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GUDRID THE FAIR

A Tale of the Discovery of America

BY

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"Love and Lucy," etc.

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PREFACE

This tale is founded upon two sagas, which have been translated literally and without attempt to accord their discrepancies by York Powell and Vigfussen in their invaluable *Origines Islandicae*. As well as those versions I have had another authority to help me, in Laing's *Sea-Kings of Norway*. I have blent the two accounts into one, and put forward the result with this word of explanation, which I hope will justify me in the treatment I have given them.

I don't forget that a "saga" is history, and that these sagas in particular furnish an account of the first discovery of America, no less a thing. Nevertheless, while I have been scrupulous in leaving the related facts as I found them, I have not hesitated to dwell upon the humanity in the tales, and to develop that as seemed fitting. I don't think that I have put anything into the relation which is not implied in the few words accorded me by the text. I believe that everything I give Gudrid and Freydis, Karlsefne and Leif and Eric Red to say or to do can be made out from hints, which I have made it my business to interpret. Character makes plot in life as well as in fiction, and a novelist is not worthy of his hire who can't weave a tale out of one or two people to whom he has been able to give life. All romantic invention proceeds from people or from atmosphere. Therefore, while I have shown, I hope, due respect to the exploration of America, I admit that my tale turns essentially upon the explorers of it. My business as a writer of tales has been to explore them rather than Wineland the Good. I have been more interested in Gudrid's husbands and babies than I had need to be as an historian. I am sure the tale is none the worse for it—and anyhow I can't help it. If I read of a woman called Gudrid, and a handsome woman at that, I am bound to know pretty soon what colour her hair was, and how she twisted it up. If I hear that she had three husbands and outlived them all I cannot rest until I know how she liked them, how they treated her; what feelings she had, what feelings they had. So I get to know them as well as I know her—and so it goes on. Wineland does not fail of getting discovered, but meantime some new people have been born into the world who do the business of discovering while doing their own human business of love and marriage and childbirth.

All this, I say, is implicit in the saga-history. So it is, but it has to be looked for. The saga listeners, I gather, took character very much for granted, as probably Homer's audience did. Odysseus was full of wiles, Achilles was terrible, Paris "a woman-haunting cheat," Gunnar of Lithend a poet and born fighter, Nial a sage, and so on. The poet gave them more than that, of course. Poetry apart, he did not disdain psychology. There is plenty psychology in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—less in the sagas, but still it is there. And when you come to know the persons of these great inventions there is as much psychology as any one can need, or may choose to put there—as much as there is in *Hamlet*, as much as there is in *La Guerre et La Paix*.

In Kormak's Saga, for instance, which I put forward some years ago as *A Lover's Tale*, is there no psychology? It is no way out of it to put down Kormak's tergiversations to sorcery. I doubt if that was good enough for the men who first heard the tale; it is certainly no good to us. In the strange barbaric recesses of the tale of Gunnar Helming and Frey's wife, what are we to make of it all unless we reckon with the states of poor Sigrid's soul, married to a gog-eyed wooden god? How came Halgerd to betray Gunnar to his foes, how came Nial to be burned in his bed? Can one read *Laxdale* and not desire to read through it into the proud heart of Gudrun?

And having once begun with them one could go on, I believe, until the hearts of all those fine, straight-dealing people were as plain to us as those of our superfine, sophisticated moderns. For Nature is still our mother and mistress, no less now than she ever was—and that's a good thing for the story-reader as well as for the story-teller.

Out of the Saga of Thorgils, which is a tale of Greenland's exploration, I hope that I drew a portrait of a good Icelander. Out of Eric's Saga and Karlsefne's Saga combined I believe there is a no less faithful picture of a good Icelandish woman. Gudrid was wise as well as fair, if I have read her truly; she was a good woman, wife and mother. The discovery of Wineland is to my own feelings quite beside the mark where she is involved; but I have put it all in, and wish there had been more of it. Psychology and romantic imagination will not help us much there. We want the facts, and they fail us. All that can be made out is that Karlsefne sailed up the Hudson. His Scraelings were Esquimaux. But who was the black-kirtled woman who appeared to Gudrid and gave herself the same name? And where was the Maggoty Sea? And what goaded Freydis to her dreadful deeds? I admire Freydis myself; I think she was a *femme incomprise*. I have taken pains with Freydis, though personally I had rather been Gudrid's fourth husband than Freydis's first.

I am not afraid of the accusation of vulgarising the classics. It is good that they should be loved, and if simplification and amplification humanise them I can stand the charge with philosophy. Of all classics

known to me the sagas are the most unapproachable in their naked strength. Their frugality freezes the soul; they are laconic to baldness. I admire strength with anybody, but the starkness of the sagas shocks me. When Nial lies down by his old wife's side with the timbers roaring and crackling over his head, and Skarphedin, his son, says, "Our father goes early to bed, but that was to be expected, as he is an old man," Professor Ker, exulting in his strength, finds it admirable. I say it is inadequate, and not justified to us by what else the saga tells us of the speaker. I am sure that Skarphedin had more to say, or that if he had not the poet could have expressed him better. It recalls the humorous callousness of our soldiers, which, nakedly rendered, is often shocking. This is, however, not really the point. Terseness may be dramatic—it often is, as in "Cover her face—mine eyes dazzle—She died young"—but in narrative it may check instead of provoke the imagination. But if it provoke, is it not reasonable to let the imagination go to work upon it? If Skarphedin indeed took his father's death in that manner, is one not justified in going to work with Skarphedin, to find out what manner of man he was who could so express himself in supreme crisis? I trace a great deal of our soldiers' crude jesting at death to their Scandinavian blood; and nothing more intensely and painfully interesting has ever been given to the imagination to work upon than their conduct in the face of horror and sin of late, so dauntless, so blithe and so grim as it is.

Where heroism has been so shown on all sides of us in these three dreadful years, it is no longer possible to pick and choose heroic nations. One might otherwise have said that no such heroes were ever given to the world as the heroes of Iceland. That they are not accepted as such on all hands is no fault of the literature which presents them; for that literature, like all great art, makes demands upon its readers. It hands over the key, but if the lock is stiff it will not give you oil for the wards. That you must find for yourself. Oil for the wards is all I can pretend to here; and if I may say that I have humanised a tale of endurance, and clothed demigods and shadows in flesh and blood, I shall feel that I have done useful work, and bear charges of vulgarisation with a philosophy which assures me that the two terms are much of a muchness.

The great gestures, the large-scale maps, the grand manner are for history and epic, but genre for the novel—and what *genre* is so momentous to it as the human? Let Homer describe the wrath of Achilles and the passion of Hektor and Andromache. The novelist will want to know what Briseïs felt when she was handed from hero to hero, will pore upon the matronly charity of Theano, the agony of the two young men Achilles slew by Skamander, and find the psychology of these pawns in the great game as enthralling as that of the high movers. I confess that to me Gudrid, the many times a wife and the always sweet and reserved, is more absorbing a tale than the discovery of Wineland. I like the two running Scots better than their country, would barter all Greenland for the tale of the winter sickness in Thorstan Black's house. So much apology I feel moved to offer for having put down Exploration from the chief place in the tale, and put up a wife and mother.

As for the verse—Gudrid's Wardlock chant is adapted from the Lay of Swipday and Merglad in *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, I, 92 *seq.*, and Thorstan's Song of Helgi and Sigrun is a partial version of that epic (*ibid.* 131).

GUDRID THE FAIR

I

Thorbeorn was old when this tale begins. His face was lean, his beard was grey, he stooped somewhat in the saddle. But he had a fiery mind, a high spirit, and was so rich, or believed so, that men said he could buy off Death more likely than any other man, seeing he would neither fail of hardihood nor money.

By this time, old age apart, he had done very well for himself, having not only buried a wife, but married another; having not only seen three sons out into the world and become a grandfather twice over; but having had also, by his second wife, whose name was Hollweg, a daughter, and an estate of Bathbrink which could be hers by and by, if he so pleased. This daughter was by name Gudrid, and by all men's consent Gudrid the Fair. Iceland has always been famous for handsome women; but three are chiefly commemorated as "the Fair." The first is Gudrun, who was daughter of Oswif; but she was now old. The second is Stangerd, daughter of Thorkel of Tongue, and at this time the wife of Battle-Berse of Sowerby in the north-west parts. This Gudrid, Thorbeorn's daughter, is the third, and was, at the moment, of marriageable age, being full fifteen years old.

She was a tall girl, well and beautifully made, with carriage so graceful and look so courteous that men used to stop in the road and gaze after her as she walked. Her hair was very nearly black, and made a plait which she could easily sit upon. She was no talker, but had the best of manners, whereby it happened that those who talked with her were eloquent and believed that she had been so. She had a beautiful voice and notable skill in singing. Men heard her songs, and rushed out into the dark emulous of desperate work, and the sooner the better, to deserve well of her. Thorbeorn was very proud of her; but it had been her mother's work to have her carefully trained. If she had lived this tale might not have been written; but she did not. She died a year before it begins, and left her old husband to a peck of troubles.

Thorbeorn was the last man to cope with trouble. He was too proud, too vain, and too idle—too proud to confide, too vain to accept, too idle to repair. He had always kept a great table and had a hall full of guests. He had them still, though he had not the money to pay for them. He borrowed on his property, and borrowed again to repay the first loans; he had ventures at sea, which failed him. He might have had help from his sons, but would not ask them. When Gudrid was fifteen years old these things vexed him sadly; but what vexed him more was that young men came to Bathbrink to see if they could get speech with her; and that some of them put forward friends with proposals to marry her. So far he had refused to treat with any. "It is not to be thought of," he generally said; sometimes, "It is very unsuitable"; and once, "I am greatly offended." Not that he did not fully intend to have her married—rather it was that he had a rooted belief in the greatness of his family and in the girl's merits, and could find none of the suitors at all equal to them.

He was one of those men who rather wish to believe in themselves than do it. He was always on the look-out for flaws upon his mettle. He thought that Gudrid was unapproachable, and when he found that she was not, fretted to make her so. But Gudrid herself was not at all unapproachable. She liked the company of her equals in age, and saw no reason why young men should not be anxious to talk to her, or why, if they hung about with the generality at the lower end of the hall, they should not be invited to the fire. With the girls in the bower she talked freely of courtships, and of young men. Thorbeorn would have been cut to the heart to hear her. It might have been better for him to have such a wound than the wound which actually he did receive.

He was riding home late one autumn evening. The weather was still mild and warm. Nearing home, he turned his horse on to the turf and walked him, with the reins hanging loose. Presently he was aware of two figures together under a clump of trees. One of them he saw at once for Gudrid. The other was a man, he knew not whom. Immediately hot water sprang into his eyes and veiled their sight, but he saw enough to guess more.

The pair were taking leave of each other. Their hands were clasped, their arms at length. They were far apart, the man talking, Gudrid listening. Then presently the strain on the arms relaxed, their clasped hands fell; they were near together. Gudrid, he saw, hung her head—and then, suddenly, the man put his other arm about her neck, and drew her to him and kissed her cheek. At that she broke away and ran towards the house. The man, looking after her for a little, then vaulted the turf wall and ran down the hillside towards the river, making great skips and jumps over the tussocks and boulders, as if he were as happy as a man could be. That was what Thorbeorn saw in the autumn dusk.

He went home in a dreadful state of mind, and could hardly bear to be served supper by his desecrated daughter. To think that those soft cheeks had been profaned by a strange youth, that those grave young eyes had looked kindly upon another than himself, that that fair hand had clasped another's in kindness—all this seemed to him horrible. He thought her a hypocrite; he thought himself insulted. Yet even he had to admit that the kiss was sudden, and she evidently surprised and (since she ran away at once) probably frightened. He judged that she was a novice at such work, but for all that was very much afraid that she took kindly to it.

He spent a great part of the night thinking it over, and before he went to sleep had made up his mind. Early in the morning he was out and about; before the day-meal he sent for Gudrid. She came, singing to herself, fresh as a rose and as fair. She asked his pleasure—and he had not the heart to tell her his displeasure. What he did say was this: "Put your gear together as soon as you can. I am taking you to Erne Pillar, where you will be put in fostership with Orme." Gudrid looked up startled, and saw in her father's eyes what she had not seen before. Her own eyes fell, she coloured up, turned and went away, to do as she was told.

It may be said at once that she had done very little harm, and none knowingly. The young man, who was one of the several who came to the house, was the son of a neighbour, a man of repute. Gudrid favoured him no more than any of the others, but it had so happened that he had been there that afternoon, talking with the girls, and that Gudrid had walked with him as far as the trees on his way home. He had protracted the farewells, and had snatched a kiss; she had been frightened and run

away. That might have happened to anybody—but she knew now that Arnkel had had no business at the house when her father was not there. That could not be denied. She went soberly about her preparations, and the girls were full of pity. They talked it over and over, but there was nothing to be done. Her bundles and bales were corded upon the sumpter's back. She embraced and kissed her housemates. There were wet cheeks and trembling lips involved, but they were not hers. Then she was put up before her father, and away she went.

As for young Arnkel, he no more comes into the tale than he had stayed in Gudrid's mind.

II

Orme was a friend of Thorbeorn's, and a prosperous man. He lived at Erne Pillar, which is below Snaefellness, and near the sea. There was a haven there and a town. Moreover it was a Christian settlement, with a church and a priest. Most of the houses and land there belonged to Orme, who lived in a good house of his own with his wife Halldis. They had no children, which was a grief to them.

Thorbeorn brought Gudrid to the house, and had a good reception from the goodman and his wife. "Take her with you, good wife, into your bower," he said, "while I have a word with Orme. He will tell you all about it, or I will. It is good for me to be sure that it makes no matter which of us tells you."

Halldis said, it was easy to see that Gudrid was not making a short stay, and took her with her through the house into the bower. There, it was not long before she knew all that Thorbeorn or Orme could have to say, and may be more still.

Meantime, Thorbeorn, after much unnecessary havers, said to Orme: "The matter is this, neighbour. I ask you and the goodwife to take Gudrid here in fostership. It will suit me in every way, and I hope you will agree to it."

Orme said that it would suit him too very well. "Nothing the mistress would like better than to see herself reflected in a young pair of eyes." Thorbeorn accepted that as a matter of course; but presently he asked whether they saw much company at Erne Pillar.

Not such a deal of company, Orme said. Now and again a ship came in, and there was a bustle, with men coming and going, cheapening the goods. "Nothing to you at Bathbrink, I daresay," he added. "They tell me that you keep a great house up there—as is fitting you should."

"I have to remember what is expected of me," Thorbeorn said, and felt that he was no nearer what he wanted to say than he had been.

"Gudrid is young," he said, beginning again.

"She's a beauty, it's evident," Orme said briskly, and instantly Thorbeorn felt himself bristling down the backbone.

"She is sought after on all hands—but not by any who is to my liking. I hope that Halldis will look after her well."

"She will look after her like one of her own," said Orme. Thorbeorn had rather he had said more than that. He could not understand that Orme did not see what was at stake, and yet could not enlighten him further. The good wife then came springing in.

"She will be happy, and so shall we be," she said. "I have a roomy heart, too long empty, woe's me. She will soon be singing about the house, and then we old folks will fall to it. It will be like a nest of linnets. She will scour our rusty pipes for us. Excellent!"

Thorbeorn was put out that they seemed to think it pure pleasure to have his daughter on their hands instead of great responsibility and a call to duty.

"Well," he said, "you have helped me with a serious trouble. I leave her to you with confidence. Where is she now? For I must be going."

"She is with the girls in the wash-house," said Halldis. "All chattering together like starlings on a thatch. All talking at once, and none listening. Do you wish her fetched?"

"No," said Thorbeorn, waving his hand. "She will do better where she is." He felt the impossibility of saying what he wished. Then he took his way homewards, and the couple looked at each other.

"A love affair," Halldis said.

"It looks like it," said Orme. "And there will be love affairs. She's a paragon."

"That remains to be seen," Halldis said. "She's a beauty at least. But a baby as yet. Wait till she's cut her teeth."

"I hope she won't cut them here," said Orme; but his wife said briskly, "Better here than there." Halldis could see through Thorbeorn and pity his barren pride.

Gudrid was happy at Erne Pillar, and soon very much at home. She had found her voice at once, and now she began to find herself. Her discoveries were made in the appreciative eyes of her foster-parents, for that is the first place in which we get our notion of ourselves. The portrait encouraged her. She became interesting to herself. Then there were the neighbours, often in and out of the house, but always under the heedful eyes of the good wife. Then there were the ships. Last there were the priest, and his little church. All the people at Erne Pillar had been christened, as had Thorbeorn himself been; but there was a great difference when you had a priest and a church. The priest at Erne Pillar was a serious priest. He said Mass every day, and expected you, or some of you, to be there. Now Thorbeorn, Christian though he were, had never been to Mass in his life. His Christianity consisted in turning his back on Frey. Frey had been the chief God at Bathbrink and in all the country round. Thorbeorn had been Frey's priest at one time, but now would have nothing to say to him; and as for Gudrid, she had never known anything herself about Frey or the other gods, but had been sprinkled as soon as she could be carried down to Erne Pillar. That, so far, had been the utmost of her Christianity. But she had heard plenty of talk about the old gods; and now she was to hear more about them, and something of the new gods too.

Orme and Halldis had both been heathens and knew a deal about Frey and Redbeard, as they called Thor. Orme was not interested in religion at all; but Halldis was. Halldis kept well with the priest, but on certain nights of the year—on the night they called The Mother Night, for instance—she was restless, and used to go to the door and stand there looking out at the moonlight, as if she would be off with the others if she dared. That, too, was what plenty other women at Erne Pillar were doing; but none of them went. The priest saw to it. Halldis taught Gudrid numberless songs—charms, incantations, love spells, and long, terrible tales about Valkyrs and their human lovers. The girl came to understand that love might become a tearing, wringing business, and marriage a tame road for life to take. Halldis's songs were seldom about marriage, but always about love. The two only came together in the same song when it was a case of a giant with a woman for his wife, or a Valkyr with a man for her husband. These cases, it seems, had often occurred. They were exciting and ended in tears—but not often in marriage as well.

She went to Mass first of all with Halldis, but afterwards, as often as not, she went alone. Halldis had plenty to do at home. If she kept to what was of obligation she thought she did very well. But Gudrid liked the quiet and darkness; she used to stare at the lights till they multiplied themselves and danced like shooting stars. She liked the murmur of the words, and the mysterious movements and shiftings of the priest. When he lifted up the Host, she bowed her head, and used to hear her heart beating. She supposed that something was happening overhead, and used to listen for the rushing sound of wings. This was a constantly renewed excitement; it never failed her when she was well—and that was always.

The priest, who was a serious priest, and came from the south, was interested in Gudrid, and wanted her to confess and communicate; but she would not. "No, I couldn't do that," she said, "without asking my foster-mother."

"Ask her, then, my daughter," said the priest.

"But she would have to ask my father," said Gudrid, "who would not allow it."

"But your father is a Christian, surely?" said the priest.

"Certainly he is a Christian. He went into the river to be one."

"Then he will order you to do your duty."

Gudrid shook her head. "No, no. He would not like it at all."

The priest spoke to Halldis about it, and scared her. "It is not the custom here," she said, "but I will ask Orme." The priest himself asked Orme, who rubbed his chin. "One thing at a time is a good rule,"

he said. "We in Iceland are not much given to private talks between men and women. Husband and wife is all very well. And Thorbeorn is a peculiar man. I recommend you to wait for a little. These are early days for new customs."

The priest was vexed. He did not care to be called a man.

III

The second summer after Gudrid came to Erne Pillar a fine ship came in from Norway with a full cargo. She came in late in the evening, and everybody was on the shore to see her. Orme knew whose she was and all about her. She was Einar's ship, he said, and overdue. In the morning she would discharge her cargo in his warehouse, "and then," he said to Gudrid, "there will be matters for you to see to, which will last you a good while. Fine cloth, Einar always brings, and embroidered lengths from Russia. We shall have you going as gay as a kingfisher about the ways."

Nothing was done that night except that Orme was rowed out to the ship and stayed drinking with the master till late. But in the morning, when Gudrid went to Mass, she saw men bringing up the cargo from the quay; and when she came back from Mass, there, at the door of Orme's warehouse, was Orme himself talking to a stranger who had foreign clothes on him, a gold chain round his loins, from which hung a goodly knife in a sheath, and rings in his ears. Gudrid, being well brought up, looked neither to the right nor left, but dipped her head to her foster-father as she went by. She had on her sea-blue gown, and a blue silk handkerchief knotted in her hair. The handkerchief was there in obedience to the priest, who had told her she must not come to church bare-headed, even in the summer-time. The morning being fresh, her cheeks were a-flower with roses.

Orme greeted her with a happy word as she sped by him, but Einar, who was the stranger present, the master of the ship, looked after her, and presently said, "Tell me, who is that beautiful person?"

Orme told him who she was and of what stock. Einar's colour was high. "She is a prize for a good man indeed," he said. "And many and many a man has tried after her, beyond doubt?"

"Many and many a man," said Orme; "you are right there. But she is not for the first comer, nor yet for the second. I won't answer for herself, if herself had anything to say in it—which isn't likely. But for her father the Franklin, I will say as much as this, that he's a great man, and knows it, though not so well to do as he was. And he will be hard to come at in the matter of Gudrid."

Einar said no more about her just then, but turned to his affairs and was busy all day long. Then, at supper-time, Orme took him home to his house, where he was to stay so long as his occasions kept him in the country. Halldis made him very welcome, and then Gudrid came into the hall, and he had a greeting for her. He was young and fresh-coloured, and showed fine white teeth when he smiled, which was often. He produced his bales, presents for Halldis and Orme; and presently, while they were all pulling over the things, he held up a jointed girdle of wrought silver with crystals set in every square of it. This he offered to Gudrid.

"For you, lady, if you will accept of it," he said. Gudrid drew back and blushed. Then she looked at Halldis.

"Oh, may I?" she asked.

Halldis, who had her hands full of scarlet cloth, looked at the glittering thing. "It is too good to refuse," she said. "And why should you refuse it?"

"You will make me proud and contented if you will take it," Einar said. "It will be a kind action on your part."

"Einar speaks well," said Orme. "Put it about you, Gudrid." Gudrid put the belt round her waist and fastened it.

"That's a good fit," said Halldis. "It might have been made for you."

Einar was still looking at Gudrid, and smiling all the time.

"Does it please you, lady?" he said.

"It is beautiful," said Gudrid.

"It ought to be," Einar said. Then she thanked him fairly, and turned and ran away to show herself to the maids in the bower. Einar was very thoughtful for a time; but brightened up when Gudrid and the girls brought in the meal, and served it. He told tales of his voyages and entertained the company.

A very good tale he told of a friend of his called Biorn—Biorn Heriolfsson—who was a ship-man like himself, and had come home to Iceland two winters back expecting to find his father at home. But his father in the meantime had up-stick with everything and gone off to Greenland after Eric Red. That put Biorn out, because he was a man who liked old customs. It had always been his way to spend the winters at home with his father, and now here was his father flitted to Greenland. So Biorn stood on the deck of his ship, very much put out. "Shall we break bulk?" somebody asked him. "No," says Biorn, "you will not do that. Let me think." When he had thought he told the ship's company that he was minded to go to Greenland after his father, and they agreed to make the voyage. He fastened down his cargo again, refitted, and away. But it was one thing to resolve upon Greenland, and another thing to hit it off. He had not sailed those seas before, and falling in with bad weather, was driven out of his course; and then—to make matters worse—there came down upon him with a northerly wind a thick blanket of white fog in which he could get no hint of his whereabouts and drifted upon a strong current, fairly smothered up. He knew no more where he was than Einar himself could tell them; he lost count of days and nights, but estimated that he was three weeks at sea before the fog lifted and he saw the stars. In the morning the sun rose fair out of the sea, and he got a bearing. More than that, he saw before him—like a low bank of cloud—a strange coast lying on his starboard bow. He could not tell where he was got to, or what land that might be, but was sure it was not Greenland. The land lay low, and was dark with woods. The shore was sandy, with hummocks of blown sand upon it, covered with grass; the surf very heavy. He coasted that country for two days and nights with a good wind off-shore, but would not try for a landing anywhere, being set upon Greenland and sure that he was not there. Other lands he saw, and a great island covered with snow, and ice-mountains rising sheer out of the sea—but still he kept on his course. After that he had a spell of heavy weather with green seas over him constantly; and last of all he saw another land, on his port bow, which he said was Greenland.

