willy Tonedale was the only one who did not think Ronald entirely responsible for Katharine's altered manner. He questioned her about Clifford Thornton, and could get nothing from her in the way of confidence. He found her reading weird books about dreams, their meaning and their relationship to normal consciousness. She spent long hours over that subject, and could make

nothing of it.

"I did not know you went in for this sort of game, Kath," he said one day.

"Oh, I do not go in for it," she said, with a slight laugh. "But I was curious to see what had been written about it. The books are disappointing. They record such trivial incidents."

Willy looked at her uneasily.

"I believe you are going to become a scholar as well as a business woman, Kath," he said.

He shook his head. He seemed to think that she was in a very bad way.

A few days afterwards he found her studying a scientific book, "Outlines of Organic Chemistry." It was true that she had it upside down; but, as he remarked, that only added to the abstruseness of the subject.

"Good heavens, Kath!" he said, as he took up the book gingerly, treating it as if it were an explosive, "what on earth have you got here? Didn't know you went in for chemistry too. What in the name of all the Cæsars does an asymmetric atom of carbon mean? I never heard of the beasty before."

"Nor did I," answered Katharine, with a hopeless smile. That book had really been too much for her. Yet she loved to have it. It was only one of the many scientific books she had been buying since she returned from Norway. Willy saw them on the shelf. They were nearly all lives of great chemists, or handbooks on chemistry. He examined them one by one, and then turned to her.

"Kath," he said gently, "don't forget that you trusted me before."

CHAPTER II.

But Katharine could tell him nothing; and he, seeing that she wished to keep her own counsel, asked her nothing. But he insisted that she should spend some of her leisure time in his home; and when she was there, he tried to be, so he said, his brightest and quickest self, in order to cheer her and chase away all bad effects of business and culture. One Sunday when she went, he was in great spirits. He had sold his picture of Mary, Queen of Scots.

"You now see the advantage of working slowly," he said in a grandiose manner. "I have taken sixteen years of continuous thought and study to paint that immortal picture. One year less would not have done the trick! By Jove! Kath, won't that look well in the papers? All the fellows I know paint six pictures a-year, or write twelve books a-month. But I, Willy Tonedale, the much-abused slow one, have painted one picture in sixteen years. I admit that an artist does not become rich on one picture in sixteen years. But reflect, I beg you, on the thought, the patient historic research involved, and the reward reached after long,

long years of toil! What a good thing I didn't die over that pneumonia affair! I should have gone spark out if you had not come over from Norway and called me back to life. I began to get better directly you returned, Kath, and directly mother left off engaging the Christian Science creature to heal me. Of course mother makes out that I was cured by Christian Science; but I say I was cured by Katharine Science. Smart of me, isn't it? But then I am getting awfully sharp! I'm amazed at myself. Seems to me, though, that as I become sharper, every one I know becomes duller. Margaret is quite flattened out with Causes, and wears sandals. Mother is a weird mixture of depression and superiority from Christian Science and the Salisbury treatment; even my belovèd cousin Julia looks devitalised and chastened. She only speaks in a whisper, and her face is the colour of artichoke-soup. She says she had a fright in Norway."

Katharine laughed.

"I should think she did have a fright in Norway," Katharine said, brightening up. And she told Willy something of what had happened up at the Saeter.

"And what are you going to do to her when you see her?" he asked.

"Nothing," Katharine answered. "I do not mind what she thinks of me. I know you do not think I ever behaved badly to you."

"I know what I am going to do to her when I see her again," he said.

"Don't do anything stupid," Katharine said. "It isn't worth while."

"What will Professor Thornton do to her?" Willy asked slowly, after a pause.

"I could not say," replied Katharine quietly. "Probably nothing."

"Haven't you seen him lately?" Willy asked.

"No," she replied, turning away from him. She could not bear to talk of Clifford, and yet she wished to make the effort in return for all Willy's gentle kindness.

Willy waited. She turned to him again with her old impulsiveness, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I think he did not care for me after all, Willy," she said almost in a whisper. "That is all there is to tell you."

"It would not be possible for him not to care," Willy answered; and this time it was he who turned away.

"But, all the same, Kath," he went on when he had recovered himself, "you must not work too hard at business. Ronnie is a duffer and doesn't see, and Gwendolen wouldn't notice if any one were ill except herself. But I know you are overdoing it. I don't half like your being down at the factory."

