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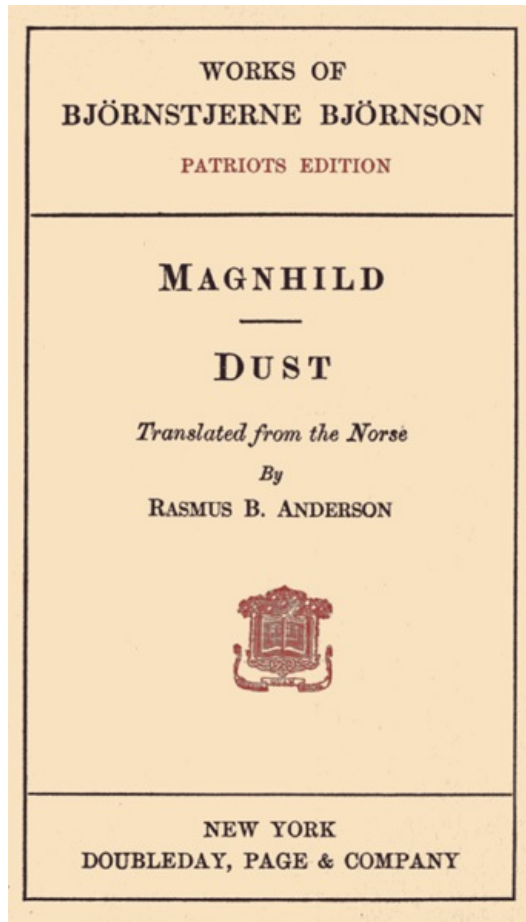
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MAGNHILD

DUST



WORKS OF
BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON

PATRIOTS EDITION

MAGNHILD

DUST

Translated from the Norse
By
RASMUS B. ANDERSON
NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

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PREFACE.

[5]

"MAGNHILD" was planned during the summer of 1873, while the translator accompanied Mr. Björnson on a journey across Norway. The story is located in Lærdalen and Skarlie's home is in Lærdalsören, a small town at the head of one of the branches of the far-famed Sognefjord on the west coast. I well remember with what care the author made his observations. The story was written the following winter in Rome, but was not published until 1877, when it appeared in the original in Copenhagen and in a German translation in the *Rundschau* simultaneously.

The reader will see that "Magnhild" is a new departure, and marks a new epoch in Björnson's career as a writer of fiction. It is but justice to say that Mr. Björnson himself looks upon this as one of his less finished works, and yet I believe that many of his American readers will applaud the manner in which he has here championed the rights of a woman when she has become united with such a man as Skarlie.

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The celebration, on the 10th of August, 1882, of the twenty-fifth anniversary since the publication of "Synnöve Solbakken," was a great success. The day was celebrated by his friends in all parts of Scandinavia and by many of his admirers in Germany, France, and Italy. At Aulestad (his home in Norway), more than two hundred of his personal friends from the Scandinavian countries were assembled, among whom may be mentioned the eminent Swedish journalist Hedlund, the Danish poet Drachmann, and the Norwegian author Kristofer Janson. Over Aulestad, which was handsomely decorated, floated Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and American flags. There was a great banquet, at which speeches and poems were not wanting. Mr. Björnson received a number of valuable presents and countless telegrams from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, England, and America.

This volume closes the present series of translations of Björnson's works. The seven volumes^[1] now published contain all the novels and short stories that Björnson has written. His other works are, as shown in the biographical introduction to "Synnöve Solbakken," chiefly dramas.

[1] The first edition of Björnson's writings, from which the present edition is arranged, was in seven volumes. "Magnhild" formed the seventh volume, and the present preface is reprinted as it there stood.

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Being thus about to send my last Björnson manuscript to the publishers, I desire to express my hearty thanks to the press and to the public for the generous reception they have given these stories as they have appeared one by one. Those who are acquainted with Björnson's original and idiomatic style can appreciate the many difficulties his translators have had to contend with. I am fully conscious of my shortcomings and am particularly aware of my failure to transmit the peculiar national flavor of Björnson's style, but I have done my best, and have turned his phrases into as good English as I could command. Others might have been more successful, but they could not have taken more pains, nor could they have derived more pleasure from the work than I have found in it. To Auber Forestier, who has kindly assisted me in the translation of the whole series, I once more extend my hearty thanks. Without her able help the work could not have progressed so rapidly. Finally, I commend "Magnhild" to the tender mercy of the critic and to the good-will of the reader, and say adieu!

RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

ASGARD, MADISON, WISCONSIN.
November, 1882.

MAGNHILD.

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CHAPTER I.

[9]

THE landscape has high, bold mountains, above which are just passing the remnants of a storm. The valley is narrow and continually winding. Coursing through it is a turbulent stream, on one side of which there is a road. At some distance up the slopes farms are spread; the buildings are mostly low and unpainted, yet numerous; heaps of mown hay and fields of half ripe grain are dotted about.

When the last curve of the valley is left behind the fjord becomes visible. It lies sparkling beneath an uplifting fog. So completely is it shut in by mountains that it looks like a lake.

Along the road there jogs at the customary trot a horse with a cariole-skyds.^[2] In the cariole may be seen a waterproof coat and a south-wester, and between these a beard, a nose, and a pair of spectacles. Lashed to the back seat is a trunk, and seated on this, with her back to the cariole, is a full-grown "skyds"-girl, snugly bundled up in a kerchief. She sits there dangling her coarsely-shod feet. Her arms are tucked in under the kerchief. Suddenly she bursts out with: "Magnhild! Magnhild!"

[2] Conveyance.

The traveler turned to look after a tall woman in a waterproof cloak who had just walked past. He had caught a glimpse of a delicately-outlined face, beneath a hood which was drawn over the brow; now he saw the owner standing with her forefinger in her mouth, staring. As he was somewhat persistent in his gaze, she blushed.

"I will step in just as soon as I put up the horse," called out the skyds-girl.

They drove on.

"Who was that, my dear?" asked the traveler.

"She is the wife of the saddler down at yonder point," was the reply.

In a little while they had advanced far enough to gain a view of the fjord and the first houses on the point. The skyds-girl reined in the horse and jumped down from the trunk. She first attended to the animal's appearance, and then busied herself with her own toilet. It had ceased raining, and she removed her kerchief, folded it, and stowed it away in a little pocket in front of the cariole. Then thrusting her fingers under her head-kerchief she tried to arrange her hair, which hung in matted locks over her cheeks.

"She had such a singular look,"—he pointed over his shoulders.

The girl fixed her eyes on him, and she began to hum. Presently she interrupted herself with,—

"Do you remember the land-slide you passed a few miles above here?"

"I passed so many land-slides."

She smiled.

"Yes; but the one I mean is on the other side of a church."

"It was an old land-slide?"

"Yes; it happened long ago. But that is where once lay the gard belonging to her family. It was swept away when she was eight or nine years old. Her parents, brothers and sisters, and every living thing on the gard, perished. She alone was saved. The land-slide bore her across the stream, and she was found by the people who hastened to the spot,—she was insensible."