A great ness ran out far into the sea, which he made with safety, and found smooth water, a town, an anchorage, and a man in a boat fishing. Biorn drew alongside, feeling for his anchorage, and laughed to himself when the man looked up from his fishing and presently raised his hand and sawed the air once or twice. "Hail to you, father," said Biorn. "I thought you would be coming along," said his father. "You have hit me off to a nicety." Biorn said, "I don't know about the nicety of it. I have been seven weeks at sea since I left Iceland, and no man alive knows where I have been—least of all myself." "Be careful of my lines," said his father. "I am in the way to catch monsters, and have pots down and out all round me." At that Biorn threw his head up and laughed till he cried. "A scurvy on your monster pots," he said. "Here am I come from beating round the watery world to seek you, and you think only of pots."

Gudrid was thrilled to hear of the new lands; but Orme, who knew Heriolf, Biorn's father, was tickled to death with the old man's quirks. "That is Heriolf all over," he said. "And to say that such a man could get on with Eric Red. Greenland is not wide enough to hold those two."

But Gudrid held Einar with the most beautiful pair of eyes in Iceland. "And what country was it that Biorn found first?" she asked.

Einar said, "I can't tell you. He must have drifted south of Greenland, south and by west. I believe that he crossed the western ocean, which no man has ever yet done. It is a notable deed—but a thousand pities that he made no landing."

But Gudrid still gazed at him, and into him. "And will you not go yourself, and seek out that new country?"

Einar said, "I have often thought of it. It would be a fine adventure. But just now I have another adventure in my mind, which may delay me.

"And what adventure is that?"

Einar said, "I cannot tell you at the moment. It is not a settled thing by any means."

Halldis looked at Orme, and Orme nodded his head.

After that Einar saw much of Gudrid, and used to tell her tales of the sea. He was busy, of course, most of the day, but found time in the evenings; and in the mornings, too, he had the habit of going to church at Mass-time and kneeling behind her. She was pleased to find him there, and the first time showed it plainly. After that she was more than pleased, but careful not to show it. They used to walk home together, and sometimes did not go the straight road, but went round by the frith and looked at

Einar's ship lying out at her moorings, swaying with the tide.

One day, looking at the ship there, Gudrid asked him again what his adventure was, and whether anything was settled. No, he said, nothing was settled; but he hoped it might be settled soon. "It does not depend altogether upon me," he said. "My mind was made up at once."

"But," said Gudrid, "if that adventure were settled and done with, would you not then think of seeking the new country which Biorn saw?"

"Well, I might do that," Einar replied. "But a man tires of the sea after a time, and I have had plenty of it. I am very well off, you must know. I might set up my house-pillars, and find me a wife."

"But you would not do that?"

"Ah," said Einar, "but I am sure that I would." She kept her gaze for the tide in the frith, feeling it would be indiscreet to say more.

A little later on he told her what the adventure was on which his heart was set, and when she had heard it she gave him her hand. But she told him that it did not rest with her—as he knew very well it did not. They sat together on the brae in the sun, and her hand remained in his keeping. Presently she said, "If my father says that we may, we will go out to find the new country together."

"We will go where you will," said Einar. "It will be all one to me."

Again she thought, with her face set towards the sea. Then she turned suddenly and put her arms round his neck.

IV

Einar spoke to Orme about the affair, and Orme put on a scared look, though he had been expecting something of the kind. "You will find Thorbeorn hard to deal with," he said.

Einar replied, "Hard or not, I intend to come at him, for I love Gudrid, and she loves me. She is worth fighting for, being as good as she is fair."

"She is so," said Orme; "but, to tell you the truth, I don't know how you will set about it."

"I shall ask you to be my friend in it," Einar said. "He will listen to you sooner than any one."

Orme put his head on one side. "I don't care much about your errand. You will get me into hot water with Thorbeorn. Don't I tell you that he is a great man, an old settler and what-not? He knows his forefathers back to Baldur the Beautiful."

"You are telling me what I know already," said Einar, who was rather red, and showed a frown. "My own birth is no such thing. My father was a freedman. Well, I couldn't help that."

"If I am telling you stale news, neighbour," said Orme, "it is only that you may see what I have to tell Thorbeorn."

"Yes, yes, I know," Einar said. "He is a man of rank, and I no such thing. I grant it. But I have money, do you see? I am well off both in ships and credit; my name stands well in the world. And I am young, and he is old. I think I could be useful to Thorbeorn, if he would allow it—and I need not tell you I set no bounds in reason upon what I would put down for the sake of the match."

"Well," said Orme, "I will go and see him."

Gudrid could hear nothing of this until the morning; but then Einar told her what he had arranged with Orme. She now considered herself as pledged to Einar, though she was nothing of the kind. Loyalty to him persuaded her of it, and he found that very sweet, and was touched. They sat close together on the brae; she allowed him her hand, and rested her cheek on his shoulder. Einar, who was an honest young man, began to fear that he was doing wrong to allow it. But he could not resist a word or two for himself. He told her of his birth, saying that his father, Thorgar, of Thorgar's Fell, had been a freedman, but had done well since. "It is right you should know these things," he said.

Gudrid said that it was nothing to her; but Einar warned her that it might be much to her father. He went on: "To you perhaps it is enough that I love you dearly—and to me it is enough. But who knows? Maybe I shall not have the right to talk to you after to-morrow or next day. Now I wish to say this to you, that I shall never look at another woman, and will bind myself to you if you will accept it of me."

She sat erect at that and looked gravely at him. "You ought not to bind yourself," she said, "since I cannot."

"You cannot. I know that," he said. "But I both can and will."

Thereupon he brought out a handful of money from his breast and chose a gold coin of thin soft gold, with the head of a ragged old king on it. He told her where it came from, and how he had had it from a dead man after a battle in the mouth of a great river in Russia. Then he bit it in the middle with his teeth, and indented it fairly. He bent it to and fro until it was broken in half; and next he bored a hole in each portion, and gave one to Gudrid.

"Now I have tokened myself to you, my love," he said. "Do you wear that upon a chain which I will give you presently, and remember when you look at it, or take it in your hands, that I wear the fellow. If ever you want me, you have only to let that half-moon of gold come into Orme's hands, and sooner or later you will see me again. And so let it be between us from henceforward if you will."

She took the coin, and closed her hand upon it until he should give her the chain, but having it, she could not be to him as she had been before. She sat up straight and looked at the sea. Her hand was free for him; but he did not take it, and she felt sure he would not.

A constraint fell upon them; neither could find anything to say. Fate was between them.

So it was until Orme came back with his news.

He had nothing good to report. Thorbeorn had heard him with impatience, and as soon as he had ended put himself into a rage. His thin neck stiffened, his faded eyes showed fire. "Do you offer for my daughter on behalf of a thrall's son? Well for him he put you forward instead of a smaller man. But I take it ill coming from you whom I have always treated as a friend."

Orme had excused himself on the score of Einar's merits—for which he could answer, he said—and well-being. "He has two ships at sea in the Norway trade. His credit stands high on each side the water. There's many a worse man than he well married—and he loves your Gudrid beyond price. There is nothing he will not put down for her."

But that had wounded Thorbeorn in his most sensitive part. He knew that he was ruined and could not bear that other men should know it also. "It is hard that his money should tempt you to insult a poor man," he said. "I am what I am, and that is a man not so poor but he can keep his honour clear. You must think me poor indeed in other things than goods when you ask me to trade my own flesh and blood. Let me hear no more of it for fear I may get angry. It is the case, I see, that I rate my daughter's marriage more highly than you seem able to conceive of. I made a great mistake when I left her in your charge precisely to avoid what you have brought upon me. Now she shall come home, where she can be valued at the worth of her name and person. That is what I have to say to you, Orme." With that he had looked Orme straight in the face, and there had been no more to urge.

Einar heard it from Orme, but it was Halldis who told Gudrid the news. Gudrid received it in silence, but put her hand up and laid it over the token which fluttered in her bosom. "My pretty one," said Halldis, "I blame myself."

"No, no," Gudrid said, "you must not do that. Nobody is at fault." But Halldis thought Einar had been much to blame. She would have comforted Gudrid and made much of her if she had been able—but Gudrid would not have that. She served the table as before, and sat by Halldis afterwards while the men talked and passed the mead about. She was pale and silent, but did not give way, nor leave them till her usual time. When she was in her bed she sobbed, and buried her hot face in the bolster; but even then she did not cry. She was always impatient of deeds which led nowhere—and crying is a great deed.

In the morning they parted. "I shall sail as soon as may be now," he told her. "Iceland will be hateful to me if it hold us two apart."

"Maybe you will seek out the new country," she said, with a bleak smile.

"Maybe," he said. "But it may be you who see it first." She shook her head sadly.

"We do foolishly when we talk of my fate," she said, and then there was a silence which was like a winter fog. She broke it by throwing herself into his arms.

"Listen," she said with passion, "listen. They will give me to another man, but I shall be yours all the while. They might give me to two men, one on the heels of another, but it would be nothing. Do you believe it? You must believe it, you must."

"I believe it," said Einar; "but it is dreadful to talk about."

"No, it is not dreadful, because I tell you it is nothing," she said. "You are free to do what you will, and you offer me yourself. I did not like to accept it, because I thought I could give you nothing. But now I know I can. Tell me that you believe me, and then I must go."

He told her as he kissed her that he believed her—but it was not true. He did not believe her because he could not.

Then they parted. She went back to Orme's house, and he went his way along the shore of the frith.

V

Gudrid did not see Einar again. Kettle, the reeve of Bathbrink, came down to fetch her away, and by now she was behind him on his pad, while Einar was far into the fells. He did not return until late, and then he told Orme that he should sail with the first tide. "Whither will you go?" He said that he must go back to Norway to discharge, and after that did not know what he should do. "I am in heavy trouble over the way this has turned out. At such times a man cares little what may become of him."

"Yes, but men get over it," Orme said.

"I think that I shall not. There is that in her which will prevent me."

"She is like all women, I fancy," Orme said; "very tender where they are loved. They set more store upon love than men do, and whosoever offers it to them, it is a valuable thing, and enhances the offerer."

"That is not Gudrid's way," said Einar.

Orme felt sorry for him.

"Thorbeorn will make a marriage for Gudrid, you may be sure," he said. "And I dare swear she will be a good wife to the man who gets her."

"It is certain," said Einar.

Early next day he weighed his anchor and went down the frith. Now he leaves the tale.

But he did not leave Gudrid's mind, who now had little else to think of. Her father said nothing to her of the reason which had brought her home. He was stately and remote. Nor did he mention his difficulties, which were gathering so close about his house. But they were common knowledge at Bathbrink, and Gudrid heard of little else from morning till night. There was scarcity there, not of provision, but of guests. No young men came about the house, or filled the great table in the hall. Other men came, who wanted money, and went grumbling away, with voices which rose higher in complaint as they went further from the house. Thorbeorn himself was often away, and used to come back more silent and proud than he had gone out. The winter set in with wind and drifting snow. Darkness drew closer about the country; the sky was lemon colour, the fells were black. It was the time of great fires, and long festivals within-doors; but Thorbeorn's hall remained empty.

In the face of such manifest misery the love she had given to Einar and received from him shone far off like a winter star, which had no warmth for the blood. She used to look fondly at her token and try to make herself believe that his strong teeth had bitten the deep gauffres into its edge. When she succeeded the scene came back to her, she felt again as she had when he had been standing there beside her on the brae overlooking the racing water. Her eyes grew misty as she looked away into the dark, holding her relic clenched in her hand. But it was not real; these were only dreams of him.

So the winter came upon Bathbrink and lapped it in snow, and love grew numb with cold.

VI

Towards winter's end Thorbeorn roused himself. He had made up his mind to face his troubles, and now saw a way of doing so with nobility. He would break up his homestead, sell his estates, pay his debts, and go abroad. That would be at once just and of good appearance in the world.

But he would not go east where he would find a life ready made for him, with the same state to maintain, and be no better off than he had been at home. It was for Greenland he intended, a new country with but few settlers in it yet. An old friend of his, one Eric Red, had gone out there for good reasons some years ago, and had often sent him messages begging him to join his colony. Now he would do it. The thought warmed him.

He set the business afoot at once, and sold the whole of his estate for a good price. When he had paid his creditors, which he did very particularly and with a great air, he had a good sum over and above the cost of his ship. His spirits rose, his taste for splendid hospitality revived. He resolved to give a great feast to all his friends and acquaintances, such a feast as should make men say that nobody had ever confronted misfortune more gallantly than Thorbeorn of Bathbrink.

It was a noble feast, lasting three days and nights; the greatest there had been made within the memory of men. Everybody came, for enmities were all forgotten. Orme was there from Erne Pillar, and Halldis was with him. Good Halldis embraced Gudrid, kissed her on both cheeks, and held her closely, very ready to revive memories. "And what have you to say to it? And how will you face the hardships of the strange land?" Gudrid was very guarded in her answers. "I shall like to see Greenland," she said; "we used to talk about it at Erne Pillar." It was true, Einar had told them of it, and of his friend Biorn who had found his father out there after seven weeks at sea.

"And you go out there without a husband?" said Halldis, with sympathy ready and waiting in her kindly eyes.

Gudrid said, "Why not? It is not I who have the wedding of myself." She would not meet Halldis half-way, nor any part of the way. Halldis felt the chill.

But Gudrid and her maidens did the last hospitalities of Bathbrink sweetly and diligently. They say that the qualities of the mistress are reflected in the maids. Gudrid was owned a beauty on all hands, but it was agreed that her manners enhanced her good looks, as a fair setting will show off a jewel. To see her at her service, you would have thought her without a care in the world. She could laugh and talk with one and all, she could be grave with the grave and gentle with those who mourned. But she would not let any know that she mourned herself. Any hint towards Einar turned her to smooth stone. She had that kind of pride from her father, the kind that is tender of itself.

As for Thorbeorn, he was splendid, and the more splendid he was the more he felt himself to be so. On the last night of his feast, when the hall was full, the horns nearly empty, and the torchlight getting low, he thumped the high table with the hilt of his dagger, and stood up in a dead silence.

"Neighbours," he said, "it is time I should bid you farewell. In this good land, where my fathers have lived before me, I too have lived my life out, and kept my customs, and good faith with all men; and have made many friends, and no enemies that I know of. As I have served mankind, so has mankind served me. To you, friends and guests, I say that we have proved each other and seen good days. But now, so it is that I at least must see some doubtful days. I have been pinched and straitened in many ways. I have had to consider whether I should stay on here in a mean way of life or move out into freer quarters. Old as I am, I choose to go abroad; nor do I think you will blame me if I can go away honourably, leaving no man the worse for my departure. Now my good friend Eric Red has asked me to share quarters with him in Greenland, where he has a settlement and keeps a great train—and thither I intend to go. And I shall go this very summer, if all turn out as I expect, and take, as I hope, your friendship with me. In any case let this feast stand to you as a token of my goodwill to every man here."

He stood for a moment looking forth upon the crowded tables, and at the women clustered about the doors. He was much moved by the force and plainness of his own words, and for a while every one kept silence, thinking that he had more to say. But he had not, and presently sat down in his seat. That was the signal for uproar. The men stood on the benches and shouted "Hail" to him; they helped the women

up, too, who waved their hands or scarves, or whatever came handy. Gudrid saw Orme's hand held out to her, and took it, standing with the rest, with Orme's arm round her. In the excitement of everybody the emotions get loose. Orme held Gudrid closely to him and whispered in her ear, "If he would let you stay with us, Gudrid, how happy we should be!" She turned him her pale face, smiling into his; but Fate held her fast, and she did not even answer him. "Shall I have at him again, for Einar's sake?" said the good Orme, eager to procure happiness for somebody. At that she shook her head. "He would not have it. I am sure of that." So was Orme in his sober mind.

Meantime the neighbours were thronging about Thorbeorn, pledging him in horns of mead and ale. Many of them offered him stock or provision for the voyage; many cried that they would go with him to the new settlement. They would never thole a new master, they said, and fully believed it. Some thirty souls did actually go on the voyage. This was the greatest day of Thorbeorn's life so far.

VII

Thorbeorn's ship lay ready for him in Rawnhaven; but there was much to do, what with hay and corn harvest, to get in, before he could leave. He sailed, then, fully late in the year—himself and his household, thirty or more of his friends beside, his house-pillars and all the stock he had left beside. He was burning to be off, the old adventurer that he was, but Gudrid was not of his way of feeling about it. The Icelanders were a race of stoics. What was to be held them spellbound. Far from hindering adventure, it promoted it; for you never knew but what Fate intended you to succeed. But Gudrid had seen how she might have been happy, and could not understand how otherwise she could be. The last night at home, so she fondly called Iceland, was spent with Orme and Halldis, to whose kindness she thawed at last. She cried upon Halldis's broad bosom, and revealed herself. "You see how it is with me now," she said. "If I never meet him again I shall never love another man. And I see no way of meeting him—and so I must be wretched." Then she fairly wailed: "I might have been so happy—I might have been!" till it was pity to hear her.

Presently she took out her token and showed it to Halldis. "That is all I have of Einar's," she said. Halldis said that she had the girdle he had given her. "Yes," she said, "but this has his teeth-marks in it." Then she sat up on Halldis's lap and looked shyly at her, saying, "I am going to ask you something."

"Ask, my child."

"If it should happen ever that I come home again, and want to see Einar, will you give him this from me? He will know then what to do."

Halldis promised. "He is mostly here every year," she said. "But there's no saying how it may find him."

"It will find him waiting for me," Gudrid said. "He promised me that."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Halldis, "to be sure he did! What else could he say or feel at such a time?" But Gudrid held to her opinion, and to her token too. She said that she should always wear it; and Halldis had not the heart to exclaim.

They sailed with a fair wind, having waited for it, and were soon out of sight of land; but it did not hold. Bad weather overtook them, contrary winds, driving rain, fog—that overhanging curse of Greenland. They ran far out of their course and had to beat back again; cattle died, provision ran short; to crown all a sickness broke out among the company, whereof near half died. Thorbeorn kept hale and hearty throughout; and Gudrid took no harm. The wet, the clinging cold, the wild weather did not prevent her attending the sick, or doing the work which they should have done, had they been able. She had no time to be happy or unhappy, and was never afraid of anything.

It was hard upon the winter; the days were short, the nights bitter cold. The fog, thick and white like a fleece, seemed incapable of lifting. The wind came in short spells, the sea was lumpy. But one day as they were labouring and rolling, the ship straining and cordage creaking, Thorbeorn lifted his head, and bore hard upon the helm. "Breakers!" he shouted, and the crew sprang to the rail. A dark form seemed to lift out of the fog, like a core of blackness, and clouds of sea-birds wheeled overhead with harsh clamour. They were come unawares to Greenland the White, and within an ace of breaking up against her cliffs.

None on board knew what headland this might be; but Thorbeorn knew it was not Ericsfrith, which he had intended to make. They rounded it, however, without mishap, and had a fair wind when they were beyond it. At last they could see a shore with a rough breakwater of stones; and presently upon that shore some men standing together. They cast anchor and let down their sails, and before all was shipshape a boat came rowing out to them, with a man in the stern in a blue cloak. The boat came alongside, and they were hailed. "Who and whence are you?"

Thorbeorn told his name and port of origin. "I hoped to make Ericsfrith," he said.

"You have made a poor business of it," said the master of the boat. "This is Heriolf'sness, a good ten hours' sailing from the frith; and I am Heriolf at your service."

Gudrid's heart leapt. This was the father of Biorn, of whom Einar had told her in the days of her happiness. That seemed for a moment to bring Einar within touching distance.

Meantime Heriolf came on board and greeted Thorbeorn fairly. He was a hale old man, with white hair and beard, and twinkling blue eyes. "You will do well," he said, "to stay with me through the winter. This is an unchancy country in winter time, what with fog and scurvy and one thing and another. In Iceland you do better, because you have the wind—but here the fog smothers everything. If my son Biorn were at home he could tell you of a new country, my word! But he's away, and no telling when he will be here again. Now, if you are willing, we will be going. My people will see to the housing of yours, and the stock shall be looked after as if it was my own. But you and your girl here will be happy to be by a hearth again."

So it was done. They found Heriolf a good host, his house well built and well stored. He had a comely wife, too, who took kindly to Gudrid. "That's a paragon of a girl you have there," Heriolf said. "If my son were at home I don't know how it would turn out."

"She's not for every one," said Thorbeorn, on his dignity at once.

"But my son Biorn is some one, let me tell you," said Heriolf. "He is a traveller who has seen more of the world than any man living, I dare say. And here in Greenland, you must know, a woman is a precious piece of goods. There was a woman brought in here last summer with a sick man who died before he had been a week in bed. Before he was buried there were six men fighting who should be her next. And two of them were killed outright; but none of them got her."

"Would she have none of them?" Thorbeorn asked, though he was not at all interested.

"She had no opportunity," said Heriolf. "For another man came and took her away before they had done fighting."

Thorbeorn held his head stiffly. "But my daughter is greatly descended," he said. "And Eric Red is of my friends."

"All that may be," said Heriolf, "but your daughter is a woman, and Eric Red himself no more than a man. In this country you have to deal with people as God made them. But there is a wise woman in the town, and maybe she will tell us what is written in the book of life."

"My daughter is a Christian," said Thorbeorn, but old Heriolf's mouth twitched.

"I dare swear she will be wanting to know what the book of life says, for all that. Let me tell you that a marriage is not over when the priest has said his say. No, nor yet begun, maybe."

Nobody could have been more easy to quarrel with than Heriolf upon the subject of his son, except Thorbeorn upon that of his daughter; yet there was no quarrel. It may be that Thorbeorn was too happy to stretch his thin legs towards a driftwood fire again, or again, that he recognised the sweet kernel of his host under the cruddled husk. However it was, he let the talk of wise women and the Book of Fate float over his head as the spume of the sea passes over the tangle far below. The spume creams and surges, then disparts; but the sea-tangle sways to the deep currents of the tide undisturbed. All well and good—but there was a Wise Woman.

Thorberg was the Wise Woman's name. She was the last alive of a family of nine, all women and all wise in the art of reading the days to come. It was supposed that she had come from Iceland, but nobody remembered to have brought her, nor knew of her origin. In these days she lived by herself in a hut of the Settlement at the Ness, and crouched over a peat fire all the winter, singing songs to herself which nobody could understand. In the summer she was often seen about among the pastures below the hills, but always by herself. When she was asked she might go out and show herself at men's houses where there was a feast going on; if she was treated according to her fancy she might foretell the fortune of the householder or of some guest of his, or the upshot of the coming harvest, whether of the sea or of the land. But everything must be exactly as she pleased. There was no telling what she would do or say.

Heriolf was the greatest man at the Ness, and kept the best table. He seldom lacked of guests during the dark months. He was a most hospitable man—loving, as he said, everything on two legs. He had never accepted the new religion, and stood well with Thorberg, but had such respect for her that he would never ask her to come to a feast unless the entertainment were what he thought worthy of her. This year, with Thorbeorn and Gudrid in the house, he felt that she ought to be asked up, so sent a man out to invite her, naming the day when the feast would be ready. Thorberg returned word that she would come, but made no promises of what she would say.

Immediately, Heriolf set about his preparations and, immediately, there was trouble with Thorbeorn. He did not like it at all. He took it ill that there should be such a fuss. Thorberg, it seemed, must have a high seat; she must be escorted to the feast; she must have her particular food, dressed just so; she must be treated with great respect, let alone, never crossed, never importuned. And he a Christian! "Heathen customs!" he said. "Friend, you shall have me excused. These things smell of brimstone. I could not be present by any means, and don't desire that Gudrid should be involved."

But Heriolf scouted him. "Hey," he said, "please yourself! But as for Gudrid, let her alone. Why should she not hear what the world has to say to her? What harm can come to a good girl? All kinds make this world."

Gudrid, whose hair he pulled, as he spoke, in a very friendly way, seeing his eyes twinkling and his lips twitching, coloured, but said that she should like to be at the feast. It was true, but apart from the truth, she would not hurt Heriolf's feelings.