"It is most curious how I seem to have to apologise to my friends for taking up some serious work," Katharine said. "No one would have any criticism to make if I were tiring myself over pleasure. And yet I assure you that dealing

with pipes and reeds and bellows and sounding-boards and pedals, and even clergymen, is far less tiring than the ordinary routine of leisured pleasure, and much more interesting."

"I always understood clergymen were tiring persons," Willy suggested.

"They may be tiring in their pulpits," Katharine answered, "but not when they come to order organs! At any rate, one can put up with them then. Then, the price is worth the preaching!"

"Ah," he said, "there is a bit of your old fun again. Your friends will not mind what you do, if only you keep your old bright happiness; we'll allow you to be as business-like, as cultured, as learned—yes, Kath—as scientific as you please, only you must not be unhappy. I'm not going to be unhappy. I am going to begin another picture to-morrow. I shall get cousin Julia to sit for me as Lucretia Borgia in a chastened mood. Do you remember my saying that you were made for happiness? As I am a living artist of great but slow genius, I mean it, Kath. You'll get your heart's desires. I know you will. Believe my word. I am never mistaken. And as for cousin Julia, you are right, we will not bother about her: she will have to sit for Lucretia Borgia."

"I think that ought to be a severe enough punishment," Katharine answered. "To sit to you for—sixteen weary years!"

At that moment the door opened, and the servant announced Mrs Stanhope.

Mrs Stanhope, who was looking pale, came into the studio. She glanced at Katharine, and seemed confused; for since her return from Norway she had been haunted by fears of prosecutions for slander and other terrors of the law.

Katharine made no sign, no movement. She appeared not to see Mrs Stanhope. But Willy, without any hesitation, went forward to greet his cousin Julia.

"Cousin Julia," he said, with his peculiar drawl, which was always accentuated when he was particularly stirred, "I am glad you have come. I have been hearing that up on a Norwegian mountain, you made the statement that Katharine Frensham played with me—and threw me over. Yes, she has played with me. We've played together ever since I can remember; and even as little children, we were proud of our jolly good understanding. But she never threw me over. And, by Jove, I hope she never will."

"I am glad I was mistaken, Willy," Mrs Stanhope said, with a touch of diluted sarcasm.

"Yes, I daresay you are," he answered. "But I rather advise you not to make any more mistakes of that sort. Might be awkward for you. Can't help being sorry for you though, cousin Julia. I believe Professor Thornton intends——"

Mrs Stanhope turned paler.

"Where is your mother?" she asked hurriedly.

"Gone to a Christian Science or Salisbury Service," he replied. "Don't know which. I always mix up those two services."

Then Mrs Stanhope, with another glance at Katharine, who still ignored her presence, hastened away.

"By Jove, Kath!" Willy said when they were alone again, "I never saw you so still or so quiet before. You didn't move a muscle."

"If I had moved a muscle, I should have whipped her!" Katharine answered with some of her old spirit.

"Ah," said Willy, nodding his head approvingly, "I perceive you won't die yet. You are still human."

CHAPTER III.

It was the 19th of December. Clifford was sitting in his study at "Falun" when the letters were brought to him. He did not look up from his work. The postman could bring him nothing that he cared to have that day; for he had already heard from Alan, who was still at school; he knew that all was well with the boy, and that he would be home for the holidays on the 21st.

For nearly four months he had waited and longed for a letter from Katharine. But now he had given up hoping. He believed that he had alienated her by his merciless outspokenness up at Peer Gynt's stue; not at the moment, for he remembered the ring in her voice and the expression on her face when she said, "*Judge you—judge you*," but later, when, quietly by herself, in her own surroundings, away from him, she was able to think things out and measure them. She had judged him—and left him. He suffered. He dared not attempt to approach her. He had told her all—and her answer was silence. He haunted Westminster and Stangate; but he never met her once. He walked up and down Westminster Bridge, knowing that if he did see her in the distance, he would be constrained to turn away. For he had told her all; and since her answer was silence, he had no right to force himself on her.

"Love has passed me by," he said to himself sadly.

He made no accusation on life.

"I was not worthy of it," he said.

"I had to tell her all," he said. "I had to lay it all before her."