The traveler became absorbed in thought.

"She must be destined to something," said he, at last.

The girl looked up. She waited some time, but their eyes did not meet. So she resumed her seat on the trunk, and they drove on.

The valley widened somewhat in the vicinity of the point; farms were spread over the plain: to the right lay the church with the churchyard around it; a little farther on the point itself, a small town, with a large number of houses, most of which were but one story high and were either painted white and red or not painted at all; along the fjord ran the wharf. A steamer was just smoking there; farther down, by the mouth of the river, might be seen a couple of old brigs taking in their cargoes.

The church was new, and showed an attempt at imitating the old Norse wooden church architecture. The traveler must have had some knowledge of this, for he stopped, gazed a while at the exterior, then alighted, went through the gateway, and into the church; both gate and door stood open. He was scarcely inside of the building when the bells began to ring; through the opening he saw a bridal procession coming up from the little town. As he took his departure the procession was close by the churchyard gate, and by this he stood while it moved in: the bridegroom, an elderly man, with a pair of large hands and a large face, the bride, a young girl, with a plump, round face, and of a heavy build. The bridesmaids were all clad in white and wore gloves; not one of them ventured to bestow more than a side glance at the stranger; most of them stooped, one was hump-backed; there was not one who could truly be said to have a fine form.

Their male friends lagged behind, in gray, brown, and black felt hats, and long frock coats, pea-jackets, or round-about. Most of them had a lock of hair drawn in front of the ear, and those who had beards wore them to cover the entire chin. The visages were hard, the mouths usually coarse; most of them had tobacco stains about the corners of their mouths, and some had cheeks distended with tobacco-quids.

Involuntarily the traveler thought of her in the waterproof cloak. Her history was that of the landscape. Her refined, unawakened face hung as full of yearning as the mountains of showers; everything that met his eye, both landscape and people, became a frame for her.

As he approached the road, the skyds-girl hastened to the wayside where the horse was grazing. While she was tugging at the reins she continued to gaze fixedly at the bridal procession.

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"Are you betrothed?" asked the stranger, smiling.

"He who is to have me has no eyes yet," she replied, in the words of a proverb.

"Then, I suppose, you are longing to get beyond your present position," said he, adding: "Is it to America?"

She was surprised; that query was evidently well aimed.

"Is it in order that you may more speedily earn your traveling expenses that you have gone into the skyds line? Do you get plenty of fees? Hey?"

Now she colored. Without uttering a word in reply, she promptly took her seat on the trunk with her back to the stranger, before he had stepped into the cariole.

Soon they had neared the white-painted hotels which were situated on either side of the street close by the entrance to the little town. In front of one of these they paused. By the balustrade above stood a group of carriers, chiefly young fellows; they had most likely been watching the bridal procession and were now waiting for steamer-bound travelers. The stranger alighted and went in, while the girl busied herself with unstrapping the trunk. Some one must have offered her help, for as the traveler approached the window he saw her push from her a great lubberly boy in a short jacket. In all probability some impertinence had also been offered her and had been repaid in the same coin, for the other carriers set up a shout of laughter. The girl came walking in with the heavy trunk. The traveler opened the door for her, and she laughed as she met him. While he was counting out her money to her, he said,—

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"I agree with you, Rönnaug, you ought to be off to America as soon as possible."

He now handed her two specie dollars as her fee.

"This is my mite for your fund," said he, gravely.

She regarded him with wide-open eyes and open mouth, took the money, returned thanks, and then put up both hands to stroke back her hair, for it had again fallen out of place. While thus engaged she dropped some of the coins she held in one half-closed hand. She stooped to pick them up, and as she did so some of the hooks in her boddice gave way. This loosened her kerchief and one end fell out, for a knot in one corner contained something heavy. While readjusting this she again dropped her money. She got off at last, however, with all her abundance, and was assailed with a volley of rude jests. This time she made no reply; but she cast a shy glance into the hotel as she drove the horse past, full trot.

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It was the traveler's lot to see her once more; for as he passed down to the steamer, later in the day, she was standing with her back turned toward the street, at a door over which hung a sign-board bearing the inscription: "Skarlie, Saddler." As he drew nearer he beheld Magnhild in the inner passage. She had not yet removed her waterproof cloak, although the rain had long since ceased. Even the hood was still drawn over her head. Magnhild was the first to espy the stranger, and she drew farther back into the house; Rönnaug turned, and then she too moved into the passage.

That evening Rönnaug's steamer ticket was bought; for the sum was complete. Magnhild did not undress after Rönnaug had gone home late in the evening. She sat in a large arm-chair in the little low room, or restlessly paced the floor. And once, with her heavy head pressed against the window pane, she said half aloud,—

"Then she must be destined to something."

CHAPTER II.

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SHE had heard these words before.

The first time it was in the churchyard that blustering winter day her fourteen relatives were buried,—all whom she had loved, both parents and grandparents, and brothers and sisters. In fancy she saw the scene again! The wind had here and there swept away the snow, the pickets of the fence stood out in sharp prominence, huge rocks loomed up like the heads of monsters whose bodies were covered by the snow-drifts. The wind whistled behind the little group of mourners through the open church porch whose blinds had been taken out, and down from the old wooden belfry came the clanging toll of the bell, like one cry of anguish after another.

The people that were gathered together were blue with the cold; they wore mittens and their garments were closely buttoned up. The priest appeared in sea-boots and had on a skin suit

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beneath his gown; his hands also were eased in large mittens, and he vigorously fought the air round about him with these. He waved one of them toward Magnhild.

"This poor child," said he, "remained standing on her feet, and with her little sled in her hand she was borne downward and across the frozen stream,—the sole being the Lord saw fit to save. To what is she destined?"

She rode home with the priest, sitting on his lap. He had commended her to the care of the parish, and took her home with him "for the present," in order to set a good example. She nestled up to his fur overcoat, with her small cold hands inside of his huge mittens, beside his soft, plump hands. And all the while she kept thinking: "What am I destined to, I wonder?"

She presumed that her mind would become clear on this point when she got into the house. But nothing met her eye here she had not seen before until she entered the inner room, where a piano which some one was just playing in the highest degree attracted her.

But for that very reason she forgot the thought she had brought in with her.

In this household there were two daughters, heavy-looking girls, with small round heads and long, thick braids of light hair. They had recently been provided with a governess, a pale, though fleshy person, with her neck more exposed and her sleeves more open than Magnhild had ever seen in any one before. Her voice sounded as though it needed clearing, and Magnhild involuntarily coughed several times; but this was of no avail. The governess asked Magnhild's name and inquired if she knew how to read, to which Magnhild replied in the affirmative. Her whole family had been noted for their love of reading. And then the governess proposed, still with the same husky after-tone in her voice, that she should be allowed to share the instructions of the little girls, in order to spur them on. Magnhild was one year older than the elder.