"Of course you would like it," said Heriolf, greatly pleased. "I never knew a handsome girl yet who did not like to be told about it. Thorberg thinks a deal of handsome persons. You will find that she has a wonder-deal to tell about you. And perhaps we shall learn what my son Biorn means to do with himself when he comes home here, and finds a flower in the garth." Gudrid coloured more than ever at this; but she liked it. Thorbeorn waved his hand before him as though to brush gossamer from his path, and stalked away with his chin in the air, and his beard jutting out like a willow in the wind. He kept his word, though; and took himself to bed when the feast began.

These were the preparations made for Thorberg's visit. A high seat was set for her at the right hand of Heriolf's own, and upon it a cushion worked with runes and dragons in knots, stuffed with hen's feathers. That had to be wherever she went. Then she must sit in the chief place at the table, beside the giver of the feast, and her food must be seen to. First she must have a mess of oats seethed in kids' milk; then, for her meat, a dish made of the hearts of animals. Gizzards, too, of birds, and their livers, must be in it. There were to be set for her a brass spoon, and an ivory-hilted knife with rings of bronze upon the handle. She had a great horn for a beaker, adorned with silver; and then her drink was to be hot mead, with spices and apples floating in it. Heriolf saw to everything.

When all was ready, and the guests expected, a man was sent out to her house to bring Thorberg to the feast; and when all the guests were gathered, but by no means before, in she came. She was a tall fair woman, blue-eyed, broad-shouldered and of large presence. She had a wild, rich, comely face. She was dressed in a black robe which gleamed and reflected light. It clung to her as if she had been dipped in water. Silver clasps held it under the bosom, and from neck to foot it was set with large blue stones. Round her neck she had a string of beads, of red amber, as large as seagulls' eggs. She walked with a staff, knotted with amber; on her head was a hood of black lambskin, lined with white. There was a girdle round her loins made of dried puff-balls strung together, and a fishskin pouch hung from that, in which were the charms she used in her prophesying. Her shoes were calfskin with the hair outside, and were bound to her ankles with broad leather thongs. She had gloves on when she came in—catskin gloves with the hair turned inwards. So dressed, holding herself high and queenly, she stood in the doorway, and said, "Hail to this house," in a deep voice, like a bell. Then she took off her hood and gloves and gave them to him who attended upon her, while Heriolf came up to her, took her hands and kissed them, saying, "Sibyl, you are welcome."

After Heriolf all the company came crowding about her and saluted her as if she were a princess. To

some she was gracious, at some she stared as if she could see through them to the wall beyond, at some she muttered with her lips and looked about, as if she were uneasy till they were gone. All the women curtsayed and kissed her hand, and presently Heriolf brought Gudrid to her. Gudrid did not kiss her hand, but curtsayed and spoke her fairly. Thorberg frowned, not unkindly.

"And who art thou, my child?"

Gudrid said, "I am a stranger, not long come to Greenland. I am Thorbeorn's daughter, of Bathbrink in Iceland."

"You have a good face, and a fair one," said Thorberg, "and yet you will not kiss my hands." Gudrid coloured and looked down. "Perhaps the day will come when you will kiss them," Thorberg said. "It would be no shame to you to do it."

Gudrid then said, "I will do it now if you will let me." But Thorberg patted her cheek and said, "By and by." The people thought that Gudrid had shown good manners by offering and that Thorberg was pleased with her.

They spread the table for the feast, and Gudrid served the guests with the other girls of the house. Thorberg sat by Heriolf, and said very little, which was all to the good, since it made men treasure what she did say, and find more in it than may have been there. Then, when the tables had been cleared, Heriolf stood up and asked her if she had been well-treated. Thorberg said, "You have given me your best, Franklin. No one can look for more."

"Would it please you, then, to reveal certain things to the company?"

She stared before her. "What do you desire to know?"

"Why," said Heriolf, "we should like to know how it stands with this house, and with those who are in it, and those who are of it; and how long these plagues of sickness and death are to oppress us; and other things which you may read out of the dark, and be moved to tell us."

She thought for a while, looking down the hall above the heads of those who stood to hear her. Just below the dais Gudrid was standing with the house-girls.

After a time Thorberg said, "Set me the spell-seat," and remained abstracted while it was being done.

Heriolf set up the spell-seat, and then Thorberg opened her pouch of magic and took out certain small flat stones covered with writing, and some tufts of feathers, a lump of brown amber, a ring of jet, and some teeth of a great sea-beast. All these she laid round the seat in a circle, except the ring of jet, which she kept in her hand. Then she sat upon the spell-seat, and said to Heriolf, "Bring me the woman who is to sing the Ward-locks." Those were the charms which had to be sung, not so much to invoke the spirits with whom she was familiar as to keep away those who were adverse.

Every man looked at his neighbour; the women whispered together, but all shook their heads. In and out among his guests Heriolf ran in a great taking. "Heard any one the like of this, that I should think of everything, and fail for one?" But nobody knew the songs. In his naked bed behind the wall lay old Thorbeorn with the blanket up to his nose, and jerked his thin legs, losing not one tittle of all this.

Presently, with Heriolf hot and flustered and at his wits' end, with women scouring the kitchen and the bower to find some one not counted yet, Gudrid turned round about to face the Wise Woman. She was pale, but her eyes were bright. "Whisht now," Thorberg cried in her deep tones; "heed the fair girl." The hush then was dreadful, but Gudrid said what was in her. "I am not a sorceress, and know nothing of magic, but Haldis my foster-mother taught me some songs which she said were Ward-locks and charms." Heriolf clapped his hands, and Thorberg smiled and said, "I believed thee wise when I saw thee first. And now perhaps it is for me to kiss thy hands, or even for the most of this company, for thou art timely as well as wise."

But Gudrid looked troubled. She did not at all wish to sing. "The songs," she said, "were sung idly at home while we sat at needlework. They did not mean anything to me. I thought no harm of them."

"Nor is there harm, my child," said Thorberg.

Gudrid said, "But this is a rite, and the song is part of it. I think I ought not to sing, because I am a Christian."

Thorberg was still smiling, but her eyes glittered. "It may be that thou canst serve the company here, and do no harm to thyself. Who should think the worse of thee? Certainly not I. But this is for our host to see about. It is he who made me sit here."

Now it was Heriolf's turn, and he pressed Gudrid hard. The girls too, and all the women who were there, were closely about her, asking with eyes and voices. Gudrid could not resist them, though she knew Thorbeorn would be angry, and believed herself that she ought not to have anything to do in magic. But she promised. The women made a circle about her; she thought for a little while, then lifted her head, and sang loud and clear—

"To Vala sang Vrind,
The first charm I wind—
What evil thou meetest
Let drop it behind.
Thyself for guide,
The ghost is defied—
Look forth
To what thou shalt find.

Next charm I call—
If despair thee befall
As thou goest thy journey,
May the Good Folk wall
With wings, with wings
Thy wayfarings—
Look forth,
Fear not at all.

This third charm I make—
If the dark thee take
On the road thou goest
For this man's sake,
May the hags of night
Do thee no spite.
Look forth,
My heart is awake.

The fourth charm I tell
Is the loosing spell—
Though they bind thee in fetters
And cast thee in cell,
No walls shall clip thee,
The irons shall slip thee—
Look forth,
All shall go well."

The song was to a strange wild air, very beautiful, known to many, of whom many had tears in their eyes to hear it again, and sung so well. Thorberg sat with her eyes closed, and nodded her head to the beats of it. It made a great effect, and Gudrid was praised by everybody. When it was over, Thorberg, being squarely on the spell-seat, said to her: "I thank you for the song, and for the good heart which was in it. I tell you that many beings besides those whom you see have been drawn in by the sound of your voice, beings who without it would have passed over our heads and paid no heed to us and our concerns. They have been here, they are here now all about us, and by their means I see many things clearly. And first, you, Heriolf, need not fear the death nor the sickness which are rife at this time. They will pass with the winter, and return again with another winter; and for a long time the winter will be hard upon you men in Greenland."

So much she said to Heriolf, but she had not ended her soothsay. Her eyes returned to Gudrid, who stood just below her.

"As for you, my daughter," she said, "I can read what is in store for you as if it was written in a book. You will have three husbands here in Greenland, and shall not go far to get them. All will be honourable men. One will be a famous man, and one an ugly man; but he will be kind. With all of them you will go great journeys over sea, but they will not all last long. One journey you will go, to a country far from here, which will be of the greatest length, and have hardships in it, and wonders, and a good gift for you. But all your ways lead to Iceland, and thither you will return. Out of you will come a great race of men, and you shall end your life-days in the way that pleases you best." Then her eyes grew less blank, and seemed able to see more clearly. She held out her hand towards Gudrid, who stood rooted, staring up with great eyes. "Farewell, daughter, and I give you hail," she said. Gudrid ran up the steps and kissed her hand.

IX

Gudrid's fortune was envied by the girls of the house, who expressed themselves freely about it. "With your looks," they said, "it was to be expected she would take notice of you. But to see so much, and to tell you all!" The poor girl herself, however, took it very hard, and saw herself punished for impiety. She felt as if she was branded for ever—the girl who was to kill two men, and perhaps a third. In her mind's eye she could see that doomed first husband of hers, the shadow coldly upon him, herself looking sorrowfully at him, seeing him in the shadow but not able to speak of it. Her heart gave a leap of gratitude that Einar had been sent away by her father. It might have been he in the shadow. But would he be the second? Ah, no, she vowed he should not. Or would he be the third? Not if the third was to be an ugly man. Then there was the promise of the end: "Your ways tend to Iceland . . . thither you will return . . . you shall end your life-days in the way that pleases you best." Could that mean that Einar —? But after three honourable men had received death at her hand! She shuddered and hugged herself against the cold. Not even the promise of Einar seemed fortification enough for that. Nevertheless, there was comfort in the last days. She told her bedfellow stoutly that she did not believe a word of it, but the girl merely stared at her. Then she said: "I know who your first husband will be if he can persuade Thorbeorn. It is Skeggi of Whitewaterstrand." After that Gudrid had to be told all about it.

She told her father too—but not so stoutly—that she did not believe it; but in her heart she felt that it must be true. As for Thorbeorn, who had heard it all through the wall, whatever he may have thought, he was very indignant, and angry with her too. "Put such mummery out of your head. We are not Christians for nothing, I should hope. A scandalous hag with her bell-wether voice and airs of a great lady! What has she to do with good women, well brought up? A woman's duty is to leave match-making to her parents, and the future to God and His Angels. Who can foretell his end? Can the priest? Can the bishop? No. And who would wish to know it? Ask yourself. I am vexed that we should have fallen upon a heathen house, and much more that you should have lent yourself to its wicked customs."

Gudrid excused herself. "I couldn't help myself. They are kind people. It would have been ungracious. And I did know the songs. How could I have said I did not?"

"And who taught you such songs?"

"Halldis sang them," she said; "I learnt them of her."

He had to allow for much that she urged. "Well, think no more of it," he bade her.

"No, I must not," she said.

"When the time comes, when we are settled by Eric Red, I shall find a good husband for you, beyond a doubt."

"Yes," said Gudrid.

"Then we shall have the laugh of these mystery-mongers."

"Yes."

"As for me, I never heard such nonsense in my days."

"No," said Gudrid, looking about for a way of escape. She could neither put it out of her head, nor believe it nonsense. Fate hung heavy on her like a pall of smoke.

She had Skeggi of Whitewaterstrand pointed out to her by her room-mate, and recognised him as a young man she had often seen at the house. Now immediately she looked upon him with tenderness, and received his advances to acquaintance with such kindness that he conceived high hopes and went about with his chest swelling with pride. But all the time he was talking to her, or at her, rather, with the other girls, her heart was calling to him, "Do not marry me, do not, do not——" which he, unfortunately, interpreted in the opposite sense.

Oddly enough, though every one in the Settlement had heard the soothsay, and nobody doubted it, she was the only person concerned who took it closely to heart. Young Skeggi was earnest to have her

to wife, and asked Heriolf to put his case forward to Thorbeorn. Thorbeorn, however, would have nothing to say to him. Skeggi disappeared, and Gudrid had a moment's ease.

The first things foretold by Thorberg came about with the quickening of the year. With the first blowing of the warm wet wind of the west, the fogs began to roll away off the land and pile themselves upon the flanks of the mountains. Then, when the earth had warmth enough in her body to thaw the iron mail about her ribs, the sickness in the Settlement abated. Men felt the light, and saw whence it came. The sun showed himself, first like a silver coin, then with sensible heat. The cattle were put out to pasture, the sheep could move and nibble about the foothills. Hens began to lay, cows to give milk, sheep to drop lambs. Thorbeorn made ready to sail to Ericsfrith, and Gudrid was able to forget that she was marked with a curse.

So the day for sailing came, a bright spring day with a soft wind, which crisped the waters of the bay and heaped froth upon the stones. At parting, old Heriolf twinkled his kind and frosty eyes upon Gudrid. "Farewell, my child," he said; "you are a notable woman who will do great things." She smiled, but sadly. "It seems I am to bring unhappiness to many," she said. "No, no, that's not how I look at it," said Heriolf. "Men must die, we all know. But more than one are to have your love and kindness while they live—and that is more than they ought to expect. If I were not so old, or my son Biorn were at home, we would keep you in the family. Who wants a long life? Not I, though I have had it. But who wants a good wife? Who does not?"

Gudrid said, "To be good is the least I can do. It seems very easy. But to be happy is difficult."

"I never found it so," said old Heriolf. And so they parted, she whither Fate beckoned her, and he to go fishing.

X

Eric Red, who lived at Brattalithe in Ericsfrith, had been a notable man all his life, and a man of mettle. In Earl Hakon's day in Norway he had been a Viking, had made a few friends and many enemies; then he had gone out to Iceland and founded a family in the west country, which might have endured to this day if it had not been for his headstrong way of doing. But, as before, he made more enemies than friends; and when he killed the son of Thorgest the Old, and was pursued for the slaughter at the Thing, he found that there was more feeling against him than he had reckoned on, and that Iceland could not hold him much longer. By what shifts a ship was hidden for him among the islands, and how his friends got him down by night, and rowed him aboard, and how he slipped his cable and escaped pursuit, cannot be told here. Enough to say that he found his way to Greenland, and chose out a fair haven for himself and his company. When he was settled in, and had his town of Ericshaven marked out, and his house built, he felt himself like a king and cast about for alliances. He sent out messengers to Iceland calling upon all men who had been his friends to rally about him. Many came, and by the time his friend Thorbeorn had decided to join him there was a strong settlement at Ericshaven.

Eric was now grown old, and was very fat. He thought himself that his work was over, but had hopes to see it continued in his sons. He had three sons by his wife Theodhild; the eldest was Leif, who was abroad at this time, supposed to be in Orkney. Leif was a fine tall man who took after his mother, and had none of Eric's fiery colour; the second son was Thorstan, who was as red as a fox; the third was Thorwald, and resembled Leif, but was of slighter build. Then there was a tempestuous daughter, named Freydis, a strongly made, fierce girl, who was fated to do terrible things. She was married to one of Eric's vassals, a man called Thorward of Garth, but treated him with great contempt and did just what she pleased. As for Theodhild, Eric's wife, she was a Christian at this time, and had taken herself out of Brattalithe for religion's sake. She had built a church in Ericshaven and found a priest to serve it; and now she lived in a small house hard by and practised austerities. She was a very stately woman, and held in great estimation all over the settled country. Eric Red was uneasy with her, because he believed that she scorned him; but her sons used to go to see her. She had quarrelled with Freydis irrevocably, and if she met her anywhere would never take any notice.

Thorbeorn was made welcome at Brattalithe and great attention shown to his fair daughter. Women were scarce in Greenland. Eric's two sons, Thorstan and Thorwald, immediately wanted her; but Thorstan was the elder and stronger, and soon came to terms with Thorwald. "My mind," he said, "is

set upon Gudrid, and I am older than you by a good deal. I advise you to be my friend in the affair, otherwise no one knows how it may turn out." Thorwald said that that was fair enough: "But I advise you to be sharp about it." "Why so?" said Thorstan. Thorwald told him that he would be only one of many. He named one or two, and Thorstan frowned. Thorstan was a very honest man; he was a good poet and a great man for dreams, but slow and heavy minded. "A man must not be driven in such a matter," he said. "A man should not need it," Thorwald replied. "As you have spoken to me, so do you speak to Gudrid's old iron father. Hammer him smartly; knock sparks out of him. If you do not, some one else will, and I shall have wasted benevolence upon you. If you are not to be the lucky man, why am I to be thrown aside?"

This was in the very early days, before Thorbeorn had taken up lands in the Settlement. He was all that summer the guest of Eric at Brattalithe, and there was a great deal to do. Eric and Thorbeorn rode about the country, talking of this land and that. Gudrid fell into the ways of the house and made herself useful. She was taken to see Theodhild, and became friends with the stern, lonely woman. Theodhild spent much of her time in the little dark church she had had built. Until Gudrid came, she and the priest had had it pretty much to themselves, for the people in the Settlement stood by Eric, their great man. But Gudrid went to church with Theodhild, and renewed her emotions. She seemed to escape from her shadow in there. One little twinkling light before the altar shone to her through the fog and bade her still to hope.

Then there was Freydis. Oddly enough Freydis took to her, though she pretended to despise her. "You are one of those women whom men go mad about—one of the meek, still women who madden men," she said. "But I am one whom men madden rather; for I hate them and detest their ways, and yet cannot get on without them." Gudrid denied her maddening qualities, and denied that she was meek or still. She assured Freydis that she herself could get on very well without marriage. "I used not to think about it at all until I came to this country where, it seems to me, nobody thinks of anything else. The first thing that happened to me was dreadful. It is no wonder if I think about it now."

Freydis wished to hear what dreadful thing it was, and with a little pressing Gudrid told her what Thorberg had prophesied. Freydis stared. "Is that all? You have only to live in Greenland and live to be a hundred and you might have as many husbands. People die here in the winter like tadpoles in a dry summer. Three! Her moderation alarms me."

"But I must be sure of the death of two men!" said poor Gudrid.

"You must be sure of the death of every man in the world," said Freydis. "It may be that you will be glad enough to be sure of it before you have done with them. I am sure that I should be."

That was all the comfort she got out of Freydis; but happily she had a diversion of her thoughts. Biorn Heriolffson, who had come round the Ness soon after Thorbeorn sailed, now came up to see Eric Red.

He was a brisk, vivacious man, with a good conceit of himself, and had much that was interesting to say of the new countries he had visited. Gudrid was rapt in attention, for every word he said seemed to make Einar visible to her, with his bright eyes, his ear-rings, his soft eager voice and his white teeth. Einar now stood for all sorts of things besides himself to Gudrid. He stood for home; he stood for Halldis and Orme who had loved her well; and he stood for the days when no heavy fate hung between her and the blue sky. He stood to her as to us the song of a lark may stand, when we are shut up within the walls of a town. She would have married him gladly, but for the Fate; but she no longer thought of him as a lover.

Therefore on account of all that he stood for—home, freedom, loving-kindness, hopefulness—she was enthralled by Biorn's talk, and could not hear enough of the new countries which he had seen. Einar's account of what he had done and where been was quite true. A fair wind took him out from Reekness, and he sailed before it until he had lost the land for two days. Two more days it held, then veered to the northward and blew down upon them the dense Greenland fog. He was now helpless, and for a week or more had no knowledge of his course; but he observed that a strong current was bearing him, as he thought, westward. That might be all to the good, he judged, forgetting how far south he had run before the thick weather caught him; anyhow, there was nothing to be done except to keep a sharp look-out for land a-starboard. He passed several icebergs and had a touch-and-go business with some of them, he said.

At last the fog lifted a little, and a light and fitful wind began to blow—from what quarter they had no means of knowing, but it was a chill wind. Biorn guessed it was northerly. He saw the stars before he saw the sun, and got his bearings. Next day it was fair. The sun rose out of the sea. The ship was heading nor'-nor'-west. He hoisted all sail, and made brave work of it. In the course of that day they saw land ahead, a long low line of dark, like a bank of rain-cloud. Biorn ran on, heading straight for it, but he had his doubts from the first, and when they could make out the country better he said to his

mate, "That's never Greenland."

Sounding carefully, they came within two miles of the land, and could hear the thunder of the surf, and see it too. The sea was like a hilly country with troughs between the rollers like broad ghylls, Biorn said. He would be a bold man who tried to land there from a boat.

The country looked to be low-lying, with a sandy shore blown into small pointed hills. Behind those, so far as the eye could reach, there was a dense woodland—most of it black, or looking so, but with patches and belts of red and rose-colour; like flames, said Biorn. No mountains, no snow at all, though by now it was winter in Iceland. Biorn said, "I knew very little about it, to be sure, but knew it was not Greenland the White."

Eric asked him why he had not landed. "How should I land in a surf like that? And what was I to do in the country with my Norway merchandise still aboard, and my father God knew where? I knew he was not there—and that was enough for me."

"But, Biorn," said Gudrid, flushed and eager, "that was a new country you had found. How could you pass it by?"

"All very well," said Biorn, "but I'll trouble you to remember that Greenland was a new country to me—and my father in it moreover. And one new country at a time is enough, I suppose."

He went on to say that he coasted those flat wooded shores for the better part of two days and nights, keeping the land on his port bow, but when, as it seemed to him, the coast-line turned westward as if to make a great bay, thinking he would cut across it, he held on his course. It was another two-three days before they made land again, and then it was the same thing as before—woods, swamps, sand, driving rain, or good sunshine; and still no snow. Now he had trouble with his crew, who were for running into the land. They wanted wood and water, they said; but Biorn wouldn't have it. "I wanted my father," he said, "and besides there was abundance of water."

"What you wanted your father for beats me," said Eric, and Gudrid's bright eyes sparkled their approval of his judgment.

"A man may want to see his father more than a foreign country, I suppose," said Biorn. "You forget that I have seen a deal of foreign countries—Russia, Sweden, Dantzick and what-not."

Well, then they sailed for three days and nights before a spanking breeze from the southwest, and ran into the true winter cold, and presently saw land for the third time—snow mountains wreathed with cloud, snow upon the sea-beach itself. Biorn said it was an unchancy, inhospitable kind of country where his father would never choose to live. It was deep water so that they could come close in. There were no signs of habitancy; but there were white bears to be seen, in plenty. That was an island, he said. They held on their course, which was N.E. by E., the breeze stiffened into a gale; and then it came on to blow hard. They had more than enough of it under shortened sail, and shipping green seas every fourth wave. Then, for the fourth time, they sighted land, and a great ness which ran far out into the sea. "Greenland!" said Biorn; and Greenland it was. On the lee side of that ness was the very town about his father's house; and the very first man he saw was his father, with lobster-pots all round him.

That, he said, was how it had been, and anybody was welcome to the news. As for himself, he was a trader, and had no mind for fancy voyages. Eric said that he might take the adventure up himself, but at any rate his son Leif would take it up. Thorwald said that he intended to go if Leif would take him. "I want to see that country where there is no winter. That's the place for me. Will you come too, Thorstan?"

But Thorstan was looking at Gudrid and did not hear him.

XI

Biorn stayed on some time longer with Eric Red, and had some talk with Gudrid. He had had his eye on her from the beginning, with curious, considering looks. After several attempts, swallowed down by himself with abrupt decision, he did manage to speak out. "It was of you that Thorberg prophesied at the Ness, I expect," he said.

"Yes, it was," said rueful Gudrid.

He tossed his foot from the knee, and looked at it swinging. "Such things as that make a man thoughtful."

Gudrid bent over her needlework. "You may be sure that she made me thoughtful."

"Well," said Biorn, "it is a glory to a woman to hear the like of that. But it makes a man think twice. Now, I daresay my father spoke to you about me, with a nod and wink, as we say? He is fond of me, is my father."

"And you, certainly, of him," Gudrid said. "You seem to be a loving couple."

"He spoke to me about you," Biorn went on, pursuing his own thoughts. "He was much taken with you, and seemed to think you were singled out for great honour. And clearly you are. But I value my life—and so I told my father. And then he spoke scornfully to me, and hurt my feelings." Gudrid found something to smile at in this.