"Love was so near to me," he said. "I almost reached it. And now I have to pass on alone."

He went two or three times during the term to see Alan. Alan was well and happy. But he was disappointed that Katharine had not been to see him.

"She promised, father," he said. "And I've looked for her week after week. But I believe that she will still come."

"Do you?" asked Clifford eagerly.

"Yes," the boy answered. "She was not the sort of chum to break her word."

"She promised to write to me," Clifford said. "But I have not heard."

"Oh, you'll hear," Alan said staunchly.

But that was several weeks before Christmas; and now Christmas had nearly come, and Katharine's promised visit to Alan had not been paid, nor her promised letter to Clifford been received.

And the man had given up expecting it. So now he did not look up from his work. He had looked up many times on other occasions and been disappointed. He had gone back to his work many times with a sore feeling of personal bereftness, as though fate had put him outside the inner heart of things. So now he bent over his desk, immersed in some abstruse calculation. After an hour, he rose and went to his laboratory to give some instructions to his new assistant, a young Welshman from Aberystwith, who had arrived that morning. A case of glass apparatus had just been brought in. He lingered to see if they were in good condition. He came out, and then went back to fetch his notebook, which he had left on the bench. He stood for a moment looking at the enlargements which he had carried out since his return from Norway.

"Alan and Knutty will be pleased," he said.

"I had hoped that she too would—would see them," he thought. "I hoped—ah, I don't know what I hoped. I was mad."

He returned to his study and closed the door. He stood leaning against the mantelpiece, thinking. His grave face looked sad. He had reconquered his power of working. Peace was in his house; but sore loneliness and longing were in his heart. Still, he was working, and with satisfaction to that part of his nature which had been so greatly harassed by poor Marianne's merciless turbulence.

"After all, I only asked to work and to be at peace," he said aloud, as if in answer to some insistent disputant.

"But——" began that inner voice.

"I only asked to work and be at peace," he answered again sternly.

Then he went to the table by the door and looked at his letters. One was from Knutty.

"No," he said, as he fingered it; "Knutty asks an impossibility of me. She does not know all—she does not see all around. Katharine Frensham has shown by her silence that...."

He opened Knutty's letter. There was one enclosed, addressed in a gallant handwriting: "Clifford Thornton, Esq., Solli Gaard, Gudbrandsdal, Norway." It

was old and stained. On a slip of paper Knutty had written: "Solli has this moment sent this letter to me. He says it must have been to many Sollis all over the Gudbrandsdal, until the Norwegian post-office got tired. You see there is no district mentioned, and Solli is as common as Smith. Ragnhild Solli found it reposing in the Otta post-office, waiting, no doubt, for next year's tourists."

Clifford's hands trembled. A great pain had seized his beating heart. He sank down into his chair, broke open the letter, and read with dim eyes the following lines:—

CHAPTER IV.

"Judge you, judge you. Oh, my dearest, my dearest, if I could have told you what was in my heart when you said those words to me, up at Peer Gynt's stue, then I should not be writing this letter to you, though I want to write it, want to write down everything that is in my heart, everything that sprang into flower at the moment when I first saw you. For I love you, and I am holding out my arms to you, have been holding them out ever since I first saw you. Does it seem overbold that I say this to you? Why should not a woman say it? Anyway, I say it, and am not ashamed. I love you, and I am waiting for you. I have loved you with tears in my heart from the very beginning, grieving over you as over one whom I had known all my life, and with whom I had the right to sympathise with all the sympathy of my best nature.

"You know, dearest, I had been away from England for three years. You remember that I told you I went away when my brother married. I can never describe to you how I had dreaded my home-coming. There was nothing and no one to come back for. Twice I turned back. I had not the courage to face the loneliness which, with my mind's eyes, I saw stretched before me like some desolate plain. But one day I felt a sudden irresistible impulse to return. When I saw you that evening, I knew that I had returned to find you. And I knew that in some strange way you recognised me and claimed me in your heart of hearts, as I claimed you. From that moment my life changed.