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The mistress of the house was sitting by, engaged with her embroidery. She now glanced up at Magnhild and said, "With pleasure," then bent over her work again. She was a person of medium size, neither thin nor stout, and had a small head with fair hair. The priest, who was heavy and corpulent, came down-stairs after removing his gown; he was smoking, and as he crossed the floor, he said, "There comes a man with fish," and passed out of the room again.

The youngest girl once more attacked her scales. Magnhild did not know whether she should remain where she was, or go back to the kitchen. She sat on the wood-box by the stove tormented with the uncertainty, when dinner was announced in the adjoining room. All work was put aside, and the little one at the piano closed the instrument. Now when Magnhild was alone and heard the rattling of the knives, she began to cry; for she had not yet eaten a morsel that day. During the meal the priest came out from the dining-room; for it had been decided that he had not bought enough fish. He opened the window and called out to the man to wait until dinner was over. As he turned to go back into the dining-room he espied the little one on the wood-box.

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"Are you hungry?" asked he.

The child made no reply. He had lived long enough among the peasants to know that her silence meant "yes," and so taking her by the hand he led her to the table, where room was silently made for her.

In the afternoon she went coasting with the little girls, and then joined them in their studies and had a lesson in Bible history with them; after this she partook of the afternoon lunch with them, and then played with them until they were called to supper, which they all ate at the same table. She slept that night on a lounge in the dining-room and took part the next day in the duties of the priest's daughters.

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She had no clothes except those she had on; but the governess made over an old dress for her; some articles of old linen belonging to one of the little girls were given to her, and a pair of their mother's boots. The lounge she had slept on was removed from the dining-room, because it occupied the space needed for some shoemakers who were to "see the household well shod." It was placed in the kitchen, but was in the way there; then in the bed-room of the maid-servants, but there the door continually struck against it; finally it was carried up to the nursery. Thus it was that Magnhild came to eat, work, and sleep with the priest's daughters; and as new clothes were never made for her she naturally fell to wearing theirs.

Quite as much by chance she began to play the piano. It was discovered that she had more talent for music than the daughters of the house, so it was thought best that she should learn, in order to help them. Moreover, she grew tall, and developed a fine voice for singing. The governess took great pains in teaching her to sing by note; she did so at first merely in the mechanical way she did everything, later because the remarkable skill in reading at sight which her pupil developed under her guidance proved a diversion to them all in their mountain solitude. The priest could lie on the sofa (the place he most frequently occupied) and laugh aloud when he heard Magnhild running all sorts of exercises up and down like a squirrel in a tree. The result of this, so far as Magnhild was concerned, was that the young girl learned—not more music, as one might have supposed, but—basket-making.

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The fact was that about this time there spread, like an epidemic among the people, the idea that skill in manual industries should be cultivated among the peasants, and propagators of the new doctrine appeared also in this parish. Magnhild was chosen as the first pupil; she was thought to have the most "dexterity." The first thing taught was basket-making, then double

spinning, then weaving, especially of the more artistic kinds, and after this embroidery, etc., etc. She learned all these things very rapidly, that is to say, she learned zealously as long as she was gaining an insight into each; further development did not interest her. But as she was henceforth expected to teach others, grown people as well as children, it became a settled habit for her to repair twice each week to the public school where many were assembled. When anything had once become part of her daily routine she thought no more about it. The house that had given her shelter was responsible for this.

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The mistress of the house made her daily regulation visits to the kitchen, cellar, and stables, the rest of the time she embroidered; the whole house was covered with embroidery. She might be taken for a fat spider, with a little round head, spinning its web over chairs, tables, beds, sledges, and carts. Her voice was rarely heard; she was seldom addressed by any one.

The priest was much older than his wife. His face was characterized by its small proportion of nose, chin, and eyes, and its very large share of all else belonging to it. He had fared badly at his examination, and had been compelled to support himself by teaching until, when he was advancing in years, he had married one of his former pupils, a lady with quite a nice property. Then he betook himself to seeking a clerical appointment, "the one thing in which he had shown perseverance," as he was himself in the habit of playfully remarking. After a ten years' search he had succeeded in getting a call (not long since) to his present parish, and he could scarcely hope for a better one. He passed most of his time in lying on the sofa reading, chiefly novels, but also newspapers and periodicals.

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The governess always sat in the same chair in which Magnhild had seen her the first day, took the same walk to the church and back each day, and never failed to be ready for her duties on the stroke of the clock. She gradually increased in weight until she became excessively stout; she continued to wear her neck bare and her sleeves open, furthermore to speak in the same husky voice, which no effort on her part had ever yet been able to clear.

The priest's daughters became stout and heavy like their father, although they had small round heads like their mother. Magnhild and they lived as friends, in other words, they slept in the same room, and worked, played, and ate together.

There were never any ideas afloat in this parish. If any chanced to find their way there from without they got no farther than the priest's study. The priest was not communicative. At the utmost he read aloud to his family some new or old novel that he had found diverting.

One evening they were all sitting round the table, and the priest, having yielded to the entreaties of the united family, was reading aloud the "Pickwick Club."

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The kitchen door slowly opened and a large bald head, with a snub nose and smiling countenance, was thrust in. A short leg in very wide trousers was next introduced, and this was followed by a crooked and consequently still shorter one. The whole figure stooped as it turned on the crooked leg to shut the door. The intruder thus presented to the party the back of the before mentioned large head, with its narrow rim of hair, a pair of square-built shoulders, and an extraordinarily large seat, only half covered by a pea-jacket. Again he turned in a slanting posture toward the assembled party, and once more presented his smiling countenance with its snub-nose. The young girls bowed low over their work, a suppressed titter arose first from one piece of sewing and then from another.

"Is this the saddler?" asked the priest, rising to his feet.

"Yes," was the reply, as the new-comer limped forward, holding out a hand so astonishingly large and with such broad round finger tips that the priest was forced to look at it as he took it in his own. The hand was offered to the others; and when it came to Magnhild's turn she burst out laughing just as her hand disappeared within it. One peal of laughter after another was heard and suppressed. The priest hastened to remark that they were reading the "Pickwick Club."

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"Aha!" observed the saddler, "there is enough to make one laugh in that book."

"Have you read it?" asked the priest.

"Yes; when I was in America. I read most of the English writers; indeed, I have them all in my house now," he answered, and proceeded to give an account of the cheap popular editions that could be obtained in America.

The laughter of young girls is not easily subdued; it was still ready to bubble over when, after the saddler was furnished with a pipe, the reading was resumed. Now to be sure there was a pretext. After a while the priest grew tired and wanted to close the book, but the saddler offered to continue the reading for him, and was allowed to do so. He read in a dry, quiet manner, and with such an unfamiliar pronunciation of the names of the personages and localities introduced that the humor of the text became irresistible; even the priest joined in the laughter which no one now attempted to restrain. It never occurred to the girls to ask themselves why they were all obliged to laugh; they were still laughing when they went up-stairs to go to bed, and while undressing they imitated the saddler's walk, bowed and talked as he did, pronounced the foreign words with his English accent. Magnhild was the most adroit in mimicking; she had observed him the most closely.