But while she scared Biorn she attracted the brothers at Brattalithe, and others besides them. Thorstan Ericsson was exceedingly shy, and would never go into the bower to talk to the girls, nor into kitchen or wash-house when they were working there if he could help it. So he saw very little of Gudrid, and had nothing to say to her when he did see her. Yet he loved her deeply within himself, in an honourable way of worship, with no jealousy about it. Thorwald, his younger brother, was always in and out of the women's quarters, teasing the girls, getting in their way, and making them laugh. He was often outrageous, but they all liked him, and Thorstan trusted in his loyalty. He told Gudrid that Thorstan thought a great deal about her; but she knew that already. She used to sing in the evenings when the hall was full, and everybody praised her except Thorstan; yet she knew that he was more affected than any one. She felt his heavy eyes on her, and used to think of songs which would please him.

But Thorstan was dumb, and others were not. One day in the spring Gudrid was sent for. She was in the wash-house, up to the elbows in lather and foam, in no state for company. All the girls stopped work, and one said, "A wooer for Gudrid," and another, "Thorstan has found his voice." But they all helped her to make herself tidy, and wished her joy. She went out with all her colours flying. Her father was by the fire in the hall; Eric Red with him; and another man was standing there, tall and heavily made, in a red cloak. She had not seen him before. He was a dark-hued man, with bent brows, rather shaggy, and had a black beard. He kept his head bent, and his hands behind his back, but looked at her as she came in. So did Eric, in a kindly way. Thorbeorn only looked at the fire.

She went up to her father and put her hand on his shoulder. There was a short silence—but not enough time for her to collect her thoughts. Indeed, she had no thoughts.

"Gudrid," said Thorbeorn, "we think it is time for you to be settled, and have here an honourable man who has asked for you. He is our friend, Thore Easterling. He is well-descended and of good estimation with our host. His family is of Ramfirth in Iceland, and he has a fine estate here in Ericshaven. He has the new faith which we believe to be the true faith. Now we think you ought to feel yourself happy, being sure that you have every reason to be so. It will be a good marriage for you."

Gudrid said nothing, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground. Presently she removed her hand from her father's shoulder, let it fall to her side, and stood alone. It was a painful pause, felt to be so by all four, and broken presently by Thore himself. "Lady," he said, "I hope to have your good will in this. I have few pretensions to a lady's liking, but believe I am an honest and friendly man. If you will accept of my love and service I am content to trust myself to win yours."

Gudrid's throat was dry. She had difficulty in speaking. "I shall do my duty," she said. And then, "I shall obey my father in all things, as I ought."

Eric went over to her and took her hand. "I won't deny I shall be sorry to see you leave Brattalithe," he said. "I tell Thore here that if my Leif had been at home there's no saying what might have happened—but as it is, he's the lucky one. He will have a sweet wife, and owe it to us that she is as happy as she is good." She gave him a swift and searching look, a flash of gratitude in it for his humanity, but resumed her searching of the floor. Thorbeorn rose from his chair and said to Eric that they had better leave the pair together—but then Gudrid looked wild. "May I not go now? Must I stay here?" Her eyes asked so of Eric, but he only smiled. She caught at her father's sleeve. Then Thorbeorn kissed her forehead and said a few words of blessing. He and Eric went out together.

When they were gone Thore went over to Gudrid and put his arm firmly round her. "I see, my dear, that you are upset by this news of ours. Be sure that I understand it. My belief is, that you will be happy with me. I have a good house, warm and dry. You will see company, you will have your maids to see after; and when we have settled down together—maybe before the end of the summer, we will take ship

to Iceland and pay a visit to my old mother who is in charge of my property out there. Now let me hear your voice. I know how sweetly you can talk—for I've heard you. And your singing makes me younger: a dreamer of dreams."

He seemed kind; his arm was strong and temperate. She imagined him much older than he was. But she didn't in the least know what to say to him. He waited for her, still holding her close, but she said nothing. So then: "Come, come," he said, "just a word or two"; and when she looked up and saw him laughing, she laughed too; and then he kissed her. "There," he said, "that is better," and drew her closer.

"You seem kind," she said.

"Ah," said Thore, "you will find me so. The fonder I grow the kinder I shall be." He gave her a very friendly squeeze, and she began at once to be sorry for this strong, gentle-hearted man as she thought him.

Her face was now against his shoulder, his black beard brushed and tickled her forehead. She was rather breathless, but quite determined to tell him her trouble. "There is something which I ought to tell you."

"Is there, indeed? I thought that you might find your tongue perhaps, if I gave you time."

"But I should have found it before," she said, "if it had not been for my trouble."

"Well," he said, "and now for your trouble. Mind you, I've seen a good deal of the world, and don't expect miracles out of the church. So if you have had a sweetheart or two, think no more about it. Bless you—do you think I don't know?"

"No," she said, "it's not that. But it is that I have heard prophecies about myself. I am not a fortunate woman at all."

"Hum," he said. "Perhaps we had better clear up that. Now, you come and sit on my knee by the fire, and let me hear all about it." She did not decline that seat, but still she chose another. He sat in Eric's great chair, and she brought up a stool. He noticed that, and approved of it. "This is a girl who is not for the mere asking," he thought.

When she had told him all about Thorberg, he did not scoff, nor laugh, nor take it seriously either. He just considered it, with one large hand grasping his beard. "Well," he said, "some people have the gift, there's no doubt, and if your Thorberg had it not, all her mummeries would avail her nothing. You set them up for a deal, I fancy, but they are little to me. I am willing to believe her story, but what then? So long as I am the first husband you have you may have twenty when I am gone. Likely enough that you will see to the burying of me. I must be twice your age. So much for your trouble, my dear."

"It was horrible to me," said Gudrid; "I have been unhappy ever since. It seemed to me that I was accursed, and that no man ought to look at me."

"But how can they help looking at you, foolish girl, and you like a rose!" That gave her roses indeed, and a good deal more too.

"You are certainly very kind," she said, and he replied that if that was kindness, there need be no end to it.

She went away after a time, so free of her shadowy load that she sang as soon as she was out of the hall. She accepted the exuberant greeting of the girls with evident pleasure. Her colour was clear, her eyes shone like stars. They had plenty to tell her of Thore. He was very rich, they said, and a widower. He had had a querulous and sick wife, and had always treated her well. He was not exactly "near," but thought twice about what he spent. He had a stone-built house up the country. A just man, and one who did not bend his knee to any one. Eric Red had often quarrelled with him. Except Theodhild he was the only Christian among the great men. It was a pity he was so much older, with such a great beard. They wanted to know if it scratched you, but Gudrid wouldn't say.

It was all very pleasant, except for one small matter. Thorstan immediately went away, and stopped away for ten days or a fortnight. No one knew exactly where he was except Thorwald his brother. He was teasing about it, when Gudrid asked him where Thorstan was. "I shall tell him you asked me," he said. That made her sorry she had asked, but she did not like to say tell him by all means, nor beg him not to tell. It turned out that Thorwald did tell him.

Freydis said, "If you must marry, that is the man you should choose. Not a half-skald like my brother Thorstan, nor a pranking pie like

Thorwald. You will have a master in Thore, and most women like that. He might beat you."

"I think he will not," said Gudrid. Freydis looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"And I think that you are right. You know how to make yourself respected, I believe. But many women like to be beaten. I know that I should love the man who could beat me. But he would have to fight with me first. My husband is as timid as a Norway rat. You don't see him here often." Gudrid had never seen him. "He comes when I send for him," said Freydis.

After that she saw Theodhild at Mass, and went home with her to her hermitage and told her the news. Theodhild said little, but one thing she said struck Gudrid. She said: "You will have much trouble, and give more of yourself than you can afford. But you will leave something to give to God at the end—more than I have left." Gudrid said: "It is foretold of me that I shall have three husbands, then go to Iceland and live as pleases me best." "It may well be so," said Theodhild. "Love is all to women, but if they can love God they are happiest. Love of man is more sorrow than joy. Love of God is pure joy. You will find it so."

Gudrid was young enough to wonder if that was true.

XII

Thore was very good to her, as he had promised, but he had to be obeyed. Directly he saw the token which she wore, he wanted to know about it.

"What is that which you wear round your neck? It looks to be gold."

She said it was a token. "A token! And what kind of a token?" She said she had had it when she was a child.

"Let me look at it," said he. He held it near to the light.

"Rats have been at this," he said. "Here are teeth-marks. Hungry rats, too, they must have been. And that was a good coin of England once—and valueless now. There's the half of a king for you. That was Knut King of England—a rare man I have heard my father say. And rats have bitten him in half. Take it off, my girl. You don't want such things now." She thought that reasonable, and took it off, to be laid aside. She had not much feeling about it now, and yet could not bear it should be lost. She put it carefully away in her chest next day.

By and by she told Thore that she had not spoken the truth. She had not been really a child when it was given her.

"I never thought so," said Thore.

"And it was not rats that bit it."

"Rats, indeed! Never in the world."

Then she told him the whole story, which he took very good-humouredly. "So that's it, is it? And when I take you to Iceland I suppose you will call him up with that?"

"Not unless I want to see him," she said.

"Not unless *I* want to see him, you would say?"

"I think you will be as pleased with him as I shall be," said Gudrid. So all went well except for Einar perhaps, whose prospects certainly were not enhanced by being talked about. The stronghold of a lover is to be so deeply hid that he is never talked of.

It was the fact that Gudrid was happy with her blunt blackbeard of a man. He was easy to live with, always much the same, and did not ask for more than he was able to give. He was very thrifty, and taught her to be so, for she was anxious to please. He was never jealous, though Thorstan had a way of coming to the house. At the same time, he told her one night that he wouldn't have him there when he himself was away. He was often from home two and three days together. "It has a bad look," he said.

"The neighbours look pityingly at a man. I won't have that. Not that there is any harm in Thorstan. He is the son of a friend of mine, and a very honest young man, though I call him dull. A man ought to be able to talk. I think him hot-tempered, too. He killed a lover of his sister Freydis once, and might as well have left it alone. She could have looked after herself. Besides, we are not so handy with our weapons as our fathers were in Iceland. Life is hard enough in this country without cold steel. Now remember—" and he pinched her cheek—"no men here when I am away."

Certainly she did not love Thore as she believed she had loved Einar the sailor. Thore never made her heart beat, or brought mist over her eyes. But she was happy and proud of her great house and many maids and young men. And she was happy enough to be sorry for Thorstan, who followed her about with a dog's patient eyes, and evidently worshipped her shadow. He told her that he went down to Herjolfsness when he heard that she was promised to Thore. When there he had gone to see Thorberg. What did she tell him? Gudrid wanted to know; but he wouldn't answer. He said, however, that she had told him that he himself had the sight. "I had thought as much," he said, "and now I know that I have."

Gudrid became very much interested, but not enough to dare probe any further. Indeed, she asked him not to tell her what he had seen. Thorstan looked away. "I would not tell you even if I knew anything," he said; "I would die sooner." She felt that she might become very fond of this moody and melancholy Thorstan, as a woman readily will of a man who, through no fault of his own, seems marked out for misfortune. She could not find that he had any faults. While very manly, and of great strength and courage—for he was untiring at hunting, could swim like a seal, and was believed to be afraid of nothing—with all this he was as gentle as a woman. She knew that he was a poet, though he would not sing her any of the verses he made. She thought to herself, "I could make him if I cared"; and the thought gave her joy. She told herself that if ever she loved a man again, as she had once understood love, it would be this man. And upon the heels of that thought came another, which she instantly put away, What and if Thorstan was to be her second husband? She put that out of her mind for Thore's sake—Thore's, who had freed her and made her happy. It was odd that Thore, whom she could never love, had made her happy, while Thorstan whom she could have loved, it was certain, would never do that.

In the course of that year the great event was the home-coming of Leif, Eric Red's eldest son. He sailed up the frith in the early morning of a June day, and when Eric came out of doors, there was Leif's fine ship in the anchorage, and many boats about it.

He had been away more than two years, adventuring greatly; but those adventures of his do not belong to this tale. He had been in Orkney for some time, and had fallen in love with a high lady whose name was Thorgunna. He knew her to be of great descent, and that she had the gift. He was much taken with her and she with him, and they set no bounds upon their intercourse, it is understood. When it came to the day before he sailed, Thorgunna said that she would go with him. Leif said that could not be, because her kindred would never allow it. "Maybe my people are as good as yours," he said, "but yours would not believe it, and I have to make my way in the world." "Think nothing of my people," she said, "but take me." But Leif would not. So then she told him the truth, that she was with child, and the child his. "If that's the case, then I stay here till the child is born. Him I will take, for it is the best thing for you." But Thorgunna said that she would bring up the child, and send him out to Greenland as soon as he was old enough. "I will accept him," Leif said.

He sailed, then, as he had intended, and went to Norway. There he fell in with King Olaf Tryggvasson, and was made a Christian. The King put great trust in him, and when he heard that he was going home to Greenland, gave it in his charge to change the people's religion. Leif said that would be a hard matter. "My mother is a Christian, I know; but my father is not, and never will be, and my brothers are of no account." But King Olaf was in earnest about it, and Leif promised that it should be as he wished.

Thore and Gudrid went to Brattalithe to see Leif. Gudrid thought that she had never seen so fine-looking a man. He was about thirty-five years old, and six feet four inches high. He looked as broad as a bull. He had golden hair and beard, and blue eyes. His face was burned to a hot brown colour. He was frank and open in speech, and full of fun and jokes. No secret was made of his intentions towards the religion of the people in Greenland. He told his father what he had undertaken; and he set about it at once. Theodhild, his mother, helped him, and Gudrid made Thore give money to increase the church. Thorstan and Thorwald were among the first to be sprinkled, but Freydis would have nothing to do with it, and Eric Red said that he was too old to change. Leif took that good-humouredly and laughed at his father. "If I were to tell you where was a great store of gold and silver coins, to be had for a little cold water on your back, you would strip to the skin in midwinter. But you will believe in no treasure which you cannot handle and run through your hands. Where do you expect to go when you die, with all that wickedness on your shoulders? You will come to a bad end, and ask me then to help you. I know how it will be. But go your way."

He spent that summer preaching to the people in the Settlement up and down the frith. Most of the people accepted what he told them, because it was he who told it. Others said that if the King of Norway was of that way of thinking it was more likely to be the right than the wrong way.

There was another matter very much in Leif's mind, and that was the voyage of Biorn Heriolfsson. He had to hear all about that, and he heard it first from Gudrid. Her face glowed and her eyes showed fire as she spoke of it. Leif watched her and thought her a lovely woman. "If you and I were to go out there together," he said, "we should never come back again. But your good man would take it in bad part." Gudrid said, "Yes, he would. But to go with us would seem to him still worse. Yet you will go." Leif considered.

"Yes," he said, "I shall go, and as soon as may be. But first I must know what course Biorn took, and next I must have his ship to go in. I would not take my own—she is neither roomy enough, nor strong enough built for such great seas."

Gudrid had by heart the figures and bearings of Biorn's voyage, for first Einar had drawn them on Orme's table, then Heriolf on his own, and then Biorn on Eric's table. She fetched a charcoal from the kitchen and drew the map, with all the company crowded about her. Leif was absorbed in it and her eager explanations. "I see just what he did," he said. "He drifted far south of Greenland, and didn't know it. Then when he got a wind he sailed south-south-west, and made that low-lying forest country. Then he steered north with a wind off the land, and came into the winter which we have here. He followed the coast along, and then, when it came on to blow from the south-west, he ran before it, and made Greenland. That's what he did. And that's what I will do."

"It is what I would do if I were a man," said Gudrid.

"Good for me that you are not a man," said Thore, who sat by the wall.

Before that summer was over Thore told Gudrid that he should take her to Iceland, as he had business there. They would go almost at once.

"How long shall we be there?" she asked him.

He said that there was no telling. "A year and more, I expect."

Her face fell. "Then we shall miss Leif's sailing."

"No harm in that," said Thore. "What have you to do with Leif and his affairs? Enough for you that you have made him go." He was not angry with her; but he thought Leif altogether too fine-looking a man. That was a man's reason—no woman would have reasoned so.

XIII

Leif bought Biorn's ship from him that winter, and busied himself stocking her with tools, weapons and spare gear for his voyage. As soon as the weather was open he was ready, and then it was a question whether Eric Red would go with him. Eric was in two minds about it, old as he was, and extremely fat. He had been a great traveller in his youth, and was averse from exertion in these latter days, but he was uncomfortable at home, with no wife in the house, and all his sons holding the new faith. So he wavered until the last minute, and then said that he would not go at all. Leif was not sorry.

He had a crew of five-and-thirty with him, and sailed his ship as near to S.S.W. as might be. She ran for six days before a fair wind, and on the afternoon of the sixth they made land on the starboard bow. There were mountains with snow upon them, and much fog; but Leif said that he would land in the morning, whatever kind of country it was. "It shall never be said against me, as it has been against Biorn, that I travel six days over the sea and leave the land I reach because it is not Greenland," he said.

They found a good anchorage, waited the night through, and then rowed off in their boat and ran her up on to the beach. It was a naked country of broken rock and shale. No grass was to be seen, and hardly any trees, except a few stunted silver birch. They walked inland for a mile or more to where the snow began, and then saw, as it were, one vast unwrinkled sheet of snow stretching upwards into a bank of cloud. The ground was all scree of slate and shaly rock. They saw no signs of habitancy, and

few tracks of animals. Then presently they looked at each other, and Leif laughed. "I think there is something to be said for Biorn; but although this is a barren land there is no reason why it should not have a name. I will call it Hellowland, for such it is." [1] Then they returned to their ship, and up-anchor, and away along the coast, so far as that allowed, but always keeping a straight course.

They came to another land, lying low in the sea, and sailed in towards it. Here also they landed, but on a shore of fine white sand, very level towards the sea, but blown into hummocks, whereon grass grew, towards the land. That was a flat country, and swampy, with trees so far as they could see, in some places dense and in others more open; but where the country lay open there were the swamps. "This country pleases me more than the last," Leif said. "The least it deserves is to be named. We will name it after its quality, and call it Markland," he said.[2]

But nobody wanted to stay there very long, and there seemed nothing better to do than to get back to the ship again and sail. Leif considered the timber that he saw of little worth to them. It was mostly small wood, and soft or of open texture.

They sailed, then, once more, with a fresh north-easterly wind blowing off the shore, and were two days at sea without sight of land. But then they made an island in the sea, and south of that saw the mainland, and a great frith striking up into it. There was no snow hereabouts, and the air was balmy and scented, blowing from the island. "Here," said Leif, "is a land worth visiting, I believe. Let us cast anchor in the lew of the island for the night; and to-morrow we will row up the frith yonder and see what we shall see." They found good holding-ground under the island, and then, as the light was good for several hours yet, launched the boat and rowed to the shore. The place lay peaceful in the level afternoon light, with trees softly rustling, and birds calling to each other from thickets. They wandered about, singing as they went, or calling to each other to see some new thing. Gradually the sun sank and the light began to draw in. One of them by chance stooped down and felt the grass. There was dew upon it. He put his finger into his mouth; and then he said, "This is a holy place. The dew tastes sweet." They all tried it that were there, and believed it. This filled them with wonder, and some of them walked about on tiptoe, as if they had no business to be there.

They slept on board ship, and in the morning very early found that the tide had gone down and that she lay on her side, high and dry. The tide went back so far that it was possible to walk from the island to the mainland. As for the frith, it had shrunk to a dribble of water. But all this made no matter, so eager were they to savour the country which was heralded by so fair an island. They jumped off the ship's side on to the sand, which was firm and white, and ran to shore, and up the frith, where the going was easy for a mile or two. They found that it issued from a great lake, many miles in length, and many in width. It was shallow at the edges, but in the midst looked to be deep enough. On the shores of this lake were fine trees growing, of such wood as none of them had ever seen before; flowers, shrubs, birds were alike new to them. In the pools of the river left by the tide they saw great fish lying, which Leif thought were salmon.

They wandered about all the forenoon, and when it was time to eat something and they went back to the shore, the river was filling fast, and their ship was afloat. They hailed her, and saw one of the hands row off for them in the boat. Leif then said that they would tow up the river and cast anchor in the lake, and that was done when they had made their meal. They found good anchorage there and a snug berth out of all troubles of wind or water. Next day they took off all their stores, and pitched tents for themselves in a glade, for it was Leif's meaning that they should pass a winter there. He was very much in love with the country, and said that in all his travels he had never been in a place so little likely to be vexed by cruel weather. "In my belief," he said, "we should have no need to store fodder for the stock against the winter. It seems to me that there should be grazing here the year through—but we will prove that, if you are willing." Everybody agreed.

In a little time they had established order in their camp, for Leif was a strong and wise leader, a tall and fine man of wisdom and good manners, and all obeyed him cheerfully. Duties were assigned to the men in order; some were to fish, some to hunt—for they found deer as well as birds in plenty—and some to explore. Leif made a rule that no more than half his party should be away at one time, and that none should wander so far as that he could not win back by nightfall, nor separate himself from hail of the others who were with him. So the time wore on and the seasons changed. A mellow autumn gave way to a mild winter in which came no iron frost, and very little snow. If they had had cattle with them, as Leif had foretold, they could have kept them out all the winter. They found the light very different from Iceland or Greenland. On the shortest day they saw the sun between the afternoon meal and the day-meal. What puzzled Leif very much was this, that in so fair a country there was no sign of habitancy. They saw no men, nor any traces of men—and yet it was hardly to be believed that such a country was empty.

It was late in the autumn when a great discovery was made.

[1] York Powell and Vigfussen translate this as Shale or Slate-land; and Laing says that it is believed to have been Newfoundland.

[2] That is, Bush or Scrubland. Believed to be Nova Scotia, according to Laing.

XIV

It happened one day that Leif had not gone out with the exploring party, but was by the tents expecting it to come home. When the men returned late in the evening he saw at once that a man was missing, and a man, too, of whom he was very fond. His name was Dirk, and he came from the south—that is, from beyond the Baltic Sea, from some distant part of Germany which no Icelander had seen. Eric Red had found him in his younger days in Bremen and shipped him for a voyage. Dirk had made himself useful, and desired to remain in Iceland. When it became necessary for Eric to leave home, Dirk went with him to Greenland. So it was that Leif had known him since he was a boy, and that there was much love between them. Dirk was as ugly a man as there could well be in the world, short, bandy and misshapen, with a small flat face, high forehead, little eyes, no nose to speak of; but yet he was active and clever with his hands and feet. The men told Leif that they had not missed him before the call had gone about to assemble for the return. They had looked all ways for him—but no Dirk. They had called—no answer. There was nothing for it, since it was growing dark, but to go home.

Leif was troubled. "You are good men all," he said, "and yet I will tell you that I would rather have missed any two of you than Dirk. I have known him all my life, and grown up, as you may say, between his knees. It shall go hard with me but I find him before another sunset." With that they took their meal, and turned in for the night, all but Leif. He had Dirk in his mind and no way of thinking of sleep. Instead, he wandered up the shore of the lake in the moonlight, and presently was aware of a whooping sound among the trees, as it might be of a coursing owl. As he listened, it seemed to waver from place to place, now high, now low; and then in the pause he heard something like a chuckling noise; and then last of all a great guffaw. "There is Dirk, as I live," he said to himself, and plunged into the woodland to find him. He had not far to go. Some bowshot within the forest, in a glade, he saw Dirk plainly under the moon, dancing and waving his arms, curtsying to his own shadow.

"Ho, Dirk!" he cried out sharply, and Dirk stopped short and looked about him. Leif watched him.

Dirk stared into the dark, then shook his head. "I made sure somebody called Dirk," he said, and then—"But I don't care," and fell to his dancing and whooping again.

Leif stepped into the moonlight, and Dirk saw him, but without ceasing to caper. "Dancing," he said, and went on.

Leif went to him and clapped him on the shoulder. "Are you drunk, then?"

Dirk nodded. "I am very drunk. That is just what I am."

"Come you with me," said Leif, "and you shall be no more drunk." Then it was that Dirk said, "Let us sit down. I'll tell you where I've been." So they sat down together in the moonlight.