"Is it not wonderful, my belovèd, how one rises up and goes forth to meet love: how time and space become annihilated, and all barriers of mind and circumstance are swept away as by an avalanche? Yes, from that moment my life changed, and yours changed too. But I knew that I had to wait. I knew that you had to free yourself in your own way from the memories which were encompassing you. And all the time I was yearning to say to you: 'Do not fight with the past. Do not try to push the past on one side. It can never be forgotten, never be ignored. But something better can be done with it. It can be faced,

understood, and then gathered up with the present and the future. Let me help you to do it. I will gather it up with a tenderness never dreamed of before in the whole world of love.'

"All this I yearned to say to you before I knew the whole history of your troubled life. And now that you have told me the whole history, what shall I say to you? I will say to you that my love for you is a thousandfold greater than before: that as I learn to know the depth of your suffering and sadness, I shall learn to make my love deeper still to reach those depths: that I am waiting for you, with arms outstretched, a thousandfold more eagerly than before: that my love for you is the love of a woman for a man, the sore yearning of one kindred spirit for another kindred spirit, the tender sympathy of friend with friend, the frank understanding of comrade with comrade,—this is my love for you.

"Take it, my belovèd. It is yours. If it were worthier of you, I should be more joyous still in offering it. But, side by side with you, the best and the worst in me will become better. This is my answer to you. This is the answer I longed to give you up at Peer Gynt's stue. Everything that I have been telling you now was in my heart then. But I could not, dared not, tell you then. You knew why I was silent? Let us speak of it, dearest. I saw your poor Marianne's face. And that moment, the moment of my life, when the story had been told to the very end, and your barrier had been broken down—-that moment was consecrated to her. I shall always feel deeply thankful that I, an impulsive, impetuous woman, was able to be silent then—was able to turn from you then....

"And now, my Clifford, I want to speak to you of Marianne's death. There will come times when you will be assailed by this old wrongful belief that you were responsible for her sad end. You and I will fight those times out together. I have no fear of them; I have no fear of that poor Marianne; I have no fear of anything. You and I will work through those cruel hours. You must and shall learn to be just to yourself. You spoke of Marianne's defenceless state of dreaming. I remember those were your very words. I remember that my heart and mind cried out to you, 'And your own defenceless state of dreaming? May no one plead that to you?'

"I plead it now. I plead it with my heart, my brain, my spirit. My belovèd, I entreat of you to give yourself bare justice; nothing more. I would not wish you to sacrifice one inch of the gentle chivalry of your nature. If I were asking you to do that, I should indeed be asking you an unworthy thing. If I were asking you to do that, I should be asking you to injure that which I love and adore in you. But bare justice: a cold, stern, reluctant measuring-out. That is all I entreat of you to give yourself. Will you do this? Will you trust me? You may trust me. If I had my doubts, it would not be possible for me to keep them back. I might try, and I

should fail. I am not a prisoner of silence. My words and thoughts come tumbling out recklessly. You may trust me. I should tell you, and risk losing you and breaking my heart—because I could not help myself.

"Lose you now that I have found you. No, no, that can never be. I am yours, you are mine. We dare not lose each other now that we have found each other. We have found each other not very early in life, but what does that matter? What does Time matter to you and me? I never yet knew the time of day, the day of the month, the month of the year, nor cared to know. But I knew full well when spring had come. I know that spring has come now. I rise up from the darkness of winter to meet the glorious days which you and I will live through together. You have made my life splendid for me already, and I will make your life splendid for you. You shall love and work, and work and love. Your career shall be a glory to me. You shall go on and on, and be all things you want to be, and do all the things you want to do, and take your rightful place in your own world—my world, because it is yours. And I, who know nothing of science, will become a woman of science—because I love you. Ah, I can see a smile on your grave face. You are thinking that the paths to science are long and arduous. Long and arduous indeed! I shall find the short cut—because I love you.

"And, oh, my dearest, we will not shut others out in the cold because we love. I have been out in the cold. I have been freezing there until you came into my life. Great love and great sorrow are apt to shut the whole world out of the Cathedral. Let us keep the doors wide open. Then those who love us can come in.