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At that time she was fifteen, in her sixteenth year.

The next day the girls passed every free moment in the dining-room, which had now been transformed into a work-shop. The saddler told them of a sojourn of several years in America, and of travels in England and Germany; he talked without interrupting his work and with a frequent intermingling of jests. His narratives were accompanied by the incessant tittering of his listeners. They were scarcely aware themselves how they gradually ceased laughing at him and laughed instead at the witty things he said; neither did they observe until later how much they learned from him. He was so greatly missed by the girls when he left that more than half of their time together was occupied in conversation about him; this lasted for many days after he was gone, and never wholly ceased.

There were two things which had made the strongest impression on Magnhild. The first was the English and German songs the saddler had sung for them. She had paid little attention to the text, unless perhaps occasionally; but how the melodies had captivated her!

While singing hymns one Sunday they had first noticed that Skarlie had a fine voice. Thenceforth he was obliged to sing for them constantly. These foreign melodies of his fluttering thither from a fuller, richer life, freer conditions, larger ideas than their own, clung to Magnhild's fancy the entire summer. They were the first pictures which had awakened actual yearning within her breast. It may also be said that for the first time she comprehended what song was. As she was singing her interminable scales one day, before beginning her studies in singing from note, she came to a full realization of the fact that this song without melody was to her like wings beating against a cage: it fluttered up and down against walls, windows, doors, in perpetual and fruitless longing, aye, until at last it sank like the cobwebs, over everything in the room. She could sit alone out of doors with *his* songs. While she was humming them, the forest hues dissolved into one picture; and that she had never discovered before. The density, the vigor in the tree-tops, above and below the tree-tops, over the entire mountain wall, as it were, overwhelmed her; the rushing of the waters of the stream attracted her.

The second thing which had made so deep an impression on her, and which was blended with all the rest, was Skarlie's story of how he had become lame. In America, when he was a young man, he had undertaken to carry a boy twelve years old from a burning house; he had fallen with the boy beneath the ruins. Both were extricated, Skarlie with a crushed limb, the boy unscathed. That boy was now one of the most noted men of America.

It was his lot to be saved, "he was destined to something."

This reminder again! The thought of her own fate had heretofore been shrouded in the wintry mantle of the churchyard, amid frost, weeping, and harsh clanging of bells; it had been something sombre. Now it flitted onward to large cities beyond the seas, among ships, burning houses, songs, and great destinies. From this time forth she dreamed of what she was destined to be as something far distant and great.

CHAPTER III.

LATE in the autumn all three girls were confirmed. This was such a matter of course to them all that their thoughts were chiefly busied with what they should wear on the day of the ceremony. Magnhild, who had never yet had a garment cut out and made expressly for herself, wondered whether an outfit would now be prepared for her. No. The younger girls were furnished with new silk dresses; an old black dress that had become too tight for the priest's wife was made over for Magnhild.

It was too short both in the waist and in the skirt; but Magnhild scarcely noticed this. She was provided by the governess with a little colored silk neckerchief and a silver brooch; she borrowed the every-day shawl of the mistress of the house; a pair of gloves were loaned her by the governess.

Her inner preparations were not much more extensive than the outer ones.

The day glided tranquilly by without any special emotion. Religious sentiments at the parsonage, as well as elsewhere in the parish, were matters of calm custom. Some tears were shed in church, the priest offered wine and a toast at table, and there was a little talk about what should now be done with Magnhild. This last topic so affected Magnhild that after coffee she went out and sat down alone. She gazed toward the broad rocky path of the land-slide on the verdure-clad mountain, then toward the mighty mass of débris in the midst of the plain, for it was there her home had stood.

Her little brothers and sisters appeared before her, one fair, bright face after another. Her mother came too; and her melancholy eye dwelt lingeringly on Magnhild; even the lines about the mouth were visible. The fine psalm-singing of her mother's gentle voice floated around Magnhild now. There had been sung in church that day one of the hymns her mother used to sing. Once more, too, her father sat on the bench, bowed over the silver work in which he was a master. A book or a newspaper lay at his side; he paused in his work now and then, stole a glance at the

page before him, or turned a leaf. His long, delicately cut face inclined occasionally toward the family sitting-room and its inmates. The aged grandparents formed part of the home circle. The grandmother tottered off after some little dainty for Magnhild, while the old grandfather was telling the child a story. The dog, shaggy and gray, lay stretching himself on the hearth. His howl had been the last living sound Magnhild had heard behind her as she was carried downward across the stream. The memory of that awful day once more cast over her childhood the pall of night, thunder, and convulsions of the earth. Covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

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The saddler's ballads came floating toward her, bringing a sense of want with their obscure dream images. And there drifted past her a motley throng of those half-comprehended songs and the anecdotes upon which she had often placed false interpretations, until, exhausted by the thoughts, emotions, and yearnings of the day, with an aching void within and a dull feeling of resignation, she fell asleep.

In the evening Rönnaug, with whom they had become acquainted during the confirmation instructions, made her appearance; she was out at service in the neighborhood and had a holiday in honor of the occasion. She brought with her a whole budget of gossip concerning the love affairs of the parish, and the inexperienced girls sat with wondering eyes listening. It was she who caused the youngest girl to tear her new silk dress. Rönnaug could roll down hill with such incomprehensible speed that she was induced to repeat the feat several times, and this finally led the priest's daughter to try her skill.

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Hereafter Rönnaug often dropped in of an evening when her work was done. They all took delight in her wild exuberance of spirits. She was as hearty and as plump as a young foal; she could scarcely keep the clothes on her back because she was all the time tearing them to tatters, and she had never-ceasing trouble with her hair, which would keep falling over her face because she never had it done up properly. When she laughed, and that was nearly all the time, she tossed back her head, and through two rows of pearly teeth, white as those of a beast of prey, could be seen far down her throat.

In the autumn Skarlie came again. There was a difference between the reception now given him and the former one. The three girls surrounded his sledge, they carried in his luggage, notwithstanding his laughing resistance, their laughter accompanied him as he stood in the passage taking off his furs.

Questions without number were showered like hail upon him the first time they sat with him in the work-room; the girls had an accumulation of treasured-up doubts and queries about things he had told them on his previous visit, and many other perplexing themes which they considered him able to solve. On very few topics did Skarlie hold the prevailing opinions of the parish, but he had a way of deftly turning the subject with a joke when pressed too closely for his precise views. When alone with Magnhild he expressed himself more freely; at first he did so cautiously, but gradually increased his plainness of speech.

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Magnhild had never viewed her surroundings with critical eyes; she would now laugh heartily with Skarlie over the priest's last sermon, or his indolent life; now over the spider-like activity of the mistress of the house, because it was all described so comically. At the "fat repose" of the governess, even at the "yellow, round heads" of her young friends, Magnhild could now laugh; for the humor with which everything was delineated was so surprisingly original; she did not perceive that this jesting was by degrees undermining the very ground she stood upon.