Then Dirk told him that he had outwalked the others and passed out of the forest belt and reached a ridge of low hills. When he came to them he found that they were a tangle of wild vines. "And I know what vines are very well," he stopped to say, "for in my country there is no lack of them." Now these vines, he said, were loaded with grapes, some still ripe, but mostly over-ripe and fallen; and in a hollow of the rocks he had come to a pool of water wherein the grapes had fallen and fermented. "There," said he, "was my wine-vat, and there was I. The rest, master, you know."

"Can you take me to that place to-morrow?" Leif asked him. Dirk said that he could.

"Well," Leif said, "here is our work then. We will collect what we can of your grapes, and load our ship with timber. That will fill up the winter for us; and in the spring we will go home."

And that was the way of it. The timber which they got was fine wood, and fit for building. They stored what grapes they could, and having a good-sized meal-tub on board, they made wine in it. They had samples of self-sown grain, too, and the skins of animals which they had trapped or shot with bows. When the spring came, they loaded their ship and sailed out of the lake into the open sea; but they left on shore the huts which they had made, meaning to return. At parting Leif said: "That country deserves

a good name, and shall have one. I call it Wineland the Good."

XV

Leif in after days had his name of The Lucky, not for the great country which he had explored, nor for what he brought back from it, nor for the good passage home which he made, but for another reason altogether. It was the fact that the wind never failed them from the day they set out until that one on which they first saw plainly in the sea the snow mountains of Greenland. Everybody on board was in high spirits. Leif himself at the helm, and the look-out man was waiting for the first view of the great headland beyond which Eric's frith with its two rocks would open up, and a straight course for the haven. And then, suddenly, Leif put down the helm, hard, and the ship veered several points off the land.

"What will you do, master?" one asked him, and Leif replied, "Look out and see what I will do. Do you see nothing on the water?"

The man said that he saw nothing out of the common. "Well," said Leif, "look again. I see a rock, or else a ship—and if a ship, then a ship on a rock."

They all saw the rock now. "Yes," said Leif, "and there's a ship too, or a piece of a ship; for there are men on the rock."

That was true too, but before they were near enough to count the survivors of a wreck, pieces of the wreck itself, and baulks of timber, which they supposed her cargo, came drifting by them; and then presently a drowned man with a white face turned upwards.

Leif ran on, as near to the rock as he dared, near enough at least to see the men huddled on the ridge of it, and their hands up signalling to them. There, too, were the bows of a good ship rising high into the air like a seal. The rock was a sort of shelf in the sea, and stood out some ten furlongs from the great headland.

Leif brought up his ship and cast anchor. He had the boat out, and himself rowed out to the wreck. "They can do us no harm, whoever they are," he said; "but I think they are friends of ours." Some fifteen men were huddled together, and apart from them was a woman in a blue cloak, with a man lying beside her, his head on her lap, and a cloth over his face. She did not move as the boat drew in, but all the others came scrambling down the shelf to the water's edge.

Leif shouted. "Who are ye? And of what country?"

"Thore's people—from Ramfirth."

"Where is Thore?" They pointed to the woman.

"Yonder he lies hurt. That is his wife."

"And you are for Ericshaven?"

They said that they were. "Then you are well met," said Leif, and stepped on to the rock.

Gudrid's eyes were great and serious. Leif came to her and took her hands. "I little thought we should meet again like this."

"We must have died without you," she said.

Then he asked to look at poor Thore. He was unconscious, and had a great wound in his temple, cut open almost to the bone. Gudrid told him that when they struck, Thore, who had been at the helm, was thrown out upon the edge of the rock. One of his men, thrown out also, had pulled him up out of the sea. Gudrid herself had been below, sleeping. She did not know how she had been saved. She awoke at the shock to find herself in water. Then Leif saw that she was wet through and almost rigid with cold. He did not believe Thore was dead, nor did she. "No, no, he won't die so. He will die in my arms." So Gudrid said.

They took off the sick man first, and Gudrid with him. Both of them were put to bed, where Gudrid, who was now in a fever, soon became light-headed. Leif attended to her like a woman. It was wonderful

to see so big a man so gentle and light in the hand.

He brought them all in safely, and Thore and Gudrid were taken up to Brattalithe, to lodge with Eric until one at least of them was well again. Gudrid very soon recovered, and seemed none the worse, but in all her glow of beauty and health. Thore was much slower. His wound pained him a great deal. Cold had got into it and inflamed it. The pain made him fretful; he seemed much older than a year and a half's absence could account for, and was anxious to get home.

Gudrid wished to go also. Everybody was very kind to her at Brattalithe. She was a great favourite with Eric Red, who used to tell her that she ought to have married one of his sons. "Then I should have been sure that things would go right here when I am out of the way." Gudrid once replied to that that none had asked her, whereupon the old man looked slyly about him, and then said: "There was one at least was thinking of you—and so he is now."

She knew that too well. Thorstan was consumed by love, and must always be with her if he could. She was gentle with him, as she was with everybody, and had to own to herself that it was Thorstan who now possessed her thoughts. That may have been going by contraries, for if Leif paid her nothing but the good-humoured civility he had ready for everybody, Thorstan, on his part, seemed afraid of her, and was speechless in her company. But there's all the difference in the world between a man completely easy in your company and one completely uneasy. Leif was a young giant, the best-tempered giant in the world; but it was clear to Gudrid that he had other things to think about besides love. He was full of the exploration he had made, determined to get more of the good timber over, and with more than half a mind to go out and settle in Wineland. Dirk made wine of the grapes which they had brought back. There was a great feast, and everybody got very drunk. If Eric Red had not died and left the Greenland settlement on his hands there is little doubt but Leif would have colonised Wineland.

Meantime, Thorwald, the third of the brothers, was on fire with the thought of going. He said that he should go out next spring if Leif would let him have his boat. Thore—to the surprise of all—said that he would go too, but nobody seemed to want him. Leif said: "I don't think you a lucky man, Thore. And I don't think your wife will care about so long and rough a voyage, seeing what you made of her last." The laugh went against Thore.

"Gudrid shall stay with her father," said he; but Gudrid said, "I shall go if you do." Thorstan's face fell, and Eric Red burst into a great shout of laughter. "Oh, sour face," he cried out, "let us hear what you have to say about all this."

Thorstan was very hot, but he answered his father. "I think that Gudrid should not go, nor Thore either"—which made Eric chuckle.

When he was with her the next day, after a long time of brooding, Thorstan said that he hoped she would not go to Wineland.

"I must go if Thore goes," she said over her needlework.

"If Thore goes, I shall go myself," Thorstan said after a pause. Gudrid looked up, but said nothing.

"He is not a lucky man—that is to be seen," Thorstan said then. "And he has no great knowledge of the sea, and is moreover infirm. It would come to this, that he would hurt himself, and you would have the care of him as you did upon the rock out beyond the head."

She answered him gravely. "It may be as you say, that he is not lucky. Indeed, I know it too well. For it was told me before ever I saw or heard of him, that he would die before me."

Thorstan was now strongly moved. He wrung his hands together. "I beg you to tell me just what was said about that."

She coloured deeply. "No, I cannot tell you."

But Thorstan said: "I know what it was. It was said that you would have two husbands. Was it not so?"

She could not tell him the truth; so she said, "Yes." Then Thorstan said in a voice which did not sound like his, "That is another reason why I must go." And then they looked at each other for a measurable space of time—and then Thorstan got up and left her.

When they met again he was as he had always been before; but Gudrid was frightened, and insisted on going home to Stockness. It was hard to persuade Eric Red to let her leave him. He had grown very fond of her, and the more so because he hated his own daughter Freydis. But Gudrid held to her

determination, and won her own way. At parting old Eric took her in his arms. "I am loth to let thee go, dear child," he said, "and afraid lest I lose thee altogether. But thou art between two old men who love thee, and Thore has the first claim. Promise me this, that if he die before me thou wilt come back to Brattalithe and be a daughter to me."

"Yes," Gudrid said, "I promise you that."

"Right," said old Eric. "Then I shall live to see thee again." With that he kissed her and let her go.

XVI

Thorwald told Leif that he had been too faint-hearted in his explorations of Wineland. "You were bolder than Biorn, I grant you," he said; "but you only nibbled at the rind after all. I promise you I will dig down deeper into the meat."

"Dig," said Leif, "dig by all means. But look that you don't dig your grave. I saw no men the length and breadth of the land; and yet it is unreasonable to think that no men have been engendered to live in such a fine and fruitful country. If our father were not so old and hard to move, I tell you I should be for cutting adrift from Greenland and settling out there. But then I would go in a larger way than you intend. I would take a wife first of all——"

"So would Thorstan, our brother, if he could get her," said Thorwald.

"But he cannot get her," Leif said, and then Thorwald, "He won't move from her until he does get her."

Leif said: "He will go if Thore takes her out with you. But never mind all that. You will need a stock of cattle if you are for settling, and a strong body of men. It is not the way of our people to live in tents and eat only of the beasts that we chance to take. We are too fond of the earth to care to live without what she can give us. And if by incessant toil you win a sustenance out of this frozen land, consider what you could do in Wineland, where there is no frost, and but a sprinkling of snow, and where the soil is four feet deep, or double that for all I know."

"You are talking of one thing, and I thinking of another," Thorwald said. "Time enough to settle when I have discovered the country for you. That's what I mean to do."

Leif helped his brother with a ship and good advice; and Thorwald sailed west in the spring with a sufficient crew. Thore did not go; for that winter there had been a great deal of sickness, and old Thorbeorn took it badly, and died of it. Thore himself had the sickness, and Gudrid nursed him through it; but he was not fit for a long voyage. And Thorstan would not go either, though he kept away from Stockness, and saw nothing of Gudrid. Thorwald would have been glad of his help, for Thorstan was very strong and a man who could be depended upon; but he saw the trouble in his eyes and forbore to urge him. It came to this, then, that Thorwald was in sole command. He was young and full of spirit; he did not doubt himself the least in the world: but Leif doubted him, and threw away much sound advice upon him.

They sailed out of the frith one fine afternoon, and were lost to sight. They had a prosperous voyage throughout, and no trouble in picking up the Island of Sweet Dew, the river and the lake. There, in a glade of the forest and in full view of the lake, they saw the booths still standing, which Lief and his men had set up. They were intact, the bolts seemingly not drawn, and not much the matter with the goods within, but what fresh air and sunlight could amend it. They spent the better part of six weeks in and about those shores, but then, leaving a garrison at the booths, Thorwald and the rest of the crew went far and wide over the land, travelling mainly by boat up the great river which fed the lake on the west. They did not return till late in the autumn.

They reported to their friends that so far as they had been the forest land extended, with timber in it of incredible size and height. It increased in density the further they went, and the country all level, with no mountains to be seen. In the river were many shallows, and islands too; the shores were white sand and firm to walk upon. They had met with few animals, and no signs of men at all. Thorwald, who was unaccustomed to a forest country, said that he should never settle there, and that he should go further north, where a man might perhaps see where he was going. But they stayed out the winter

where they were.

In the spring they made their preparations to depart. They sailed east in the first place, but always north of the land, but encountered rough weather off a great headland which drove them on to the beach and broke the ship's back. That gave them a great deal of work, and involved a long stay while they mended her. There was abundance of timber, and of good quality, and they were well stocked with tools; but there was much building to be done before they could get at their work, and it took them the best part of the summer. But they were away about the time of harvest, and still sailing north, and being east of the mainland, the country appeared to grow more open, the trees were sparse, and they could see hills to the far west of them. So presently, when there opened out to them the mouth of a great frith, Thorwald sailed up it some distance till he came to a place where there were bluffs standing up sheer in the water, and beyond a headland a broad bay. Thereabouts, standing close inshore he berthed his ship, and was able to run out gangways and walk from ship to land. He himself with a party went into the country to look about them. It was fine open land, with a good deal of wood growing on it, but well-watered and with pasture of fine quality. "This country suits me," Thorwald said. "I shall stay here and make a homestead in it." As it turned out he spoke more truly than he thought for.

On their way back to the ship they struck the frith nearer to the mouth than where the anchorage was. They jumped down the cliffs to the beach, and in the very act to jump Thorwald saw something move between two hummocks of sand. He collected his men together and advanced quietly. There behind the hummocks they saw men. Three hide-boats lay at the water's edge. There were three men to each.

Thorwald said, "We must rush upon them suddenly. Let each of us make sure of one man." There were twelve men with Thorwald, counting himself.

The men, who were short and very dark, with black hair, in which were feathers, had bows with them; but Thorwald gave them no chance of using them. At a signal his party sprang with cries from behind the hummocks, and fell upon them. Three fell at once; the others took to the water and were slain there, all but one. He, as he went, slid out a boat, and scrambling in, made off at a great pace, and was soon out of sight behind the cliffs. Thorwald took the hide-boats and the weapons, but left the dead men where they lay. Then he went back to the ship, uneasy, thinking what he had better do.

It was everybody's advice that they should seek an anchorage further from the shore—and that they did. Setting a watch, they went to bed. Nothing disturbed them until the grey hour of the morning; but then the watchman called loudly to Thorwald: "Thorwald, Thorwald, arm yourself, and come up!" Thorwald leapt to his feet and ran out to look. The water was very smooth and still, but listening intently, he could hear countless paddle-strokes; and by and by in the mist the water appeared to be moving, so many and close together were the boats, and so shadowy-grey the men in them.

"Out with your war-wall," Thorwald cried, and all the crew, now wide awake, obeyed him. The war-wall was run up and made fast. Every man took spear and shield and stood behind it, ready for the worst.

The natives came within easy shooting range and rained showers of arrows at the ship. They did not venture to get at closer quarters, but held on until they had shot all their arrows; then made off with cries. The Icelanders looked at each other, and Thorwald, who was very pale, said, "Is any man here wounded?" They told him No. Then Thorwald, smiling rather queerly, said: "There slipped in an arrow between the rails of the board and my shield and struck me under the arm. You shall take it out, one of you, but I declare it my death-wound. I feel the venom working in me; and now I see how wisely I spoke when I said that my homestead should be out yonder. So it will be, but a smaller one than I thought to have put up. Now," he said, lying down upon a skin which they had spread for him, "pull me out this accursed dart, and listen to what I say. You shall bury me there where my homestead is to be, and put up a Cross over me. For though I am not long christened I know that I belong to the true faith. Call that place Crossness in memory of me, and when you go home tell my people where I lie, in case any of them come out and are minded to see if I need anything."

He bore the pulling out of the dart with great cheerfulness, and composed himself for his end. The poison worked swiftly. He was soon discoloured, and rambled much in his talk. Towards the end they had to hold him, and at sunset he died.

Everything was done as he had ordered it. They dug him a grave, rather than piled a cairn about him as the custom had always been; but sat him up in it with his weapons, thinking that more honourable. There were no Christians among them to say any prayer over the grave; but they made a great Cross and carved runes upon it. Then they went back to the ship and got the anchor up, being ill-disposed to stay there another day. The night passed without attack, and by daylight they rowed out of the frith, and out to sea. They beat their way back to Eric's booths in Wineland and found them unmolested.

There they remained for the autumn and winter following; and then went home to tell Eric Red and Lief the fate of young Thorwald.

XVII

Thorbeorn of Stockness died of the winter sickness the winter before Thorwald sailed for Wineland. Thore himself had been very sick too, but he recovered and was almost himself that summer. Not altogether so, for he had lost his lightness of heart, and with that his decision and blunt common sense. Gudrid, who had fought, as it seemed to her, against fate, and prevailed, was unhappy that he should care so little to be with her. She did not know that he avoided her. But it was so. He spent most of his time at Brattalithe, where he had taken a great fancy for Thorstan. He did not tell her, and Gudrid did not know, what he and Thorstan could have to say to each other—but the two were great friends. The fact of the matter was that Thore had now got it into his head that Gudrid had cast a spell upon both himself and Thorstan, and that the prediction concerning her was less prophecy than a gift of magic power. He found that Thorstan would let him talk about his hard fate by the hour together—nay, more, he found that Thorstan did not at all avoid being cast in the same lot. Thorstan, indeed, was quite open about it. "I have so much love in me for Gudrid," he said, "that you may say whatever you please about her to me, and I shall hear you gladly. Talk evil of her, sooner than not talk at all. I shall never believe you, but I shall hear her name, and name her myself. That will be enough for me." So Thore grumbled away about his troubles, and Thorstan listened to him.

He himself saw Gudrid seldom, because he believed that it made her uneasy to have him there. Nevertheless he prevailed upon Thore to bring her to Brattalithe very often; and when she was there he would take himself off cheerfully to work about the estate. Eric Red always made much of her, and even Freydis liked her well enough. She was the only woman for whom Freydis had a civil word. Freydis used to frown upon her, with her arms folded under her bosom. "You have soft ways," she said, "and can make men do as you want; but all that is nothing to me. I see that you are made of steel underneath, for all that. I see that you are no fool, and no doll. One of these days you will fall in with a man worthy of you, and then I should like to see the pair of you at work."

Another time she said, "Good for you, Gudrid, that you have no child."

Gudrid said, "That is not my opinion. I wish with all my heart I had."

"Wait," said Freydis, "until you have a man for a mate." But that made Gudrid's eyes bright.

"You must not scorn my husband to my face," she said.

"Pooh!" said Freydis; "he's not here for long." Then Gudrid turned pale, and grew very grave.

"You know that, then?"

"Why," said Freydis, "it is common knowledge. We have all had to do with Thorberg. She has the second sight."

"That is dreadful to me," Gudrid said, but Freydis took it easily.

"You are woman enough to bear what you must bear," she said. "One of you must die before the other. I hope you don't want to share graves with such an old man as Thore? Well, then, suppose it had been you that were to die first—do you suppose that Thore would have left you for some other girl? What do you take him for? Not he. He's man enough to have his pleasure. Trust him for that."

Such was Freydis, who treated her own husband with a high hand, and sent for him when she wanted him.

Freydis spoke of the marriage of Thorstan and Gudrid as of an appointed thing. "You will suit each other," she said. "There is good mettle in Thorstan."

Gudrid could say nothing to that. The fate hung heavy upon her. She felt that she was killing Thore, and had the knife in readiness with which to kill—not Thorstan but herself. For she knew that she had given Thorstan her heart, and that his death would be more certainly her own.

Meantime, with a dreadful fascination, she watched the doom settling like a storm about her husband Thore. She only saw it; he himself, now that he was better, was unconscious of anything impending. He talked hopefully of what he should do when Thorwald came home with news of Wineland, having forgotten his dark commerce with Thorstan. But Thorstan had not forgotten, and seemed to be waiting, like a raven on a rock, until he should be dead. Gudrid, who was fanciful, saw herself and him in that guise—silent and watchful, each on a rock, made patient by certainty. All this was terrible to her, and made her old before her time. She was not more than three-and-twenty even now. Thorstan avoided her, which made matters no better, but worse, rather; for she knew why he did it, and felt spotted, and longed to see him, and felt that she was accursed.

So life drew along for that summer and autumn; and then the long Greenland winter began, with the dark and the clinging, frozen fog. Thore seemed to make no stand against it, but took to his bed, from which Gudrid knew he would never rise. She waited on him hand and foot; he lay there watching her with his aching eyes, and wounded her to the heart. He hardly ever spoke, and seldom asked for anything. Thorstan used to come up most days to ask how he did. Gudrid knew quite well when he was on the road, and would tell Thore. "Here is Thorstan Ericsson coming. Will you not see him?"

"Nay, nay, not yet," was Thore's answer.

Then there came a day when, being very ill, and nearly blind with fever, Thore asked to see Thorstan. So Gudrid opened the door to him, and her colour came back to her when she said, "Thore has asked for you. Come in, then."

Thorstan, glowing in his health and strength, came into the hall. Gudrid took his furs from him to dry them by the fire, for the fog was frozen thick upon them.

Thorstan sat on the edge of the bed, and asked Thore how he did. "I do badly," said Thore, "but before long it will be better with me." Gudrid was turning away when he said to her, "Nay, do you stop here. I shall need you." So she stood where she was, a little way from the bed, half dreading and half glorying in what was to come.

Thore shut his eyes and seemed to wander in sleep. They heard him talking very fast to himself—counting the same things over and over again, and always failing at a certain number. They thought he was counting sheep—but it was salmon in a net. Thorstan watched him attentively, while Gudrid stood in a spell; but presently Thorstan got up and fetched a stool for her to sit upon. She could not look at him to thank him. So the time passed in silence, broken only by the feverish whispering of the sick man. The thoughts of the man were deeply upon the woman, and the joy of her nearness made his heart beat. As for her thoughts, if there was no joy in them, there was great content, and a sense of peace which she had not known for a long while. She thought that a word from him might have broken down her peace. "What need of speech between us two?" she thought. "I would live with him and know all his thoughts, and tell him all mine without speech at all."

Presently Thore woke up with a start and asked what time it was. "It is late," Gudrid said. "I will bring you your broth, and maybe you will sleep a little." She turned away to the fire, but Thore said sharply, "Stay; there is no need for broth now." Then he said, "Are you there, Thorstan? I cannot see you." Thorstan said, "Here I am."

Thore spoke again. "Take the hand of Gudrid, and tell me that you have it." He faltered for a moment, but then looked at Gudrid, and called her with that look. She went over and gave him her hand.

"Is it done?" said Thore.

"Yes, it is done," he was told.

"Her father was too quick when he married her to me, and you, maybe, were over-slow," Thore said. "She would have married you at first if you had asked her. Now you must make the most of your time, for it won't be long. And I knew what the matter was between you from the first, but in those days I loved her dearly and could not let her go. Now do you two be married soon, and take it not amiss with me that I have outstayed my time."

"You do wrong to speak so," Thorstan said. "Gudrid has been faithful and loving to you; and it is no fault of hers that she knew how it would turn out."

"No, no," said Thore. "She has been good to me."

"Now I will tell you," said Thorstan, "that I have the second sight myself, and know what my fate is, and that she must take a third husband. But if it were my fate to die the day after my wedding with Gudrid, I would wed her if she would take me. You, Thore, are dying a Christian. See to it, then, that

you do not die with hard judgments of Gudrid in your heart."

Thore lay still, breathing very short. They believed he was struggling with his thoughts.

Presently he called her, and she went to him, and kneeled by the bedhead, and put her cheek against his. He lay very still, and she remained patiently waiting. So then he had a great convulsion, and struggled in it; and then turned violently in his bed and sat up. He saw Gudrid kneeling, and smiled at her. It was as if he had newly awoken out of sleep, and was himself again as she had first known him. She, as if knowing his mind, leaned towards him. He kissed her forehead, and lay down again. In a few moments more he was dead.

When they had laid him out, and lighted tapers about him, Thorstan said: "Do you now go and sleep, and I will sit up with him." She asked with the eyes that she might stay, but he would not have it. So she went away and made a bed by the fire, and slept long. He did not touch her, would not look at her. They neither kissed when they parted, nor at all until Thore was buried. But after that, when she was at Brattalithe, and he found her there, he took her in his arms.

XVIII

There were many things about her marriage with Thorstan which she did not understand at the time—Thorstan's urgency for it was one, a kind of feverish haste about getting through with preliminaries; and another was his opposition to living anywhere but at Brattalithe. He would not go to her father's house, nor to that which had been Thore's, and which was now hers for life. He put a reeve in each of them and took her to Brattalithe. Afterwards she understood everything, and was confounded by her former blindness; but it is the truth that Thorstan's love for her was of a sort to forbid thinking. She was carried off her feet and out of her common sense by his passion. He, so dumb and still a man, was by the touch of passion set on fire. And fire caught fire. The pair of them lived in each other, and the world seemed empty of all other men and women.

As for Thorstan himself, knowing what he knew, it is not wonderful that his love burned at white heat. Passion with him was in a trap and fighting for an hour of life. What is wonderful is, that he never betrayed in any other way that he had the end in sight from the beginning. It was "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" with him. But Gudrid did not see it. She was too happy to see it. Her doom was flooded out by sunlight, as it were.

He made songs for her from the time of Thore's death onwards, and in these his secret might have been revealed if she had been able to read below the surface. He sang her one night as she lay in his arms the terrible Song of Helgi and Sigrun. Certainly Death and Love embrace in that.