"My dearest, my belovèd, if you only knew, it has not been easy for me to tear myself away from Norway, from you, from Alan, from Knutty, from the beautiful surroundings where our love has grown apace. But my brother was in trouble, and, you see, the Cathedral doors had to be opened at once. And if I had spoken to you and told you all that this letter tells you, I could not have left you. But it tears my heart to be away from you. All the time I have wanted passionately to turn back and come to you and say, 'I am yours, and you are mine.' But I went on and on, in spite of myself, farther away from you, and yet getting nearer every minute—that has been my consolation: that I was getting nearer to you, because—because at a distance I dared to open my heart to you—because—the moment of silence up at Peer Gynt's stue was past—not forgotten, not ignored—but gathered up tenderly, tenderly. So I get nearer to you all the time. That is why I am writing this long letter to you. Every word has sped me quicker on my joyous way to you. When I began it I was near to you, my belovèd. Now that I am ending it, I am by your side. There is no space between us.

"But before I end it, there is something else I want to tell you. I want to tell you how I love and admire you for not having become bitter. It is so easy to become bitter. You must have lifted the cup of bitterness to your lips many a time, and then put it resolutely down. Will you forgive me if I speak of this? It is only because I want you to know that I have always prized that power ever since I can remember; striven after it myself; failed lamentably; but shall not fail now, because of you.

"Yes, and there is still something else I must tell you. Do you remember that I did not come back to the Gaard, but stayed behind at the posting-station? Oh, my dearest, you can never know what it cost me not to be there, with Knutty and Alan, to receive you if by chance you should have returned. You can never know what it would have cost me if I had lost you.

"Lost you. No, no. It was impossible, once having found you. It is impossible. I should find you, over the mountains, over the sea—anywhere.

"Oh, my dearest, Norway will always be the fairest land in the whole world to me: the land where the barrier was broken down between you and me.

CHAPTER V.

The letter fell from Clifford's hands. He leaned over his desk, and covered his face with his hands. The tears streamed down his cheeks. Then he took the letter, pressed it to his heart, kissed it passionately, kissed the signature, read it all over again with dim eyes, pressed it to his heart again—and was made whole.

When he had recovered himself, he rang the bell, ordered the trap, caught the train to Waterloo, and ran up the stairs to Katharine's flat.

Katharine had come home rather earlier than usual from business. She had finished tea, and was standing by the window of her pretty drawing-room, watching the lights on the river. She was in one of her sad, lonely moods; she was feeling outside everything.

"Mercifully I have my work," she said to herself. "If any one had told me ten years ago that I should be thankful to go down to business every day at the same hour, I could not have believed it."

Some one had sent her Matthew Arnold's poems as a Christmas present. She took the volume now, and opened it at these words:—

"Yes, in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know."

She read them through again. Then she leaned against the mantelshelf and stared into the fire, still holding the book in her hand.

The bell rang. Katharine did not hear. The thought in those words was holding her. The door opened. Katharine did not hear. Gerda's Swedish song had suddenly come into her remembrance, "The lover whom thou lov'st so well, thou shalt reach him never."

She recalled the time when she had first heard it. She saw the great Gudbrandsdal spread out before her, and the hillside opposite the Solli Gaard, where Gerda was strolling, singing as she went. She remembered Knutty's words, "But that is not true for you. You will reach him; I know you will reach him." She remembered that when she turned round, she saw that Clifford had come back from over the seas.

Something impelled her to turn round now—and she saw him.

"Katharine, my belovèd," he said in a voice that thrilled through her, "I have only just had your letter."

And he folded her in his arms.

Long and silently they stood thus, whilst outside in the great world, the noise of the traffic went on unheeded, the barges passed down the river, the lights of Westminster shone out, Big Ben rang the hour of the evening, stars crowned the towers of the Abbey, the moon rose above the Houses of Parliament.

So they had found each other at last.

The lonely wilderness of their inner hearts became a fair and gracious garden.

And when their long embrace was over, and the moment for speech had come, they sat near together as lovers, friends, comrades of all time, talking frankly and fearlessly of the sad past which was to be gathered up with sane and tender understanding into the present and the future, talking of their love for each other: of their first meeting: of their separation: of their longings after each other: of their companionship in Norway: of this three months' desolation in England: of Knutty's impatient admonitions that they should break through all reserve and seek each other out: of Alan's love and trust restored and strengthened: of their new life, in which he would grow up to manhood in gladness and happiness: of Mrs Stanhope, made of no account by reason of their great joy: of Knutty's unselfish anxiety on their behalf: of her tenderness and all her dear quaint ways: and of Alan's criticism of Katharine, "She is not the sort of chum to break her word."

"And I will not break it," Katharine said joyously. "We can go together to-morrow and fetch him back."