The quite usual amusement in the country of teasing a young girl about being in love was, meanwhile, directed rather unexpectedly toward Magnhild; she was called "the saddler's wife," because she passed so much time in his society. This reached Skarlie's ears and immediately he too began to call her his "wife," his "tall wife," his "blonde wife," his "very young wife."

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The following summer the priest's daughters went to the city for increased opportunities of culture. The governess remained "for the present" at the parsonage.

The saddler came once more in the autumn to complete his work. Magnhild was now, of course, more frequently alone with him than before. He was merrier than ever. One joke that was often repeated by him was about journeying round the world with "his young wife." They met with an immense number of traveling adventures, and they saw many remarkable sights, all of which were so accurately described by Skarlie that they attained the value of actual experiences. But the most ludicrous picture he drew represented the two tramping through the country: Skarlie limping on before with a traveling satchel, Magnhild following in a waterproof cloak and with an umbrella in her hand, grumbling at the heat, dust, and thirst, weary and heartily disgusted with him. Then, having reached their journey's end, they rested in Skarlie's little home in the little town, where Magnhild had everything her own way and lived like a princess all the rest of her life.

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It would be impossible to describe the countenance of the priest when the saddler appeared in his study one evening, and taking a seat in front of him asked, after a few cordial, pleasant remarks by way of introduction, whether the priest would object to his marrying Magnhild. The priest was lying on the sofa smoking; his pipe dropped from his mouth, his hand sank with it, his fat face relaxed until it resembled a dough-like mass, in which the eyes peeped forth as wholly devoid of thought as two raisins; suddenly he gave a start that set a quantity of springs beneath

him to creaking and grating, and the book that lay upside down on his knee fell. The saddler picked up the volume smiling, and turned over the leaves. The priest had risen to his feet.

"What does Magnhild have to say to this?" asked he.

The saddler looked up with a smile.

"Of course I should not have asked if she were not likely to give her consent," said he.

The priest put his pipe in his mouth, and strode up and down the floor, puffing away. Gradually he grew calmer, and without slackening his speed, he observed:—

"To be sure I do not know what is to become of the girl."

Once more the saddler raised his eyes from the book whose leaves he was turning over, and now laying it aside, he remarked:—

"It is, you know, rather a sort of adoption than a marriage. Down yonder at my house she can develop into whatever she pleases."

The priest looked at him, took a puff at his pipe, paced the floor, and puffed again.

"Aye, to be sure! You are, I believe, a wealthy man?"

"Well, if not precisely wealthy, I am sufficiently well provided to get married."

Here Skarlie laughed.

But there was something in his laugh, something which did not quite please the priest. Still less did he like the tone of indifference with which Skarlie seemed to treat the whole affair. Least of all did he like being so taken by surprise.

"I must speak with my wife about this," said he, and groaned. "That I must," he added decidedly, "and with Magnhild," came as an afterthought.

"Certainly," said the other, as he rose to take leave.

A little while later, the priest's wife was sitting where the saddler had sat. Both hands lay idly open on her lap, while her eyes followed her spouse as he steamed back and forth.

"Well, what do you think?" he urged, pausing in front of her.

Receiving no reply, he moved on again.

"He is far too old," she finally said.

"And surely very sly," added the priest, and then pausing again in front of his wife, he whispered: "No one really knows where he comes from, or why he chooses to settle here. He might have a fine workshop in a large city—wealthy, and a smart dog!"

The priest did not use the choicest language in his daily discourse.

"To think she should allow herself to be so beguiled!" whispered the wife.

"Beguiled! Just the word—beguiled!" repeated the priest, snapping his fingers. "Beguiled!" and off he went in a cloud of smoke.

"I am so sorry for her," remarked the wife, and the words were accompanied by a few tears.

This touched the priest, and he said: "See here, mother, we will talk with her, both of us!" then strode heavily on again.

Ere long Magnhild stood within the precincts of the study, wondering what could be wanted of her. The priest was the first to speak:—

"Is it really true, Magnhild, that you have agreed to be the wife of this fellow, the saddler?"

The priest often used the general term "fellow" instead of a proper name.

Magnhild's face became suffused with blushes; in her whole life she could never have been so red before. Both the priest and his wife interpreted this as a confession.

"Why do you not come to us with such things?" asked the priest, in a vexed tone.

"It is very strange you should act so, Magnhild," said the mistress of the house,—and she wept.

Magnhild was simply appalled.

"Do you really mean to have him?" asked the priest, pausing resolutely in front of her.

Now Magnhild had never been accustomed to being addressed in a confidential tone. When questioned thus closely she had not the courage to give a frank statement of all that had occurred between her and Skarlie, telling, how this talk of marriage had commenced as a jest, and that although later she had had a misgiving that it was becoming serious, it was so continually blended anew with jests that she had not given herself the trouble to protest against it. How could she, with the priest standing thus before her, enter on so long a story? And so instead she burst into tears.

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Well now, the priest did not mean to torment her. What was done could not be undone. He was very sorry for her, and in the goodness of his heart merely wanted to help her lay a solid foundation to her choice. Skarlie was a man of considerable means, he said, and she a poor girl; she certainly could not expect a better match, so far as that went. True, Skarlie was old; but then he had himself said that he designed rather a sort of adoption than a marriage; his only object was Magnhild's happiness.

But all this was more than Magnhild could bear to listen to, and so she rushed from the room. In the passage she fell to crying as though her heart would break; she was obliged to go up to the dark garret in order to avoid attracting attention, and there her grief gradually assumed definite shape. It was *not* because the saddler wanted her that she was in such distress; it was because the priest and his wife did not want her.

This was the interpretation she had put on their words.

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When the governess was informed of the affair she differed entirely from the mistress of the house, who could not comprehend Magnhild, for the governess could comprehend the young girl perfectly. Skarlie was a man of fine mind and very witty. He was rich, jovial, rather homely, to be sure, but that was not of such great consequence down at the Point. And she adopted this tone in talking with Magnhild when she finally succeeded in getting hold of her. Magnhild was red with weeping, and burst into a fresh flood of tears; yet not a word did she say.

Somewhat curtly the priest now informed the saddler that as the matter was settled he might as well proceed with the preparations. The saddler desired this himself; moreover, he was now quite through with his work. Eagerly as he strove for an opportunity to speak with Magnhild, he even failed to catch a glimpse of her. He was therefore forced to take his departure without having an interview with her.

During the days which followed Magnhild neither appeared in the sitting-room nor at table. No one attempted to seek her and talk with her; the governess deemed it quite natural that in the face of so serious a step the young girl should wish to be alone.

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One day the members of the household were surprised by the arrival through the mail of a letter and large package for Magnhild. The letter read as follows:—

In order to complete our delightful joke, dear Magnhild, I came down here. My house has been painted this summer, within and without, a joke which now almost looks like earnest—does it not?