Helgi was a Wolfing, the son of Sigmund and Borghild. He was forecast a hero by the Norns, and at fifteen slew Hunding, who had slain his father. The sons of Hunding gathered themselves—Alf and Eywolf, Hiorward and Haward—and the hosts met in the plain under Lowfell. There was war in heaven while those armies made it on earth. Out of the lightning flare came the Valkyrs, daughters of Odin, choosers of the slain. They rode grey horses; they wore helms and coats of mail; their spear-heads gleamed like fire. Helgi sat by the Eagle Rock and cried out to them to stay. And one—it was Hogni's daughter, Sigrun—turned him her fire-hued face and answered: "Other business have we in hand than to pledge you in horns. My father has plight me to King Hodbrord, whom I hold no better than the son of a cat. Yet he will come for me soon unless you deliver me." Then love grew between them as they looked at each other; and Helgi said: "Fear not Hodbrord, for I will meet him unless I am dead."

King Hodbrord called up his levies and mustered a host. The ships flocked about Brandey, but still he waited, and warriors came to him, hundreds of them, from Hedinsey and other islands. Then said Helgi to Hiorleif, "Is the host called?" And Hiorleif nodded his head and pointed them out over sea, high-beaked ships, hemmed with shields, thick on the water like wild swans. They fought in a storm, and the waves played their part in the battle. The waters drank as much blood as the swords; from on high Sigrun the Valkyr guided the warriors of Helgi.

Now King Hodbrord stood in the gate of his house, hooded and helmed, his spear in his hands. He saw far off in the valley horsemen riding with speed, whose cloaks flew out in the wind they made. Who come here? Whose is the host? And Godmund, his housewife, told him of the sea-fight, and that the Wolfings were coming against his house. Then looking, he saw the helm-bright Valkyrs coursing the air,

keeping pace with the horsemen below. They met in a crash by the Wolf rock; the swords flamed, the spears were like flying stars. Over the dead Hodbrord Sigrun the Valkyr cried in triumph, "Never for your arms is Sigrun of Sevafell," and as she spoke the arm of Helgi the hero held her fast.

Their love was fierce, but it was short. Helgi is dead of countless wounds, and laid in his barrow with his weapons beside him. Sigrun of Sevafell keeps the house; she sits by the fire; her eyes are hard. She says to herself—

"Now had been here
Had he been minded
Sigmund's son,
The hero Helgi,
Out of the halls of Odin;
But the eagles roost
On the high ash-boughs,
All the household
Falleth to dreams—
Faint is my hope of him now."

But her handmaid at the window sees a man riding in armour. He rides a grey horse, his face is pale and streaked with blood. She speaks to herself, and then to the dead—

"What wraith rideth?
Is Doomsday come?
Shall dead men ride,
Shall they drive spurs in?
Ho, pale rider,
Hast thou leave homeward to fare?"

It is Helgi who answers her as he rides by upon a noiseless horse—

"This is no wraith,
This is not World's Doom
Though a dead man rides,
Though he pricks with spurs,
Leave I have homeward to fare."

And then he cries aloud, so that Sigrun hears him, and looks up, listening—

"Ha, come thou forth, Sigrun of Sevafell!
Here is thy lord
If thou wouldst see him;
The cairn is open,
Helgi is here
With the sword-wounds bleeding—staunch thou the blood!

For I must ride soon
The reddening roads,
My good horse climb
The ways of the air;
West of the sky-bridge
Needs I must be
Before the grey cock cry to the sun."

Sigrun is up now, and at the door. She pants as she pulls at the bobbin of the latch. Her eyes are on fire with eagerness. But the maid cries to her—

"Go not, go not,
Sigrun of Sevafell,
Sister of kings,
Seek not the house of the dead!
For the night is abroad
When the dead are mighty;
Await bright dawn, thou shalt be stronger."

But Sigrun is out in the moonlight, and Helgi is upon his feet. Now she has him in her arms; now she holds his pale face between her hands and speaks to him close—

"The hawks of Odin
Greet not the Storm-lord,
Scenting the slain, their smoking quarry,
Not more eagerly
Cry they the dawn dew
Than I cry thee, dead King Helgi.

Now I kiss thee, dead King Helgi,
Ere thou castest
Thy blood-clutter'd mail-shirt.
Bloody the dew
On thy dauntless body,
Heavy the rime
On thy raven love-locks;
Cold are thy hands, Helgi, my king's son,
How shall I loose thee, lover and lord?"

But Helgi puts her hands away from his face and holds her apart—

"The death-dew is dank on me,
Sigrun of Sevafell,
This is thy doing, O sun-fraught lady,
Golden woman, the tears thou sheddest
Upon thy bed stay not beside thee;
Like blood they fall, cold and deathly,
Like sobs they stab me
Through the breast!"

Then, seeing her despair, he throws up his white face towards the moon and laughs without joy—

"Ho, let us drink
Deep draughts of joy,
We that have lost
Land and life!
Let no man keen us,
Let no man pity
The wounds shining upon my body."

He clasps her close in his arms, and speaks as it were between his teeth.

"Now is a queen,
Sigrun of Sevafell,
Now is a queen
Shut in the cairn,
Living and warm with the cold dead."

But she strains him to her and cries aloud—
"Helgi, Helgi, here is thy bed made,
Thou son of Wolfings, a warm bed, a gentle—
Fast in arms, Helgi, enfold me;
As when thou livedst
Clip me in death sleep."

And then the maid sees the cairn open, and Sigrun lying in it in the dead man's arms. Helgi lifts up his face to the moonlight, and sings—

"Never on Sevafell
A great marvel—
No more wondrous
That hill of magic—
For Hogni's white daughter

Lies with a dead man;
A king's daughter
Alive in the arms of the dead."

There is no more terrible song than that, nor one in which love is brought so close to death. When she remembered it after-wards Gudrid saw well that she had indeed been lying with a dead man when that song was sung to her. For if she could have had the wits she would have felt at the time the death-dew on his face. But love had then bereft her of all wits.

She called that year afterwards the Little Summer, as well because of the glory and promise of it as for the few days it held. By the end of June she knew herself with child. Thorstan gave a sort of sobbing gasp when she told him and pressed her to his heart. She felt the wet from his eyes upon her cheek, looked at him and saw tears. "You weep at my news?" "It is because I am happy, my love." She herself was softly elated by the gift she was to be enabled to make him, but not otherwise. All her love was centred in him just then.

But in July the ship came home from Wineland the Good without Thorwald, and with the heavy news. Eric, who had been ageing, was very much cast down by it. He wished Lief to go out and fetch back the body; but Lief did not seem inclined to move. He told Thorstan his reason. "If we can move out, house and homestead, gear and cattle, man, woman and child, well and good. It is a finer country than this. I will settle there gladly. But you see how it is with our father. He won't last long, and you will see he will refuse to move. This is his Settlement; he has made it for himself. He is king of all this country, and he feels it. Now if we go and leave him here, he will die—and what then? The end of Eric's kingdom. No, I shall stay here and take up the government after him. But I think that you should go—you and Gudrid."

Thorstan said: "I think so too. I will speak to Gudrid. But I shall wait till after harvest."

He told Gudrid what he thought. "They have buried him heathenwise, sitting with his weapons, looking out to sea, and heaped the stones over him. True, they have set up a cross atop. But he should have the rites. I must see to that. We will go, my love, if you are willing—but maybe we shall not come back."

She looked at him fondly. "I will go wherever you bid me. But we shall come back." It is wonderful that she did not remember what had been predicted of her; but she did not.

Thorstan did not meet her eyes. "We will go, then. But not till after harvest."

"Harvest!" said she. "You will not go in the winter?"

"No, no," he said. "The harvest will not be done." Then she knew that he did not speak of the corn-harvest, but of their own.

The year sped quickly, as happy years will do; the harvest of the earth was gathered, the winter fell, the clinging mists, the still and deadly cold. But they were a happy household at Brattalithe, for Gudrid was found to be a solvent of much domestic ferment. Her sweet manners drew even Theodhild to come in and out of the house, and hushed the storms which periodically swept over Freydis the Wild. At Yule there was a feast of many days, singing, eating and drinking, and games in the snow for the young men. Gudrid sat apart and watched it, Thorstan never far away from her. Still she didn't guess what lent such fervour to their loves. Foolish with happiness, she thought it was the first of many Yules—whether here in this frost-locked country or in the forests of Wineland mattered little to her. She saw them all in years to come as they were now and felt her heart high in her breast.

And then at the end of March, when men began to talk again of the ice breaking up, and the thawing of the passages, her child was born. It was a girl, and christened Walgerd. And now Thorstan looked about him at the still sheeted lands and knew that his hour was at hand. He told nobody, he never betrayed himself; but went to work silently and methodically.

XIX

It was the end of summer again before they were ready to sail. The ship which brought home Thorwald's crew had gone a voyage to Iceland and not come back. It was necessary to find and furnish

another; no crew would ship until the harvest was over; and though Gudrid was willing to follow Thorstan at a word, Eric had not wanted her to leave him yet; so she saw one more high summer.

They fared badly from the start, with heavy weather as soon as they were off the land. After a week of blustering south-west gales and rain the wind went round to the north. Then from the N.N.W. there began a storm the like of which none of them had ever known, and for week after week they were buried in it, not knowing where they were. They lost men, tackle, stores; there was not a dry rag on the ship; every day Thorstan expected the snow. Instead of that, after a few days of sunny weather, the wind dropped in a clear sky; it began to freeze, and then came the white blanket to cling about sheets and spars, and hold them close, a blur drifting upon a sea like oil. Gudrid sat like a ghost in the after deckhouse, nursing her baby and trying to keep it warm. It did not thrive and could not be expected to thrive. She was sure it would die. And so it did—died in its sleep while she was suckling it. She felt the cold upon its legs; and then it grew heavy. She looked down—its eyelids were blue. But she did not move.

Thorstan came down to see her. He knew at once. He went to her and covered her breast in the blanket. He said nothing, but was very gentle.

"Oh, husband, speak to me! Our little baby——"

"Hush, my dear one—it is better. She is not cold now." He made her lie down, with a hot stone for her feet and another for her arms to hold instead of her Walgerd. When she was asleep he said a prayer over the child and sank it in the sea. Then he comforted her as only he could have done it.

There was a good deal of sickness on board and plenty for Gudrid to do. The wind blew gaps in the fog, and as it stiffened tore it into flying shreds and rags. The ship heaved and lurched in water now inky-black. They got steerage way, and ran before a gale which they judged came from the south-west; they held this course for many days, hoping to get a sight of land. And land was nearer than they thought, for one morning Thorstan saw a darkening in the fog, a kind of shape, and then, quick as the thought, he put the ship about. She came round slowly, and at that moment the spars and rigging seemed alive with sea-birds. As the ship went round a huge black wall reared itself a-starboard, and he heard the waves at its foot. As nearly as might be he had broken up his ship on the rocks.

Thorstan ran out to sea for half a mile or more and stood off until the weather cleared a little. When it did they all saw the crags and headlands of an iron coast. The only thing to do was to keep within hail of it until they found some sort of haven. Thorstan said he would spend the winter there, whatever country it might be. Already it was cold, and wherever the land stooped low enough there was snow to be seen lying.

An opening in the land was reported next day, and as they drew near they could make out a firth and a muffled ship lying at anchor within it. The tide serving, Thorstan ran in between low hills all smothered in snow. A settlement of white, muffled houses lay on the shore of a bay, a deserted quay, a few boats drawn up on the beach: not a soul was to be seen; the winter swoon was over all.

He drew up within hail of the silent ship and anchored in that black water. The rattling of the chain and splash of the anchor echoed among the hills, but awoke no man. "Are we, dying, come to a city of the dead?" he thought. The chill lay on his heart like lead; the thought of Gudrid gave him a dull ache; even the passion of desire to save her was dead within him. He did what came up before him to be done, but could not provide nor foresee.

"Here we must see the winter out," he said, and had the boat out so that he might go ashore and seek quarters. First he went below to see Gudrid.

He found her in the bed, rigid with cold, almost too cold to shiver. He leaned over her in an agony of pity. "Oh my heart! Oh my poor heart!" She looked up at him and smiled in his face. She was not able to speak.

"I shall see the winter out here," he told her. "I must find out where we are—I believe that we have beaten back to Greenland. If that be so, then we may be able to reach home; but if that is not possible, then we stay here. I will get quarters for the men, and for ourselves, please God. My love, trust me to do for the best—and wait for me here."

She nodded her head two or three times, but her eyes were shut and she did not look at him again. He dared not kiss her for fear of finding out how cold she was. How could it be that men were allowed to suffer so? He found some more covering for her bed before he left her.

The boat took him ashore; he went to the nearest house he saw and thumped on the door. There was

no light to be seen, and for long there was no sound to be heard inside; but at last he heard the bolts drawn back. A white-faced woman peered at him through a crack.

"Let me in, for the love of God," said Thorstan. Then she beckoned him in.

A sick man lay muttering in a bed; children huddled about a turf fire. The place was very nearly dark, but he made out some six souls to be there. He found out that he was come to Lucefrith in West Greenland; the winter sickness was heavy on the place. The woman did not refuse to take one of his men, and did not agree. She seemed stupid with misery. He told her that he should send her a man, and went out. In every house in the Settlement was much the same story. Sickness and death on all hands, but no refusals. At the end of his rounds he had managed to place out all hands. There remained himself and Gudrid. There was no place for them—not room enough to die in. He had asked if there were no headman in Lucefrith, and was told of one Thorstan Black; but he, it seemed, lived far off—over the hills, they said—and no way of getting at him through the snow.

Then he went back to the ship and told his men to get ready to go ashore. He took them off by companies in the boat, and saw them all indoors before he left them. The last man under cover, he rowed back alone to the ship. At this extremity, with frozen death and silence all about him, he felt a strange uplifting of the heart in the thought that he and Gudrid were now alone indeed—they two and Love. And what if Death were a fourth in the party? Ah, he was welcome too. But before Death came Love should be there. He rowed gaily, fiercely, that he might be with her the sooner.

He was warmed by his exercise when he was on deck again, and wildly happy in the thought which possessed him.

He went below and saw his love watching for him. "My heart, I am coming to you," he said. He took off his furs and most of his clothes and got into the bed with her. He held her close to him, with a passion which despair may have quickened into flame. Wildly as he had loved her since she had given him herself, he never loved her as he did now, when the end seemed close upon them.

For a week they lived so, the supreme week of Thorstan's and Gudrid's lives. They were utterly alone, and they never left each other's arms, but when Thorstan was busy mending the brasier fire, or getting food. They cherished each other, the fire in them at least never went out; they loved and slept, they loved again and slept. It was the last leap of their fire, it was the swan-song of their love maybe; but it was beautiful, and as strong as if they were breasting a great flight through space. Thorstan sang to Gudrid, he told her tales of lovers, he put their joint lives into verses; but he had not a word to say of the future. Here fate was too heavy for either love or religion. Fate stood with stretched-out arms holding a black curtain over what was to come. Thorstan had seen behind it. He knew. But Gudrid had forgotten, and he would not tell her. As for Gudrid herself, the glory was to have Thorstan find her so lovely, and her love so full, was enough for her. She lived on his needs. To fill them was her utmost desire, and to be to him a never-failing well was a crown of stars. She seldom spoke; she was as silent as the earth below the rains and heats of heaven, and as receptive. She neither asked nor pondered what was to be the end of this rapturous dream. If she had, her utmost desire would have been that they should die together in some nuptial sleep, and lie still, folded under the snow.

But Fate ordered it otherwise. The day came when they heard the knocking of oars, and then while they lay clasped, listening, a great voice hailing the ship. They looked at each other. "The dream is over," Thorstan said. "My love, the world is about us again." She clung to him. "Let us stay here—let nobody forbid us that." "Nay, but I must go out and see who is coming."

He dressed and went on deck. A large man muffled to the eyes in a bearskin was below him in a boat, standing up in it holding on to the side. He pulled open his hood and showed a red face, black beard and a pair of merry eyes.

The two hailed each other, and then the new-comer said, "They told me in the Settlement that you were under the weather here. It will have gone hard with you, I doubt. And your lady with you! Now I make known to you that I am Thorstan of this place, called commonly Thorstan Black, and at your service."

Thorstan said: "Then I must be Thorstan Red, for Thorstan is my name, and the red is of Nature's doing, and my father's. I am Eric's son of Eric'sfrith. I was making the western voyage, but was driven out of my course in a gale, and forced to beat up here against my will. My men are in the Settlement, but I and the good wife could find no better quarters than these."

"I will show you better," said Thorstan Black. "I knew nothing of your coming till last night when a man came up asking for fuel. You shall come off with me now if you will. In a week's time you will be able to walk ashore. My mistress will be glad of your company, and so shall I be."

"Thank you for that," said Thorstan. "We take your offer gladly." He asked him up, but Thorstan Black said he was very well where he was.

Gudrid was dressed when he came down for her. The dream was broken, and neither of them spoke of it. Their preparations were soon made, and then they left the ship.

Thorstan Black rowed them ashore with strong and leisurely strokes. He told them that he lived over the ridge beyond the Settlement. He had a sleigh of dogs waiting for him, packed up Gudrid, put Thorstan one side of her and himself the other, cracked a great whip, uttered a harsh cry; and they were off. The dogs panted and strained at the ropes; sometimes one yelped in his excitement. And so they came to a broad-eaved house, and were welcomed by the good wife, whose name was Grimhild.

XX

The winter fell upon them in bitter earnest within the next fortnight. The snow was up to the top of the windows, and being there, froze hard, and had to be cut away with an axe. That was how they made a road to the byres where the stock were, and where they must be fed. The two Thorstans worked hard at this and at fuel-getting, and hewing of wood. Gurth the reeve helped them, but he was ailing already with the sickness, and not much use.

Grimhild, a strong-faced, huge woman, managed all the house, but Gudrid helped her now willingly. There were no maids there. In the evenings they sat by the fire and told tales. It was as merry as might be, and with Thorstan Black there was always some fun to be had. He was the lightest-hearted man and the happiest whom Gudrid had seen in Greenland, where mostly, it seemed, men had to fight with life at too long odds to have any heart left over for pastime. Thorstan Black owned to it. "There is no people but ours of Iceland, I do believe, who would hold out against this white death," he said. "So fast as we come we die of it. Then come others, and so the game goes on. It is the fighting we love; we were always fighters—what with horses, or our young men. But here we fight with the earth, sea and sky, and do little slaughter of our own kind."

"It is the fog that kills us," said Grimhild; and Gurth smothered his cough and hugged himself over the fire.

Gudrid said: "Why should you stay here? I think it is a terrible country. We shall go to Wineland as soon as the spring comes." Then she told them of that good country—of the tall trees, and the clear sky, of the dew which was sweet to the taste, of the vines tumbling over the hot rocks, the birds' voices in the forest, and the strange stars at night. Grimhild was moved by the recital.

"Ay," she said, "I have heard tell of such lands, and you may see them, being young. But this place has made me old, and almost broken my heart. In a little while I shall ask no better than to be laid in the snow."

Thorstan Black patted her on the back.

"Courage, old lass," he said. "You and I have seen the worst of it. I think it may be better hereafter. As for your land of summer all round the year, I know not that it would suit Icelanders. If you take our hardihood from us, what have we left? That which swills and eats heavily, and plays the mischief. Nay, give me a dark ghyll in Iceland, with a river racing down its length, and the sea never far off. That means more to me than your vines and soft winters. As for this stricken land, we shall beat the sickness yet. A man tempers himself. There should be a fine race here one day, of them who have got through."

Gurth turned up the whites of his eyes. He was very sick.

By and by they had news from the Settlement, where things were going badly. The sickness was very rife. Many of Thorstan's men from Ericsfrith were dead of it. They took down stores in the sleigh, and were much concerned at what they saw and heard. The strangers from the east were all sick; six were dead, and could only be buried in the snow. Thorstan promised that he would take all the bodies back to Ericsfrith if he had to heap the ship with dead men. When they returned to the homestead the first thing they heard was that Gurth was dead.

Gradually, as the winter thickened, gloom began to fall upon the housemates. The hall grew cold; it was as if there were no heat in the burning coals; as if the cold was become master of the fire. Grimhild

grew strange in her ways. She was always listening, waiting for something. She said she expected a visitor, but would never say who it was. She became very silent, and tried to avoid the others. Thorstan Black told Thorstan Red that he feared the worst. "The truest woman!" he said. "She has stood by me in sickness and health for twenty years—and now she turns her back on me—hunches her poor shoulders and will take no comfort from me. That's a sure sign of the sickness. You distrust your old friends first." "Is that the way of it?" said our Thorstan, with fear in his heart.

Grimhild grew more and more remote, but remained on terms with Thorstan Red, in whom she confided some of her growing fancies. "The dead are unquiet," she told him when she had him out of range of the others, "and how should I be quiet? They are all about us. So soon as it grows dusk they come out of the snow. I hear them quarrelling, murmuring, and some of them grieve. I shall be with them soon—and perhaps you will see me there. It has been bad enough other winters, but none so bad as this. There are strangers here—that's how it is. We shall never quiet them till we have burned the bodies. That's the only way."

"They shall be burned, mistress," said Thorstan. "I will see to it."

She looked at him queerly, with one eyebrow arching into her hair. "You?" she said, then turned away her face. "Well, well—Christ have mercy on us."

When the fever took her and seemed to stretch her skin to cracking-point, she would not go to bed, and nobody could persuade her. She huddled by the fire, rocking herself, until the evening; but directly it was dusk she was restless. The wind used to moan about the house, and she heard in it the voices of the dead. She thought she could distinguish one from the other. "Gurth is railing—hark to him. . . . That was Wigfus answering, and that deep one is Kettleneb. Oh, let me rest—have done!" She wandered forth and back, but was mostly in the kitchen, listening at the door. Thorstan Black grieved for her and used to try to coax her back to the fire. She scowled at him as if he were a stranger, and would not let him touch her. Gudrid was afraid to go near her.

Once when she was out there on a wild moon-lit night, the others by the fire heard her cry aloud; and then she called on Thorstan. The two Thorstans looked at each other. Thorstan Black said, "It's you she wants. Go and talk to her." Thorstan Red went out.

Grimhild had the kitchen door open; dry snow was sweeping in upon her; the front of her gown was white with it. "Look at them there," she said; "look at them. Gurth is whipping them round the garth. See how they huddle—heed their crying. There, there—and there go I among them, wringing my hands." She clutched his arm. "Hush—and there go you."

Thorstan's heart jumped, and then fell quiet. "Do you see me there, mistress?"

"You are standing there in the shadow of the byre. He will not touch you. Round and round. No rest in the snow." Then she turned to him and screamed: "Don't let him touch me!" She caught at him and he tried to draw her into the house; but she struggled fiercely, and before he could stop her she was outdoors racing through the snow. Thorstan shouted to his host, who came to him in a hurry. "She's gone," said Thorstan Red. Thorstan Black and he went out together, but by now she had passed through the garth and was deep in the snow beyond. They got her home at last, but she was quite mad and fought against them all the way.

They put her to bed and kept her there by main force until she was exhausted. They were up with her all night, and she died in the small hours of the morning. There was nothing for it but to bury her in the snow.

Gudrid laid her out while Thorstan and his host were making the coffin. She put candles at her head and feet in the Christian fashion, with a cross of wood between her hands. Then she knelt by the bed to watch the corpse. It was piercingly cold, and she grew numb with it, and then drowsy. It is likely that she dropped off to sleep as she lay, for she came to herself with a start and saw the corpse sitting up, staring with open and glassy eyes. Her heart stood still, she neither felt nor thought. How long they were, the living and the dead, staring at each other, Gudrid could never have told—she was incapable of moving, being frozen with terror and cold. Presently the dead woman's mouth opened, as if she were going to speak; and then her head fell forward and she dropped. Gudrid staggered to her feet and ran out of the house. She found the men in the outhouse, and caught Thorstan Black by the wrist. Her face told her story; it was no longer that of a sane woman. Thorstan went back with her.

That night they buried Grimhild in the snow; and Thorstan Red took the sickness. He told Gudrid of it when they were in bed. He held her closely in his arms and spoke with passion: "My love, I am sick, and it may go hard with me. Remember now what I say—that the thing which I may be is not I. Be not afraid of it. You have had the best I could be—and it was you who made me. Remember what we have been,

and think of me as dead already. And when I am dead, take my body back to Eric'sfrith."