Suddenly there came a loud knock at the hall-door. And when it was opened, an excited voice with a slight foreign accent asked impatiently for Miss Frensham.

Clifford and Katharine heard it. They looked at each other.

"It's Knutty!" they cried together; and they ran out into the hall.

"Knutty! Knutty!" they cried. "Welcome! welcome!"

"Dear ones," she answered, gasping. "Oh, what stairs! I hope I shan't die from apoplexy, but I feel very much like it now. Talk about sea-sickness indeed! Stair-sickness is much worse! Ak, ak! Give me some aqua vitæ or some mysost instantly! Ak, ak, why did I ever come? Oh yes, I know why I came. No use writing and inquiring. Could have got no news out of an iceberg. So I came to see for myself. And what do I see? By St Olaf! I see daylight—full daylight! Gerda and Ejnar said I was not to interfere. Interfere! Of course I shall! It is the duty of every woman not to mind her own business! Oh, those stairs! I believe

there were nearly a hundred of them! Dear ones, dear ones, what a happy old woman I am! If I don't die from apoplexy, I shall cry from happiness! What it is to be a Viking...!"

THE END.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] *Kjaere*, dear one.

[B] *Mange tak*, many thanks.

[C]All the spellings and expressions are Norwegian and Danish, and are therefore not to be mistaken for incorrect German.

[D] *Sorenskriver*, magistrate. He would be addressed always by his title.

[E]*Stakkar* is a very usual expression of endearment, and means "poor dear."

[F]*Mange tak*, many thanks.

[G]The general name for the legendary "mountain people."

[H]A thin kind of bread, like Passover cake.

[I] *Skaal!*—Your health!

[J] Danish expression—"But Thou, mild Heaven."

[K] *Kjy*, cows. The refrain is merely a doggerel.

[L] Horse from the Nordfjord. Svarten, the black one; Blakken, the yellow one.

[M] *Frue*, Norwegian for Frau.

[N] The favourite Norwegian cheese.

[O] *Stev*, a vocal conversation.

[P] *Kubbe-stul*, a chair cut out of one solid piece of wood.

[Q] Oh, Jesus.

[R] *Laege*, doctor (leech).

[S] *Tandlaege*, tooth leech.

[T] *Storthing*, National Assembly.

[U] Björnson's words from Arne, translated by Walter Low. By kind permission of Mr. William Heinemann.

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Inconsistently-hyphenated words have been left as printed. The printed text used both "deucèd" and "deuced".

Obvious spelling, hyphenation and punctuation errors corrected whilst maintaining the original meaning. Several words used in the original with differing spellings have been retained. 'Willy' and 'Willie' were used interchangeably in the original text; to avoid confusion all 'Willie' incidences have been changed to 'Willy'. Original text below is followed by the corrected text.

'dynamite-look disappeared from Ejna's gentle face, and'
'dynamite-look disappeared from Ejnar's gentle face, and'

'That makes twelve pair for those brave English'
'That makes twelve pairs for those brave English'

'knew whether Herr and Fru Ebbesen could receive her.'
'knew whether Herr and Frue Ebbesen could receive her.'

'ever heard of in Norwegian lore. Don't be anrgy'
'ever heard of in Norwegian lore. Don't be angry'

'that she was unmericful, but only ignorant,'
'that she was unmerciful, but only ignorant,'

'Blomros (red nose), and Fjeldros (mountain rose) responded'
'Blomros (red rose), and Fjeldros (mountain rose) responded'

'"Tak!" they said, turning round and waving to her.'
'"Tack!" they said, turning round and waving to her.'

'than the Scotch firs—"Grantraer," as the Norwegians'
'than the Scotch firs—"Grantraeer," as the Norwegians'

'saeter-girls (saeter-gjenter) were busily stirring the contents'
'saeter-girls (saeter-jenter) were busily stirring the contents'

'Every right-minded guests had the same desire when'
'Every right-minded guest had the same desire when'

'was not very jealous of her when my Ejnar began to'
'was not very jealous of her when my Enjar began to'

'She had been living her own personal life, focussing on'
'She had been living her own personal life, focusing on'

'platinum dishes, your carbon compounds, your assymmetric'
'platinum dishes, your carbon compounds, your asymmetric'

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