Beds, household furniture, bedding, etc., are articles that I deal in myself, so these I can purchase from my own stores. When I think of the object I have in view, this becomes the most delightful business transaction I have ever entered into.

Do you remember how we laughed the time I took your measure in order to prove accurately how much too short in the waist your dress was, how much too wide across the shoulders, and how much too short in the skirt? Just by chance I took a note of your exact measurement, and according to it I am now having made:—

- 1 black silk dress (Lyons taffeta).
- 1 brown (cashmere).
- 1 blue (of some light woolen material).

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As I have always told you, blue is the most becoming color that you can wear.

Such orders cannot be executed without some delay; but the articles shall be sent as speedily as possible.

For other garments that you may perhaps require I telegraphed to Bergen immediately upon my arrival here; such things can be obtained there ready-made. You will most likely receive them by the same mail which brings you this letter.

As you see (and shall further continue to see), there are sundry jokes connected with this getting married. For instance, I made my will to-day, and in it designated you as my heiress.

With most respectful greetings to the priest and his honored family, I now subscribe myself

Your most obedient jester,
SKARLIE.

Magnhild had taken refuge in the garret, with both the letter and the large package. She had plunged forthwith into the letter, and emerging from its perusal perplexed and frightened, she tore open the package and found many full suits of everything pertaining to feminine under garments. She scattered them all around her, blushing crimson, angry, ashamed. Then she sat

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down and wept aloud.

Now she had courage to speak! She sprang down-stairs to the priest's wife, and throwing her arms about her neck, whispered, "Forgive me!" thrust the letter into her hand, and disappeared.

The priest's wife did not understand Magnhild's "Forgive me!" but she saw that the young girl was crying and in great excitement. She took the letter and read it. It was peculiar in form, she thought; yet its meaning was plain enough: it indicated a sensible, elderly man's prudent forethought, and deserved credit. An old housewife and mother could not be otherwise than pleased with this, and she carried the letter to the priest. It impressed him in the same way; and he began to think the girl might be happy with this singular man. The mistress of the house searched everywhere for Magnhild, in order to tell her that both the priest and herself were of the opinion that Skarlie's conduct promised well. She learned that Magnhild was in the garret, and so throwing a shawl round her (for it was cold) she went up-stairs. She met the governess on the way and took her with her. Magnhild was not visible; they saw only the articles of clothing strewn over floor, chests, and trunks. They collected these together, discussed them, examined them, and pronounced them admirable. They well knew that such a gift was calculated to embarrass a young girl; but then Skarlie was an elderly man whose privilege it was to take things in a fatherly way. This they told Magnhild when they finally found her. And she had no longer the courage to be confidential. This was because the priest's wife, sustained by the governess, spoke what they deemed sensible words to her. They told her that she must not be proud; she must remember that she was a poor girl who had neither relatives nor future of her own. In the days which followed, Magnhild fought a hard fight in secret. But she lacked energy for action. Where could she have gained it? Where could she go since the priest's family had so evidently grown tired of her?

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A little later there arrived a chest containing her dresses and many other articles. Magnhild allowed it to stand untouched, but the governess, who so well understood this bashfulness, attended to having it opened. She and the priest's wife drew forth the contents piece by piece, and not long afterwards Magnhild was trying on dress after dress before the large mirror in the family sitting-room. The doors were locked, the priest's wife and the governess full of zeal. Finally they came to the black silk dress, and Magnhild gradually ceased to be indifferent. She felt a blushing gratification in beholding in the glass her own form encompassed in beautiful fine material. She discovered herself, as it were, point by point. If it chanced to be the face, she had not before this day so fully observed that those she beheld at her side were without distinct outline, while hers—Her vision had been rendered keen by the sense awakened, in the twinkling of an eye, by a handsome, well-fitting garment.

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This picture of herself floated before her for many days. Fearing to disturb it she avoided the mirror. Once more she became absorbed in the old dreams, those which bore her across the sea to something strange and great.

But the marriage? At such moments she thrust it from her as though it were a steamer's plank, to be drawn ashore after serving its purpose. How was this possible? Aye, how many times in the years that followed did she not pause and reflect! But it always remained alike incomprehensible to her.

She could neither be persuaded to put on one of the new dresses the day Skarlie came, nor to go out to meet him; on the contrary, she hid herself. Later, and as by chance, she made her appearance. With unvarying consistency she treated both the marriage and Skarlie as though neither in the least concerned her.

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Skarlie was in high spirits; the fact was both the priest and his wife took pains to make amends for Magnhild's lack of courtesy, and he reciprocated in the most winning manner. The governess declared him to be decidedly amiable.

The next evening Magnhild sat in the dining-room arranging some articles belonging to the industrial school that must now be sent back. She was alone, and Skarlie entered softly and smiling, and slowly closing the door behind him took a seat at her side. He talked for some time on indifferent subjects, so that she began to breathe freely again; she even ventured at last to look down on him as he sat bent over smoking. Her eyes rested on the bald head, the bushy brows, and the extreme end of the snub-nose, then on his enormous hands and their very singular-looking nails; the latter were deeply set in the flesh, which everywhere, therefore in front also, encompassed them like a thick round frame. Under the nails there was dirt, a fact to which the governess, who had herself very pretty hands, had once called the attention of her pupils as a deadly sin. Magnhild looked at the reddish, bristling hair which completely covered these hands. Skarlie had been silent for a little while, but as if he felt that he was being scrutinized, he drew himself up, and with a smile extended to her one of his objectionable hands.

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"Aye, aye, Magnhild!" said he, laying it on both of hers. This gave her a shock, and in a moment she was like one paralyzed. She could not stir, could not grasp a single thought except that she was in the clutches of a great lobster. His head drew nearer, the eyes too were those of a lobster; they stung. This she had never before observed, and she sprang hastily to her feet. He retained his seat. Without looking back Magnhild began to busy herself where she stood with another lot of the industrial work. Therefore she did not leave the room, but a little while later Skarlie did.

The governess decked her in her bridal finery the next day; the mistress of the house too came to look on. This gave her great pleasure, she said. Magnhild let everything be done for her

without stirring, without uttering a word and without shedding a tear.

It was the same in the sitting-room. She was motionless. A feeling akin to defiance had taken possession of her. The men-servants and the house-maids sat and stood by the kitchen door, which was ajar, and just inside of it; Magnhild saw, too, the heads of little children. The deacon started the singing as the priest came down-stairs. [49]

Magnhild did not look at the bridegroom. The priest touched on tender chords; his wife shed tears, and so too did the governess; but Magnhild's icy coldness chilled both him and them. The discourse was brief and dealt chiefly in mere generalities. It was followed by congratulations, and a painful silence; even the saddler had lost his smile. It was a relief when they were summoned to dinner.