She clung to him, but not with tears. Tears were denied her now. The cold had mastered even them. For now she knew what must come.

XXI

The Greenland sickness took mainly the same course, varying with the patient's personal quality. It began with a high fever, intense surface irritation; there ensued violent rheumatic pains, mental alienation, delirium, madness and death. It was characteristic, as has been said, that the sufferer turned from his kind, and turned markedly from whom he knew best.

Thorstan made his preparations carefully, and instructed Gudrid. As a wife who may be allowed a last word with her husband condemned to die, she took and gave her kisses. The time was too great for tears, the heart too faint for strong embraces. All she could do she did. She would obey him, she would not show herself; but she would be always at hand. She sat mostly at the head of his bed in the wall, hidden by a curtain, but ready to fetch and carry; to bring him food which Thorstan Black could give him; hot stones for his feet, hot rags to ease the pain in his limbs. He hardly opened his eyes, hardly ever groaned; but when the fever ran high he talked incessantly, in fierce and rapid whispers—and she heard told over again the week of rapture and dream under the snow in the empty ship. She suffered greatly under this affliction, both by the memories it evoked and the knowledge that such things could never be again. Her modesty might have been offended; but Thorstan Black was very kind to her. He used to go gently away when the sufferer began to speak, and would contrive his returns so as not to intrude on any privacy. Her heart was full of gratitude to the black-bearded giant, so huge and so gentle.

The fever seemed to eat Thorstan up; he became so thin that his cheeks sank away into hollows, and his bones stuck out so sharply that the skin cracked. Gudrid began to have horror of him. She thought that her lover was dead, and that this was some terrible mock-image of him sent there to haunt her. She seemed to become younger as he grew more like an old man. She was afraid to be left alone with him. Love had been frightened out of her, and even pity scarce dared to be there. She could not believe that this was the man who had so keenly loved and worshipped her body, and by his music had uplifted her soul. She had seen Thore die and had been compassionate to the end. She remembered how she had kissed him in the very article of death, and shuddered as she thought of kissing this living corpse. Her eyes besought Thorstan Black not to leave her, and he rarely did—for by this time her husband's weakness was such that, whatever he may have said in his fever, he could hardly be heard.

Towards the end—as Thorstan Black knew it must be—he persuaded Gudrid to lie down at night while he kept watch by the bed. And so she did. The poor girl was worn out, and went to sleep almost at once.

About midnight she was awakened. Thorstan Black stood by the bed with a taper. She gaped at him, cold to the bones.

"Come, my dear," he said. "He is asking for you." She said nothing. Then in the silence she heard her husband's voice, calling "Gudrid, Gudrid, Gudrid." She fell trembling, and knew not what she said. Thorstan Black put his cloak over her, and helped her out of bed. Her knees shook. "Is he dead? Is he dead? Oh, don't leave me. I'm frightened—he looks so strange—don't leave me, Thorstan."

"No, my dear, I won't leave you," he said, and put his arm round her, for she seemed about to fall. "Come," he said, "I'll take you, and stay by you."

She mastered her fear. "Yes," she said, "I must go. Oh, but you are so good to me."

"Don't go if you are afraid," said Thorstan. "He may be dead by now."

"No, no," she said, "not yet. I must hear what he says, for it may be he knows what the course of my life must be. If God will help me, I will go. But you will come too—you promised."

Thorstan thereupon lifted her up in his arms, and carried her into the room where Thorstan Ericsson lay. He went to the side of the bed and sat down, holding Gudrid on his knee. So they waited fearfully for the dead man to speak.

Thorstan Ericsson sat up in his bed; his eyes were so deep in his head that nothing showed of them but dark caves. His mouth was open, as if his jaw had dropped. But no sound came from him.

Then Thorstan Black said: "My namesake, you called to Gudrid, and I have her here beside you. What do you desire of her?"

The dead man spoke. "Gudrid, are you there?"

"Yes, Thorstan," she said quaking.

"I will tell you, my wife, that you need not grieve for me, nor fear me, for I shall never hurt you now—nor could I have the heart. I am come to a good place, and am at peace. Now you are to know that you will be married to an Icelander who will be kind to you, and give you what your heart desires. But your life will be longer than his, and your end will be pious—and that, too, you will desire before you reach it. And I pray you to take my body back to Ericsfrith and give me holy burial. Farewell, Gudrid, and have no fear for me."

Gudrid, cold as a stone, sat on Thorstan Black's knee as if she had been a child, and stared at the figure of her love. She could not say anything to him, she dared not touch him. His head sank forward, and he fell back in the bed and lay still. Thorstan Black touched him. He was stone cold.

The good giant thought now of Gudrid only, and talked to her gently for a long while, comforting her. He promised that he would never forsake her until he had brought her safely home to Ericsfrith. He would take Thorstan Ericsson to his own ship, and all the bodies of the crew who were dead should be put with him there until such time as they could sail. "And as for you, dear child," he said, "remember that you and that true man have had the best that life can give you—for than wedded love there is no more blessed thing. Think of me, my child, who lived happily with my good wife a twenty years, and think that you are better off maybe than I. For love such as yours is not a thing that can live—no, but it must needs change as it grows older. You change, and the world comes in between; and so it changes too. Now you have had love at the full—and it is ended at the full. You should be thankful for that. And be thankful too that he is at peace, and his fate rounded—and nothing for him now but folded hands and quiet sleep. Why, look at him now, Gudrid. Even now he smiles quietly, as who should say, I have done with it all. Look at him, and have no more fear of so gentle a thing."

Gudrid turned her haunted eyes towards the dead man. It was true. Thorstan smiled to himself wisely. And now she could see that his eyes were shut. She slipped off Thorstan Black's knee and knelt beside the bed. She looked at her dead lover, and without remembering her fear or thinking what she did, she put his hair off his forehead and tidied it. Then she leaned over him, looking tenderly down at him, and stooped and put her lips to his forehead.

Thorstan Black left her, and returned presently with candles and a cross which he had made. So they laid out Thorstan Ericsson, and Thorstan Black watched him all the rest of the night.

XXII

She stayed out the long and bitter winter alone in the house with Thorstan Black. No man could have been kinder to her than he was. She felt with him the happy relation which there is between a father and his married child, when you have the equality which comes of experiences shared and have not lost the old sense of degrees—but that lingers still like a scent which recalls times past.

He was as good as his word, when the spring came. The bodies of all the crew were redeemed from the snow and put aboard ship; the settlement at Lucefrith was broken up. He gave the survivors their freedom, and free passage to Ericsfrith; for he himself intended to settle there when he had restored Gudrid to Brattalithe. So they set sail, and made a good passage, and came into the frith on a day of fresh southerly wind and strong sunshine. Gudrid, standing on the afterdeck, looked at the little town and the green fields about it, at the snow-peaks whose shapes she knew well, whereunder, as she felt, her life had been passed; and then she saw old Eric in his red cloak being helped into his boat, and Freydis, bareheaded, with her yellow hair flying in the wind, and her strong arms folded over her chest—and felt the comfort of home growing about her, and the dew of happy tears in her eyes.

Eric's eyes looked anxiously up at her. "Is all well, daughter?" he called out in a brave voice—but she could only answer with her own wet eyes. He was hauled on ship-board, and soon had her in his arms.

Her hidden voice and shaking shoulders told him the rest. "There then, my sweetheart, it is done. Yet cry your fill. I have a fine son left—and you into the bargain. Come home now, and leave me no more." So said old Eric Red, a man not easily downed by fate. He made Thorstan Black free of Brattalithe for as long as he would, and promised him the best land that he had. So they all went ashore, and Freydis hailed Gudrid and made much of her. Freydis was not changed at all. She was very fond of Gudrid, and for her sake put up with her father and mother who, without Gudrid, would have fretted her to a rag. Leif came in that evening and embraced Gudrid like a sister. He heard her dreadful story and shook his head over his brother's fate. "Thorstan was born to misfortune," he said. "He had the second sight, and there is no worse gift for a man than that. Brave as he was, that foreknowledge always balked his effort. But he was a fine man. You have had the best of us, Gudrid."

"I love you all so much," she said, "that I must have been happy with any one of you, since he would have made me free of the others. I would not have my Thorstan back again. He told me that he was at rest—and how can you look for rest in this life?"

She went to see Theodhild in her hermitage. To her only she told Thorstan's prediction, that she should be married yet again, and outlive her husband, and then find the life that she loved the best. Theodhild nodded her head. "That was a true saying of my son's. You will find the only rest there can be in this life." Gudrid asked her more, but she would not tell her. "I know, I see," said Theodhild, "but God will reveal it to you when the time comes."

Gudrid, who had left Ericshaven still a girl in her bloom, had come back to it a woman, made so by pity and terror. Her beauty was now ripe, and her mind in accord with it. They held her at Brattalithe for the fairest and wisest of women. She was rich, too, for she had her father's and Thore's estates, as well as her share of Eric's wealth which had been Thorstan's. She sold her father's house and land to Thorstan Black, who settled down there, and came to great honour in Ericshaven, as he deserved to do.

XXIII

The spring and summer of that year passed quietly enough at Brattalithe, but after harvest a fine ship from Norway came into the haven and the owner came ashore. Eric Red, Lief and Gudrid rode down to town to meet him and hear the news. He soon explained himself, for he had a copious flow of speech. He treated Gudrid with great deference, thinking her the lady of the land, and when it was explained to him that she was nobody's wife, but a widow, he smiled, saying, "So much the better," and continued to treat her as before. He was a large man, broad-faced and broad-shouldered, with light-blue eyes, and much fun in them. He looked at you when he spoke as if he wished to make you laugh, but hardly hoped it.

His friends called him Karlsefne, which means "a proper man," and his real name was Thorfinn Thordsson. "Thord of Head was my father," he told Gudrid, "and was called Horsehead, not without reason, for I will tell you that no man born could be more like a horse to look at than my father was. He was the son of Snorre who was a Viking in Earl Hakon's day; and that Snorre was the son of Thord, the first of Head." It seemed that he was well-to-do, and that he had on board his vessel, besides a crew of forty hands, a notable cargo of goods. He offered Gudrid what she pleased to take of it. "I do that," he told her, "to win your good will, for I see very well that you rule the roost here—and rightly enough. I have never been to Greenland before, and tell you fairly that I never knew there was the like of yourself to be found here. If I had known that I should have been here long ago—and then, who knows? Maybe you would not be a widow this day." He said it as if in joke, but yet he meant it. He was greatly taken with her beauty.

Eric offered him winter quarters at Brattalithe and he accepted it gladly. His goods were landed, and stood in Eric's warehouse, his ship was laid up for the winter, his men boarded in Ericshaven. As for himself, he was very soon at home in Brattalithe, and everybody liked him well. He was a good poet, and sang his own songs; he told tales, he made jokes—but was always good-tempered.

Towards Christmas Eric Red, who was now very much aged and apt to worry himself over trifles, became sad and depressed. They thought that he was grieving for the two sons he had lost, but he would not talk to any of them of his troubles. Karlsefne asked Gudrid what was the matter with his host. He always talked to her when he had a chance.

She told him what she thought: "He is an old man now, and cannot help remembering his two sons."

"That is not like an Icelander," said Karlsefne. "You yourself, lady, show the spirit of our people better. You don't fret yourself vainly. You were wedded to a good man. You were happy in him; he died. Well, you have had what you have had, and if there is to be no more, you will wait your turn. Is it not so?"

"It may be," Gudrid said. "I have learned not to build too high, by falling so far. And I think my Thorstan is at rest. He would not be if he were here now."

"Very likely not," said Karlsefne, "if he was of a jealous turn. Moreover he was a poet, one who can always see in his mind a state much better than that he lives in. That's no way to be happy. But I will talk to Eric Red. He is friendly to me."

And so he did. "What is it, host, which makes you so heavy? Your friends say you brood over the past, but I tell them that is not likely."

"No, no," said Eric, "that's not the way of it at all. The present is bad enough."

"You are treating me nobly," said Karlsefne. "I should be a churl if I did not tell you so. What else do you need?"

Then Eric said that he was aware how his house was diminished by misfortune. "I had a wife, but she has cut herself adrift; I have a daughter, but she has turned sour to me. Two of my sons are dead, look you. Now the time was when with a great houseful I could give a feast with the best. A man is best judged by his children. If they are free and high-hearted, he is judged a good man. But now I must receive you with broken rites, and it hurts me to the heart that you shall sail away in the spring of the year, and say to your friends: 'Old Eric is down in the world. A sadder Yule than that have I never spent.' I do what I can, but that is heavy on my mind."

"Nay, nay, friend," said Karlsefne, "that will never be the way of it. I am better off than I hoped for—you are treating me like an earl. Now if we are to do better and all be kings together, remember that I have a well-found ship out yonder, with stores of corn and meal, and malt for brewing; mead also, and smoked salmon are on board—whereof you shall make as free as you will, and provide such a feast as Greenland knows nothing of yet. But what a man you are to be fretted by such a thing as that!"

Eric said that he had lived in a great way all his life, and had not been used to stint his friends of hospitality. He thanked Karlsefne heartily, shook hands with him, and said, "Ask of me what you will, friend, and it shall be agreed to."

Karlsefne laughed. "Maybe I shall ask a great thing of you before I go to sea." He had made up his mind that he would have Gudrid from him if he could get her, but did not wish to precipitate matters and risk a refusal. "That fair woman has a delicate mind," he thought, "and is very religious. It will be well to make myself her friend before I offer to be her sweetheart."

The talk at the feast turned again to Wineland, and Leif Ericsson was eloquent about the sweetness of the air, the fertility of the soil, and the open winter weather which he had found there. Then Karlsefne asked Gudrid whether she would not like to go thither.

She shook her head. "Not now. Thorstan and I were on our way when the fate turned against us, and he died. It has brought us no luck yet. Two of Eric's sons have died for the sake of Wineland. But you," she said, looking in his face, "you will go. I think you are a lucky man. You have luck in your face."

"Eh," said Karlsefne, "I have thought myself pretty lucky so far; but now I am not so sure. I have been building on my luck since I came here. But I may get a fall."

She laughed. "You are bold, I can see, but yet you are careful too. You do not build except on good footings."

"If you think me bold, lady," he said, with raised brows, "you will think me too bold perhaps presently. Remember, when that time comes, that if a man sees his profit within his reach he is a fool if he don't stretch out his hand."

"He may be a fool," she said, "to think it so near." Her colour was high, her eyes shone. His own, narrowed and intense, held them.

"Do you know the name I give you in my private mind?" he asked her. She shook her head.

"I call you Constant-Kind."

"And why do you call me that? Do you think I am kind to every one?"

"I think that you have been," said Karlsefne, "and I believe that you would not willingly deny a service if you could do it."

"And what service do you ask of me?"

"Ah, I ask none as yet. But maybe I shall."

Certainly she knew what he wanted, and wondered whether he was the man predicted. Thorberg had prophesied an ugly man for one of her husbands. That could not be said of Karlsefne. He was not handsome by any means, but so full of fun that he would pass anywhere as well-looking. She had no love to give him; all that was buried with her doomed Thorstan; and yet she could see life to be a very pleasant thing with him beside her—a warm, sheltered, pleasant thing. She was rather of Freydis's opinion after an experience of two kinds of life, that a woman was happier in being loved than in loving. She had not thought so when Thorstan was her lover. Then her triumph and pride had been that she could give him inexhaustibly what he needed—but look how that had ended. She said to herself: "He will be kind to me, because he is kind by nature. I believe that is my nature too. Therefore I can give him what he wants, and find some comfort in it. I have known the highest, and that is enough for me. That will never come again. Let the other suffice, if it will satisfy him." With that she put the thought away in her heart, wishing to leave it there; yet she could not resist taking it out and looking at it now and again. It was still good to be loved, good to be desired, good to be the centre of a man's thoughts. Every time she looked at her hoard it seemed a little brighter.

Karlsefne took his time. It was close upon the spring when he asked her if she would have him. She met his looks calmly, and told him what she felt about it. "I am not very old yet," she said, "but I have had a great deal of experience. I have been married twice, and loved deeply once. That can never be again."

"Nay," he said, "I don't ask impossibilities of you. But I have love enough in my heart for the two of us. Do you trust me?"

"Yes," she said, "I do trust you."

"Why then," said Karlsefne, "will you give yourself to me?"

She thought. "You shall ask Eric if he is willing," she told him. "He loves me, and he is an old man. Since my father died he has been father to me. I have had nothing but love and kindness from him and his family. I will not leave him now, if he needs me—for he knows, and I know, that if I leave him again it will be for the last time."

Karlsefne drew near her and put his arm about her. "I will ask him—but if he agrees you will come?" She smiled and nodded her head. Then, "Will you kiss me?" he said.

"Is that in the bargain?"

He drew her close to him. "Oh, Gudrid, kiss me once. I'm on fire." So then she kissed him.

Eric looked rather chap-fallen. "You are asking me for the jewel on my breast," he said.

"That I know very well," said Karlsefne.

"She is not only a fair woman, but a wise and good woman. She is sweet-mannered, and sweet-natured. The soothsay about her is that she will rear a great race."

"She shall, if I have anything to do with it," said Karlsefne. "You know the name they give me."

"I think highly of you," Eric allowed. "Everything speaks well for you. But I will tell you this. If my son Leif were not entangled with a foreign woman, an earl's daughter by whom he has got a son, it would have been my joy to see him take Gudrid and rear that great race to my name. But it may well be that she will fulfil her destiny with you rather."

"I believe she will," said Karlsefne. "The moment I clapped eyes on her I said to myself, 'There stands before you the sweetest woman that lightens the world.' And I have had no other thought or desire since which has not drawn me to her. If you will give her to me you will do me the utmost service one man can do another. And she will come to me if you say the word. I tell you that."

Eric said it should be as he wished. The last feast that fine old man was ever to see was that which he made for Gudrid's wedding with Karlsefne.

XXIV

Directly he was married Karlsefne began to talk about the Wineland voyage, first to Gudrid, and then to the company at Brattalithe, where he still lived. Gudrid was eager to go. She had always wanted that; and when she found herself with child, that did not deter her—nor her husband either. "I am a prosperous man," he said, "and bring good fortune with me. If you are not afraid, why should I be? Let us trust to our luck, my Gudrid." She believed in him more than in any man she had had to do with yet. He seemed to her a more fortunate man than Leif himself. So it was agreed upon.

Whether it was the lucky star of Karlsefne or not which prevailed, there was more stir about this expedition than had been about any. There were to be two ships fitted for it. First of all, Freydis said that she intended for it—she and her husband Thorhall; then another Thorhall, him they called the Huntsman, offered himself—a tall, oldish, glum fellow, liked by nobody and trusted by few, but a man of great strength and courage, too able to be refused. Then came up Biorn from Herjolfsness offering himself and his ship. Altogether there were some hundred and forty people to be carried, of whom five only were women, and goods in proportion.

Karlsefne, saying that you never knew how things would go, carried livestock in the holds of both ships. He took ten head of cows, a score sheep, some goats, and a bull. He took ducks and hens, a dog or two, and some ponies for the women to ride. But he had some stranger stock yet, human stock, which Leif gave him. They were two Scots, a male and a female, whom he had had from Thorgunna's father in Orkney and had kept ever since, hoping they would breed; but they did not. They were wild, small, shaggy creatures, about the same height—the man was called Hake, the woman Haekia. They were said to be incredibly swift in running, and were certainly hardier than most human kinds. Summer and winter they wore but one garment, a long, sleeveless garment with a hood, which fell straight from the shoulders, and, being slit from the thighs, was fastened between their legs. It had no sleeves; their arms were bare to the shoulder. They called it in their own tongue *gioball*. You never saw one of these creatures without the other; they were inseparable—and yet they were never seen to speak to each other, or to use any kind of endearments. They would not eat if any one were looking at them, nor sleep except they were alone and in the dark. Gudrid tried to make friends with them. They sat still, looking down or beyond her; but never would meet her eyes.

So much for the company which, when all preparations were done, sailed at mid-summer from Ericshaven, with Karlsefne as leader. Gudrid shed tears at the parting with old Eric Red, knowing that she would never see him again. "Farewell, sweetheart," he said to her; "you leave this world the better for having had you in it." He rode his old white pony down to the quay, and sat there watching the ships go out with the tide. His red cloak was the last she saw of the haven.

The voyage was smooth, with a fair wind all the way. First they went round to the West Settlement, and Gudrid looked out for Lucefrith where her darkest days had also been her brightest. She could not have told it for herself, but Karlsefne showed it to her. The black cliffs now looked warm grey in the sun, the sea was green, sparkling with light; the creek was smooth flowing water lipping on silver sands. Karlsefne told her that nobody lived there now. "Mariners run in there in summer-time for water, and see the green flats and the mountains in a haze of heat. They say: 'This is a sweet and wholesome country. We will dwell here and work and be happy.' Then the winter comes upon them suddenly, white fogs, madness and death. You, my child, know as much of that as you ought." She shivered, and leaned her head against him. There was great store of comfort in Karlsefne; she esteemed him, she trusted him, she believed in his star; but Thorstan Ericsson had given her wings, and she had shed them into his grave. She would never fly again among the stars.

They took in water from the West Settlement and then sailed to the Bear Islands—small rocky, flat lands lying low in the great western surges. Thence with a north wind they came into the ocean and were two days without sight of land. But on the morning of the third day they saw land ahead, and came within reach of it, and cast anchor in a broad bay. This was the country to which Leif had been before and called Helloland.[1] Karlsefne had boats manned from either ship, and stayed a couple of days to explore. It was a litter of rock, very barren, and full of white foxes. They found plenty of fish, and laid in a good store; but that was no country in which to settle, so they left it, going south before a good northerly wind.

In two days' sailing they made out a land ahead, full of trees and dense undergrowth. That was certainly Leif's *Markland*. South-east of it, at no great distance, there was a large island. They saw a great bear prowling the shore, and gave his dwelling-place the name of Bear Island, out of compliment to him. Karlsefne did not stay to explore it.

They ran on still before the wind for another two days or three, saw land again, and made for it. This was a headland running far out into the sea, which they made and passed, then ran in close to the shore and coasted for some days without finding any haven. This was a very long strand, great stretches of white sand with nothing to break them up. Behind the dunes they could see the tops of great trees. It was judged that the whole country was low-lying and probably swampy. Ferly Strands was the name they gave to this interminable shore.

But yet it was not interminable, for it broke up at last into bays and creeks, with many islands which had beautiful trees on them, and rich herbage down to the sea-line, Karlsefne said that they would run in hereabouts and live ashore for a while. "We will send out our runners, to see what they can find out for us," he said. That was agreed upon.

[1] Believed to be Newfoundland.

XXV

They landed on the mainland on hard white sand, but beyond that there was turf, with patches of tall waving grass, then a belt of timber, and beyond them, as they soon made out, an infinite rolling country of woods and clothed hills, with lakes here and there. Gudrid was enchanted: the nimble and sweet air, trees taller than she had ever dreamed of, space, emptiness, silence: she stood with a finger to her lip, looking up and all about, and sometimes at her companions to see if they were not under the same spell as she. But the men were too busy choosing a good place for the camp, and Freydis was with them.

Karlsefne had no mind to be surprised by savages, so sent out men to cut wood. He intended to have a stockade round his camp in which at least the women could be defended. There were but five of them, it is true, but they were all married, and therefore precious. The men who were not married always hoped that they might be. Who could say what might be the lot of any adventurer? Let a married man die by all means—but not a wife. Tents were put up, a double stockade fixed round them; hammocks were slung. Very soon they had a fire going, and a pot over it. Gudrid, Freydis and the rest of the women saw to that. Karlsefne arranged for the watch.

The ships were left well manned, and a company from the landing-party put into each boat, and each boat at a sufficient distance from its companion. These crews were to be relieved by watches. Sentries also were posted about the stockade. They had found no signs of inhabitancy; but Karlsefne was very careful.

They had their meal in the open under a clear sky. The stars came out—larger, wetter stars, Gudrid said, than they had at home. Far off in the forest they heard beasts bellowing, and supposed them wild cattle. The bull from Karlsefne's ship thundered his answer to the challenge. They heard wolves at dusk, a chorus of them, and the barking of wild dogs. No sound of men came near them, nor were they disturbed in the night. In the morning Karlsefne sent a boat over to fetch the Scots.