During the repast the priest, desiring to propose a toast, began: "Dear Magnhild! I trust you have no fault to find with us,"—he got no farther, for here Magnhild burst into such convulsive weeping that the priest's wife, the governess, aye, even the priest himself became deeply affected, and there arose a long and painful silence. Finally, however, the priest managed to add: "Think of us!" But these words were followed by the same heart-rending weeping as before, so that no toast was drunk. What this really signified was not clear to any of those present, unless perhaps to the bridegroom; and he said nothing. [50]

While they were at dessert one of the young girls approached the bride and whispered a few words in her ear. Rönnaug was outside and wished to say farewell; she had been waiting ever since the company had gone to table and could stay no longer. Rönnaug was standing on the back porch, benumbed with the cold; she did not wish to intrude, she said. She examined the bride's dress, thought it extraordinarily fine, and drawing off one mitten stroked it with the back of her hand.

"Yes, I dare say he is rich," said she, "but if they had given me a gown of silver I would not"—and she added a few words which cannot be repeated here, and for which Magnhild, her face flaming, administered a good sound box on the ear. The kerchief softened the blow somewhat, but it was seriously meant.

Magnhild returned to the dining-room and sat down, not in her place at the bridegroom's side, but on a chair by the window; she did not wish anything more, she said. It was of no avail that she was entreated to sit with the others at least until they had finished; she said she could not.

The departure took place shortly after coffee was served. An incident had meanwhile occurred which suppressed all emotion, of whatever nature it might be. It was that the bridegroom suddenly appeared, looking like a shaggy beast, carrying a fur cape, fur boots, a short coat, a hood, fur gloves, and a muff. He let them fall in front of Magnhild, saying with dry earnestness,— [51]

"All these I lay at your feet!"

There burst forth a peal of laughter in which even Magnhild was forced to join. The whole bridal party gathered about the things which were spread over the carpet, and every one was loud in praise. It was evidently not displeasing to Magnhild either, in the face of a winter journey,—for which she had been promised the loan of a variety of wraps,—to have such presents lavished upon her.

In a few moments more Magnhild was attired in her blue dress, and she was enough of a child or rather woman to be diverted by the change. Shortly afterwards the new traveling wraps were donned, piece by piece, amid the liveliest interest of all, which reached its height when Magnhild was drawn before the mirror to see for herself how she looked. The horse had been driven round, and Skarlie just now came into the room, also dressed for traveling, and wearing a dog-skin coat, deer-skin shoes and leggings, and a flat fur cap. He was nearly as broad as he was long, and in order to raise a laugh, he limped up to the mirror, and, with dry humor in his face, took his stand beside Magnhild. There followed a burst of laughter, in which even Magnhild herself joined—but only to become at once entirely mute again. Her silence still hung over the parting. Not until the parsonage was left behind did she become again dissolved in tears. [52]

Her eyes wandered listlessly over the snow-covered heap of ruins on the site of her childhood's home; it seemed as though there were that within herself which was shrouded in snow and desolation.

The weather was cold. The valley grew narrower, the road led through a dense wood. One solitary star was visible.

Skarlie had been cutting figures in the snow with his whip; he now pointed the latter toward the star and began to hum, finally to sing. The melody he had chosen was that of one of the ballads of the Scottish highlands. Like a melancholy bird, it flitted from one snow-laden fir-tree to another. Magnhild inquired its meaning, and this proved to be in harmony with a journey through the depths of a forest. Skarlie talked further about Scotland, its history, his sojourn there. [53]

Once started, he continued, and gradually broke into such merry anecdotes that Magnhild was astonished when they stopped to rest; astonished that she had been able to laugh, and that they had driven nearly fourteen miles.

Skarlie helped her out of the sledge and ushered her into the inn, but he himself went directly out again to feed the horse.

A stylish looking young lady sat by the hearth in the guest-room warming herself, scattered over the benches around were her traveling-wraps; they were of such fine material and costly fur that Magnhild grew curious and felt obliged to touch them. The traveling-suit the lady wore, so far as material and style was concerned, made the same impression on Magnhild as she might have gained from a zoölogical specimen from another quarter of the globe. The lady's face possessed youth and a gentle melancholy; she was fair and had languishing eyes and a slightly-curved nose. Her hair, too, was done up in an unfamiliar style. Pacing the floor was a slender young man; his traveling boots stood by the hearth and his feet were cased in small morocco slippers, lined with fur. His movements were lithe and graceful.

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"Are you Skarlie's young wife?" inquired the hostess, quite an old woman, who had placed a chair by the hearth for Magnhild. Before Magnhild could reply, Skarlie came in with some things from the sledge. The bald head, half protruding from the shaggy furs, the deer-skin shoes, sprawling like monstrous roots over the floor, attracted the wondering gaze of the young lady.

"Is this your wife?" repeated the hostess.

"Yes, this is my wife," was the cheerful reply, as Skarlie limped forward.

The young man fixed his eyes on Magnhild. She felt herself growing fiery red beneath his gaze. There was an expression entirely new to her in his face. Was it scorn? The lady, too, now looked at her, and at the same moment the hostess begged Magnhild to take a seat by the fire. But the latter preferred remaining in the dark, on a bench in the farthest corner.

It was fully ten o'clock when the Point was reached, but every light there had been extinguished, even in the house in front of which the sledge stopped. An old woman, awakened by the jingling of the bells, came to the street door, opened it and looked out, then drew back and struck a light. She met Magnhild in the passage, cast the light on her and said finally, "I bid you welcome."

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A strong smell of leather filled the passage; for the work-room and shop were to the left. The loathsome odor prevented Magnhild from replying. They entered a room to the right. Here Magnhild hastily removed her traveling-wraps;—she felt faint. Without casting a glance about her, or speaking to the woman who was watching her from behind the light, she then crossed the floor and opened a door she had espied on coming into the room. She first held the light in, then stepped in herself and closed the door after her. The woman heard a rumbling within and went to the door. There she discovered that one of the beds was being moved. Directly afterward Magnhild reappeared with the candle. The light revealed a flushed face. She looked resolute.

She now told the woman she had no need of her services.

The saddler did not come in for some time; for he had been seeing to the horse, which he had borrowed for the journey. The light was still on the table. There was no one up.

CHAPTER IV.

[56]

Two years had passed since that evening, and the greater part of a third.

Magnhild was quite as thoroughly accustomed to the new daily routine as she had been to the old.

The priest visited her three or four times a year; he slept in the room over the workshop usually occupied by Skarlie when he was at home. During the day the priest visited at the captain's, or the custom-house officer's, or at the home of the chief of police. His coming was called the "priestly visitation."

There was chess-playing in the day-time and cards in the evening. The priest's wife and young lady daughters had also been seen at the Point a few times. In the lading-town there was scarcely any one with whom Magnhild associated.

Skarlie and she had taken one trip to Bergen. Whatever might there have happened or not happened, they never undertook another, either to Bergen or elsewhere.