They came, and fixed Karlsefne with intent blue eyes while he told them what they had to do. He showed them the sun, and with a sweep of his arm drew his course into the south. He made them understand that they were to run due south for three days, and then work back to the camp with whatever they could carry out of the country. They followed every sign he made, they looked at each other and spoke together, fierce, curt speeches. It was certain that they knew what they had to do, for without hesitation they began to do it at once. They looked at each other, then set off at a trot towards the creek below the stockade. Arrived there, they stripped off their single garments, folded them and put them on their heads; they swam the creek, which was a good half-mile broad, clothed themselves on the further shore, and then began to run towards the south. They ran like deer, incredibly fast, with high and short bounds, as if exulting in their legs, and very soon they were out of sight.

They waited for them three full days which were spent by the men in hunting and fishing. Game of all kinds was plenty. Karlsefne had a pony out and put Gudrid upon it. He took her a long way into the

forest and made her happy. She said to him: "You are kinder to me than I deserve, my friend." His answer was: "It is not hard to be kind to you, for you answer to the touch like an instrument of music. I win melody from you that way which enchants me." She said: "Believe me to be grateful. Believe that I give you in return all I have." "My dear love," said Karlsefne, "I know that. You have given me of your life. I never forget it." And then it was her turn to say: "It is not hard to give you that." So they were a happy couple.

Freydis too was expecting a child, but took it hardly, as she did everything else.

At sunset on the third day from starting the Scots came back. Their faces and arms were glistening with sweat, but they breathed easily and were not at all distressed. One of them carried a fine bunch of grapes, the other some ears of corn. It was wheat, but redder than what they had in any country which Karlsefne or his friends knew about. They collected from the Scot that it was wild wheat, and that the country where it grew was fruitful and good.

There was a debate about this expedition, the first of many. Karlsefne was sure that the scouts had found Wineland where Leif had once been; Thorhall the Huntsman thought not. Karlsefne was for going up the creek as far as a ship could go, and there to land their stock and spend the winter. Biorn, who was afraid of attack by natives, desired to keep to the open sea. It was compromised finally. Biorn's ship would remain in her present anchorage, but Thorhall would go up with Karlsefne. Thorhall was a man ill to deal with in any event. Neither company wanted him, but Karlsefne's company wanted him least—therefore he chose for that. Most of the stock and all the women but one were of that ship. Gudrid's child should be born about Christmas time. Her husband was keen to have a good harbourage for her, and all settled down before the time came.

So for a while the two ships parted company, and Karlsefne, having all his party safe aboard, hauled up his anchor, spread his canvas, and sailed into the creek on a flowing tide.

XXVI

Right in the mouth of the creek there was an island which they named Streamsey, because the currents about it were so many and so strong. It fairly swarmed with sea-birds, which hung over it like a cloud. It was very difficult to find a passage, but they managed that with hard rowing, and once past it, found plenty of water, and a noble country on either hand. They went up three days sailing, and there, where the woods fell more sparse and there seemed plenty of herbage for cattle, Karlsefne decided to make his winter quarters. The stock was disembarked; the stores, and the tents. They built themselves a stockade all round the camp, and hoped to have a good winter of it.

The winter came late, but was severe. There was great scarcity of pasture, the fishing fell off; they had to kill some of their cattle, but dared not depend upon that. There was trouble with some of the crew, begun by Thorhall the Huntsman, who began to preach heathenry to them, getting a few at a time in the woods and talking, and singing old songs. Karlsefne was full of business all this time, with parties out exploring the country, and so did not see what was going on in and about the camp. Then, one day, news was brought him that a whale had come into the creek and was stranded in shoal water. The men, short as they were of food, were eager to get at it. Karlsefne went out to see it—a huge beast, greyish and arched in the back. He did not know what sort of a whale it was, but the men were set upon it, and Thorhall vehement. "Get at it, get at it—what do you fear, man? I tell you it is a godsend," he said. He had been very queer in his ways for a week or more, and one day had been found upon a cliff overhanging the water, with his arms stiffly out, his chin towards the sky. His eyes had been shut, his mouth open, his nostrils splayed out. He had writhed and twisted about, talking in a strange tongue. They were some time bringing him to his senses, and had no thanks from him for doing it; but they had fetched him home and put him to bed. He had lain there with his head covered up until the news of the whale was brought in. That caused him to leap out of his bed. He was the most eager of them all to cut up the great beast.

Karlsefne gave the word, and they fell on the whale with hatchets and knives. Soon the pots were bubbling and the steam filling their nostrils. Karlsefne would not eat of it, and would not allow Gudrid any; but the rest made a feast. It was rich and savoury, very fat; this was the hour of Thorhall's triumph. He came and stood by the messes as they ate, with gleaming eyes. "Does this not prove to you that Redbeard was your friend? What had your white Christ brought you but death and misery? Now by my incantations I have brought Thor round to look on you with favour again. This is my doing, and your

leader here thought I was mad and tied me down to a bed."

Some men stopped eating as they heard him; some turned away and would not begin to eat. Karlsefne, when he knew what was going on, came down like a flame of fire. "What is this he says? That this is his doing—with prayers to Thor? And you of the new faith and the true faith, eat of what he offers to his idols! Cast that beastliness to the sea, and be done with it." Some of the eaters were ill already, and many were to be so; but Karlsefne was obeyed. The cauldrons were emptied over the cliffs, and the birds gathered from all quarters. They went hungry, and suffered much that winter; but by leading the cattle far into the woods they managed to keep them alive, and Gudrid did not fail of milk. Her boy was born on Christmas Eve, and christened by Karlsefne himself. He named him Snorre after his own grandfather.

After that things went better. There came rain which broke up the ice and thinned off all the snow. They began to get fish again; mild westerly winds enabled them to go farther afield. Biorn came up from his anchorage to see Karlsefne, and debates about the future were renewed.

Karlsefne was now bent on going south, and Biorn, with Thorhall, equally set upon the north. It was clear that the two ships must part company; and so they did as soon as the spring weather was come. The tale has little more to say of Biorn and his party. It is supposed that they fell in with bad weather in the north, and that they were driven over the ocean. Thorhall was heard of long afterwards in Ireland, as having fought and died there.

XXVII

But Karlsefne, the prosperous man, did well. He sailed along the land in and out of beautiful wooded islands until he came to the mouth of a great river.[1] He entered that on the flood and sailed up for many days. It was a broad and noble river which came, as they discovered, out of a lake. Here was such a land as they had never seen before, so beautiful, so fruitful that they had no desire to seek further. They called this land Hope, for here was the utmost they had dreamed of. There were broad acres of wheat growing here, self-sown; upon the slopes of the hills wild vines were thick and full of bud; the streams were full of fish; there were deer in the woods, and everywhere in the early mornings the piping of birds. Karlsefne said: "My Gudrid, we have found Wineland the Good. Here we will stay awhile." She was happy to be in so good a place.

They made their camp on the shores of the lake, and built themselves houses of timber, with a stockade and trench about the whole Settlement. There was abundance of food for the animals, abundance for themselves, with promise of a harvest both of corn and of wine. No signs of human occupation had been found as yet. They began to think that they had Wineland to themselves, and used to go far afield, even to being out for days together and sleeping in the open. But Karlsefne kept his eyes wide for some possible attack, and was proved to be right.

Early one morning when he went down to the lake shore he saw boats upon the quiet water. He counted nine of them. They kept close company and came on steadily. He looked beyond them but could see no more. "With no more than nine of them, this won't be a long affair," he thought to himself; but he went back to the Settlement and called out his men. Then he went into his own house and called Gudrid to come. "Are you minded to see some of the Winelanders, my Gudrid? Bring your baby with you, and I will show them to you. I don't think they mean us any harm." Gudrid went with him without question.

By this time the settlers had lined the shore, and the hide-boats had drawn up within bowshot and were making signals. A man stood up in each boat and waved a pole over his head. He swept it round in circles, and moved it from east to west, following the course of the sun. "What do they want with us?" says Karlsefne. "Not war, I think. Now who will come out to meet them with me? We will show them a white shield, but there shall be weapons at the bottom of the boat." He soon had a crew, and was soon afloat.

The native boats scattered out in a half-moon as the adventurers came on. Karlsefne saw that he was being hemmed in, but having the notion fixed in his head that no harm was intended, he did not give orders to cease rowing, and stood up in the bows himself with his white shield displayed. When he was within speaking distance he bade his men rest on their oars. By and by, as he had expected, curiosity did his work for him. The hide-boats came in and in, each of them holding five or six men. In one at

least he saw a woman with a baby. "If they bring their babies out to see us, it's no more than I have done," Karlsefne said. "They mean peace, and they shall have it."

He invited them forward with open arms, and all signs of friendliness, and presently they were all crowded about. Small people they were, very dark brown, very ugly, with flat faces, coarse black hair twisted and tortured into peaks and knots. They had broad fat cheeks and enormous eyes. Their talk was like the chattering of birds.

Karlsefne invited them to shore, and very cautiously their boats followed his. They landed and were induced to mingle with the large company they found there. Gudrid and her baby were the great attractions. The first man who saw her suckling it stared and jumped about. He called shrilly to his friends behind, and a body of them came to join him. They pushed forward the brown woman with her child. Gudrid, not at all put out or frightened, held out her hand. The woman stared hard at her white breast, then opened her gown and showed her own. She gave her baby suck and grinned community of nature in Gudrid's face. Gudrid, with one of those happy motions of hers, looked round to see if Karlsefne was by, and finding that he was, put up her hand into his.

That shot told. There was much commotion among the brown people, much bickering and stirring; and presently they pushed one of their own men forward, and joined his hand with that of the mother. Joyful murmurings arose. Everybody understood. Now it was Freydis's turn. She stood disdainfully apart, with folded arms, but her colouring and shape betrayed her. Here was plainly to be another mother soon, as they did not fail to tell each other. Then nothing would do but her husband must be found for her. His friends dragged him out and put him beside her, no more willing to go than she was to have him. "Handfast her, you dog," said Karlsefne. "How else will they believe you?" So that was done. Freydis fumed and burned, as handsome and furious a young woman as you could have hoped to see. All went so well that Karlsefne was moved to hospitality, sending a man off for milk and fish. They crowded about for their share, and growing bold by degrees handled the women's gowns, the men's weapons, and were for spying into the stockade. The bull, who was feeding in there, snorted and puffed up the dust; presently, wagging his head, he came towards them and sent them flying back. Karlsefne, by signs, tried to make them understand that he was ready to barter if they were. He touched the fur with which they were all clad, and pointed to the milk bowls. When they saw what he would be at, they in turn fingered the weapons which every man had about him. Clearly they had not the art of forging steel. It was long before they would leave the shore, and when they did go it was with one consent, without any words passing. Quite suddenly they turned about and ran down to the shore, launched their canoes and were out in the water like a horde of rats. They rowed down the lake, as if towards the sea.

Nothing more was seen of them for some time, but presently they began to come in numbers, always very friendly and willing to barter. They brought furs with them—fox and marten, beaver, as well as coarser kinds, bear and wolf and elk. Karlsefne would exchange no weapons; but milk he offered, and that they drank greedily and on the spot, and cloth too, of which he had a good store. Red cloth took their fancy most; they seemed as if they must have it, it was a kind of lust. The breadths he could spare them grew narrower and narrower; they pushed out their furs for it with no consideration of what they got in exchange. At last it became a kind of madness, and Karlsefne said it had better stop. "They take it like strong water; one of these days they will be killing men for it." It was a prophecy on his part—for they came in greater and greater numbers, and when there was no more red cloth for them, they howled and chattered and looked dangerous. Karlsefne and the men with him faced them with the best heart they had, but he ordered a retreat to the stockade, and when he was pretty near the entrance bade a man go in and bring out the bull. That answered. The great beast stood in the doorway pawing the ground and breathing hard. When he saw what was in front of him, down went his head, and he charged. The savages scattered all ways and saved themselves. In a few moments the lake was black with canoes; it was, the tale says, as though the water was covered with floating charcoal. Karlsefne did not like the look of things at all. He doubled the watch on the ship and strengthened the stockade; but did not wish to frighten Gudrid, who was so happy with her child, and beginning, as he could see, to love himself. He knew that she loved him, because at all sorts of times he found out that she had been looking at him while he moved about, busy over something or other. He taxed her with it one day. "I think that you love me, Gudrid."

She put her head on one side. "What makes you think so?" He told her; so then she owned to it, and he wished to know why. She said that she could not tell, but in such a way that he saw that she could, and wished him to know. So then he pressed her. "Tell me, Gudrid, why you love me." She touched her child's head. "Because you are strong, and good, and brave. And because you gave me this. A woman must love her child's father."

"Ask Freydis that," said Karlsefne; and she answered him; "Freydis loves more than she chooses to say. When Freydis has a child, you will see that she will love it."

"But not her man on that account," he said. "It is only a heart like yours, my Gudrid, that can love because it loves. For I see very well that you love me because you love this boy, and did not until he came."

She looked gently at him, half excusing herself. "I liked you well, and was grateful."

"Ah, yes, maybe," he said, "but that was not how you loved Thorstan Ericsson."

She said: "I was younger then, and I loved him so much because our time was short. But I love you better than I loved Thorstan, because of the peace you have put in my heart."

[1] The Hudson River.

XXVIII

There was no further visitation from the savages for some time. The leaves fell, the nights grew short, and there came a spell of cold; but if this were winter it was one which no Greenlander could fear. The sky was blue, the sun warm on the skin; there was no snow, and the frost a mere white rime which melted in an hour. Their cattle never failed of feed, and as for themselves, they had so well harvested the wild wheat and the grapes that they had nothing to fear.

The winter, to call it so, was well advanced before the savages came; but one day they were reported in large numbers on the lake, and Karlsefne gave orders how they were to be received. None were to be let inside the stockade; all the men were to have their weapons; such stuff as they had for barter was to be held up from within the defences and thrown over in exchange. He himself with a few of the best men should stand in the entry.

Now while they were waiting for the savages and could still see some of them out on the water, while others were disembarking on the shore, Gudrid was sitting just inside the door of her house with her child asleep on her lap. She sat full in the sun, and was quiet and happy, as she generally was. Presently there passed a dark shadow across the open door. Gudrid looked up quickly. A woman stood there inside the pillars of the porch and looked fixedly at her. She was dressed in black, drawn very tightly across her; she was about Gudrid's own height, and had a ribbon over her hair—which was of a light-brown colour, and not coarse as most of the savages' was. She was a pale, grave woman, and had the biggest eyes Gudrid had ever seen. They were wide open, grey, and had a world of sorrow in them. Gudrid was not at all afraid, because she thought the woman looked too sad to be wicked or ill-disposed; besides, she did not believe that any one could be ill-disposed to her. So she smiled up in her face and waited for her to speak.

When she did speak it did not seem at all remarkable that she should be perfectly understood. "What is your name?" she said plainly.

Gudrid answered her simply, "My name is Gudrid. And what is your name?"

"My name is Gudrid," said the woman, and the real Gudrid laughed softly.

"Come then, Gudrid, and sit by me," she said, and held out her hand. The woman stared mournfully at her, and seemed to have trouble in speaking again. She turned her head about as if her throat hurt her. Then she said, "No, I cannot—I may not." Again she struggled, as she said, "Go from here. Do not stay." There came a loud cry from the stockade, and Gudrid started and got up. She went to the door and looked out. The woman was not there.

By that time she was very much frightened, and saw them fighting at the entry. The outside of the fence seemed thick with savages, and presently some of them rushed the opening and came in. Freydis was at the door of her hut and saw them. Her face flamed. "Have at you, devils!" she shouted, and snatched up a double-handed sword. With this she went stumbling towards them, being so far on with child that she could scarcely walk. She had the long sword in one hand, but needed two to swing it. Her shift incommoded her, so she ripped it open and let it fall behind her. Then bare-breasted she whirled the great sword over her head and began to lay about her like a man. Her yellow hair flew out behind her like a flag; her face was flame-red, and her eyes glittering like ice. The savages fell back before her,

and at the entry were caught by Karlsefne, returning from chasing a horde of them, and all killed. The others had gone or been driven off. Two of the Icelanders had been killed, and many were hurt.

After this they had a council what had best be done. Gudrid told her story. Nobody had seen the woman but she, and nobody could make anything of it. Freydis thought that she was a ghost, but Gudrid was sure of her reality. "I think myself," she said, "that she was a woman of our own people either stolen by the savages from a ship, or cast ashore from a wreck, or lost by some adventurers of a former day. I never saw any woman with so much horror in her face. I would do a great deal if I could find her again. But the fighting began, and she went away without my seeing her go."

"I should like more to know how she came in," said Karlsefne, "than how she went out. But whether she lives or is dead she had a warning which we had best take heed of. I am for going home myself."

Freydis said that she should stay. She liked the country and was minded to live in it. Others were of her mind. About a hundred chose to settle there with her and her husband.

There arose then the question of a ship, and Karlsefne said that he could not go home and leave them there with no means of escape. He said that he would go out in his own ship and look for the others, but Freydis would not have that. "Leave us here; we shall do well enough," she said. "As for the ship that has Thorhall the Huntsman in it, I would far sooner have none than his, with him in it."

"We have tools enough here, and timber enough," Karlsefne said. "We will build you a ship as soon as look at you." So it was settled they were to build a new ship before they left. That night Freydis's child was born. It was a girl, and she called it Walgerd. That had been the name of Thorstan's daughter, who had not lived. Gudrid wondered why she chose that name. She could never understand Freydis—nobody could; yet she had been right about her in one thing. Freydis loved the child more than life itself. She was so jealous of it that she was uneasy when any one came in to see her, and used to lean right over it and hide it out of sight. Her yellow hair fell over her face, her eyes showed fire. She was like a wild beast guarding her young. As for Thorhall, her husband, she warned him out of the house, and he never dared put his head inside the door. She allowed Gudrid the entry, sulkily, it is true; but that was only her way of doing things. She was glad of her in her heart. "I am even with you now," she said, with her face to the wall.

"I am glad of it," Gudrid said. "I always wished you happy."

"I have never been so, since I became a woman," said Freydis, and Gudrid did not know what she meant.

"I was happy enough," she went on, in a grumbling, even voice—as even it was as the constant running of water in a drain—"when I was a child, running and sporting with the boys. I loved all the things that they loved—I could swim as well as any, and ride, and fight with stones. But when they began to find me a girl, and to hold me and try to be alone with me, I had horror. They made me ashamed. And worse was to come—and I almost killed a young man for it—and after that I hated men, as I do still."

"They mean no harm," said Gudrid. "They do after their kind."

"But their kind is not mine. To be held in a man's arm is horrible to me."

"It is good to me, sometimes," said Gudrid.

"But when I saw you with Thorstan's child about to be born—and saw how rich and sedate you walked the ways, and how peace sat upon your forehead like a wreath, then I grudged you." Freydis turned round in the bed and showed her burning face. "And I said, 'This woman has a secret joy, and for all she is so quiet and still she is stronger than I.' And when the child died I was glad. I said, 'Now we are level again, but I will be better than you, for I will have a child which shall live and be strong like me.' But you have had yours first, and it is a boy. So you are better than me still." Then her eyes filled with hot tears, which made her eyelids blink.

"Oh, Freydis," Gudrid said, "you don't grudge me my boy?"

"No, no, it is not that. It is that I am ashamed. You are good, and I am very bad. I hate myself now."

Gudrid kissed her.

"Tell me, Freydis, now," she said, "why did you call your girl Walgerd?"

Freydis did not want to answer, but presently she said: "I should have called her Gudrid if that had been lucky. But we must not use the names of living persons for the new-born, so I called her Walgerd,

because yours had been called so. I went as near to you as I could."

It seemed to hurt Freydis to talk about it, but Gudrid kissed her again, and went away feeling happy about her. "It is good to be loved, even by Freydis," she said to Karlsefne, whose answer was, "Who could help loving you?"

XXIX

But before the ship-building was began Freydis changed her mind, and said that she would go home with the rest. Nobody caring to stop alone out there without some chieftain over them, it came to it that all must go home in one ship. They killed what stock they could not take alive, and sailed out of the river at the beginning of summer. Gudrid's boy Snorre was just two years old, and Karlsefne was anxious to be safe at home before he had a brother or sister.

They waited about at the river's mouth for a fair wind, then set all sail and ran before it northerly along the coast. So they came again to Markland and stayed there for certain days. It was there that Karlsefne and some of the crew, on shore after game, surprised some savages in a hollow of the woods: a bearded man, two women and two children. He saw them, unperceived himself, stalked them with art, and made a dash into the midst of them. He caught the two children, but the others disappeared into the earth. He brought them home with him and gave them to Gudrid. "Can you have too many children? I don't think so." She took them gladly and brought them up. They were brown all over and naked; they had black eyes round and staring as beads, but a ring of blue all about them, as blue as that on a thrush's egg. In time she taught them her own tongue, and in time had them baptized—but that was not until she went to Iceland. When they sailed from Markland the wind still held good, and they came safely into Eric's frith, and picked up their moorings in the haven. It was as if they had never been away.

Leif came down to welcome them, and they stayed with him the rest of the year. Eric Red was dead, and Leif not married. He had his son with him born in Orkney, but Thorgunna herself had not come, and Leif would not marry any other woman. Theodhild his mother kept house for him—it was no longer the great hospitality which old Eric had loved to maintain.

They heard of the fate of Thorhall the Huntsman lost in Ireland, and of Biorn who had sailed with him. Their ship had been driven out of her course by tempest, and had drifted into a strange sea which they called The Maggoty Sea. Here the water was full of worms, which fastened on the ship and ate the timbers, so that she became rotten under them. They had a boat with them which the worms would not touch, and cast lots which should go in her and which remain. Thorhall drew a good lot and Biorn another; half the crew got into the boat. But then, as they were casting off, a young man who had been with Biorn in Iceland and on many voyages looked over the side and said, "Biorn, do you leave me here?" Biorn said, "Why, what can I do?"

"You should keep the promise you made to me when I left my father's house to go along with you," the young man said.

Biorn looked about. "Well," he said, "what would you have?"

The young man answered, "I would have you take me in the boat."

"Would you have my place? Do you mean that?"

The young man did not answer him, but said, "Well, I am young to die."

Then Biorn said, "In with you, then. Death is a hard thing for young men." So they changed places, and Biorn saw the boat out of sight. It was wrecked on the coast of Ireland, and many of the company drowned.

Gudrid's son Biorn was born at Brattalithe and named after a brave man; and then it became a question for Karlsefne what he had better do. He had had from Gudrid a fine estate in Greenland, but he had one of his own at Rowanness in Iceland, and wanted to take her there. He told her: "I had the only good thing in Greenland when I had you; and you were not born here, and do not belong here either. But it shall be as you please."

She said at once, "Let us go home to Iceland," and as she said it her face fell and she looked sorrowfully at him.

"What is it now, sweetheart?"

"I remember," she said, "what was foretold of me when first I came to Greenland, and all of it has been fulfilled but two things. Now I am afraid again, though it was so long ago."

Karlsefne laughed. "And one was that you should end your days in Iceland?" She nodded, fearing the rest; but he went on—

"And the other was that you should outlive me?" She nodded again; but he looked at her and laughed, until she did too, but ruefully.

"Let be all that, my dear," he said. "Death is not so fearful a thing—and the longer we live the less fearful it is. But I will tell you this, my Gudrid: I should be a miserable man were you to die first. And what would these children do without you? I call that comfortable soothsay, for my part—but I am not for dying yet awhile."

He was not; for the rest of his tale is as prosperous as its beginning. He settled down in Iceland upon his own land, and did well by Gudrid and her children before his time came. As for her, it is said that when she had seen her sons out in the world, and married her daughters seemly, she turned to religion. A pilgrimage to Rome is reported, and that she became a nun. Thorberg had predicted of her that she should find the life which she loved best, and may have meant that of religion. The fact appears to be that Gudrid was a sweet nature and could be happy anywhere if she were allowed to love. And if it is not permitted always to love men, a woman can always love God.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GUDRID THE FAIR: A TALE OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA ***

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