Skarlie was more frequently absent than at home; he was engaged in speculations; the workshop was pretty much abandoned, though the store was still kept open. A short time after her arrival, Magnhild had received an invitation from the school committee—most likely through Skarlie's solicitation—to become the head of the industrial school. Henceforth she passed an hour or two every day at the public school; moreover, she gave private instructions to young girls who were grown up. Her time was employed in walking, singing, and a little sewing; she did very little reading, indeed. It was tedious to her.

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Directly after she came there, Rönnaug had appeared at the Point, and had hired out at the nearest "skyds" (post-station), in order to earn money speedily for the purchase of a ticket to America. She was determined to live no longer the life of an outcast here, she said.

Magnhild took charge of Rönnaug's money for her, and was alarmed to note how rapidly it increased, for she had her own thoughts about the matter. Now the ticket was bought, Magnhild would be entirely alone.

Many were the thoughts called forth by the fact that the journey across the sea to new and perhaps great experiences should be so easy for one person and not for another.

One morning after a sleepless night, Magnhild took her accustomed walk to the wharf to watch the steamer come in. She saw the usual number of commercial travelers step ashore; the usual number of trunks carried after them; but this day she also observed a pale man, with long, soft hair and large eyes, walking around a box which he finally succeeded in having lifted on a wagon. "Be careful! Be careful!" he repeated again and again. "There must be a piano in the box," thought Magnhild. [58]

After Magnhild had been to school, she saw the same pale man, with the box behind him, standing before the door of her house. He was accompanied by the landlord of one of the hotels. Skarlie had fitted up the rooms above the sitting-room and bed-chamber for the accommodation of travelers when the hotels were full. The pale stranger was an invalid who wished to live quietly.

Magnhild had not thought of letting the rooms to permanent guests and thus assuming a certain responsibility. She stood irresolute. The stranger now drew nearer to her. Such eyes she had never beheld, nor so refined and spiritual a face. With strange power of fascination those wondrous eyes were fixed on her. There was, as it were, two expressions combined in the gaze that held her captive, one behind the other. Magnhild was unable to fathom this accurately; but in the effort to do so she put her forefinger in her mouth, and became so absorbed in thought that she forgot to reply. [59]

Now the stranger's countenance changed; it grew observant. Magnhild felt this, roused herself, blushed, gave some answer and walked away. What did she say? Was it "Yes" or "No"? The landlord followed her. She had said "Yes!" She was obliged to go up-stairs and see whether everything was in readiness for a guest; she did not rely very implicitly on her own habits of order.

There was great confusion when the piano was carried up; it took time, too, to move the bed, sofa, and other articles of furniture to make room for the instrument. But all this came to an end at last, and quiet once more prevailed. The pale stranger must be tired. Soon there was not a step, not a sound, overhead.

There is a difference between the silence which is full and that which is empty.

Magnhild dared not stir. She waited, listened. Would the tones of the piano soon fall upon her ear? The stranger was a composer, so the landlord had said, and Magnhild thought, too, she had read his name in the newspaper. How would it be when such a person played? Surely it would seem as though miracles were being wrought. At all events, something would doubtless ring into her poor life which would long give forth resonance. She needed the revelation of a commanding spirit. Her gaze wandered over the flowers which decorated her window, and on which the sun was now playing; her eyes sought the "Caravan in the Desert," which hung framed and glass covered by the door, and which suddenly seemed to her so animated, so full of beautifully arranged groups and forms. With ear for the twittering of the birds in the opposite neighbor's garden and the sporting of the magpies farther off in the fields, she sat in blissful content and waited. [60]

Through her content there darted the question, "Will Skarlie be pleased with what you have done? Is there not danger of injury to the new sofa and the bed too? The stranger is an invalid, no one can tell"—She sprang to her feet, sought pen, ink, and paper, and for the first time in her life wrote a letter to Skarlie. It took her more than an hour to complete it. This is what she wrote:—

I have let the rooms over the sitting-room and bed-chamber to a sick man who plays the piano. The price is left to you. [61]

I have had one of the new sofas (the hair-cloth) carried up-stairs and one of the spring beds. He wants to be comfortable. Perhaps I have not done right.

MAGNHILD.

She had crossed out the words: "Now I shall have an opportunity to hear some music." The heading of the letter had caused her some trouble; she finally decided to use none. "Your wife," she had written above the signature, but had drawn her pen through it. Thus fashioned, the letter was copied and sent. She felt easier after this, and again sat still and waited. She saw the stranger's dinner carried up to him; she ate a little herself and fell asleep,—she had scarcely had any sleep the previous night.

She awoke; there was yet no sounds of music above. Again she fell asleep, and dreamed that the distance between the mountain peaks had been spanned by a bridge. She told herself that this was the bridge at Cologne, a lithograph of which hung on the wall near the bed-chamber. Nevertheless it extended across the valley from one lofty mountain to the other, supported by trestle-work from the depths below. The longer she gazed the finer, more richly-colored the [62]

bridge became; for lo! it was woven of rainbow threads, and was transparent and radiant, all the way up to the straight line from crest to crest. But crosswise above this, the distance was spanned by another bridge. Both bridges began now to vibrate in slow two-fourths time, and immediately the entire valley was transformed into a sea of light, in which there was an intermingled play of all the prismatic hues; but the bridges had vanished. Nor were the mountains any longer visible, and the dissolving colors filled all conceivable space. How great was this? How far could she see? She grew positively alarmed at the infinity of space about her and awoke;—there was music overhead. In front of the house stood a crowd of people, silently gazing at the upper window.

Magnhild did not stir. The tones flowed forth with extreme richness; there was a bright, gentle grace over the music. Magnhild sat listening until it seemed as though these melodious tones were being showered down upon head, hands, and lap. A benediction was being bestowed upon her humble home, the world of tears within was filled with light. She pushed her chair farther back into the corner, and as she sat there she felt that she had been found out by the all-bountiful Providence who had ordered her destiny. The music was the result of a knowledge she did not possess, but it appealed to a passion awakened by it within her soul. She stretched out her arms, drew them in again, and burst into tears. [63]

Long after the music had ceased,—the crowd was gone, the musician still,—Magnhild sat motionless. Life had meaning; she, too, might gain access to a rich world of beauty. As there was now song within, so one day there should be singing around about her. When she came to undress for the night she required both sitting-room and bed-chamber for the purpose, and more than half an hour; for the first time in her life she laid down to rest with a feeling that she had something to rise for in the morning. She listened to the footsteps of her guest above; they were lighter than those of other people; his contact with the furniture, too, was cautious. His eyes, with their kindly glow of good-will, and the fathomless depths beyond this, were the last objects she saw distinctly.

Indescribable days followed. Magnhild went regularly to her lessons, but lost no time in getting home again, where she was received by music and found the house surrounded by listeners. She scarcely went out again the rest of the day. Either her guest was at home and she was waiting for him to play, or he had gone out for a walk, and she was watching for his return. When he greeted her in passing she blushed and drew back. If he came into her room to ask for anything, there ran a thrill through her the moment she heard the approach of his footsteps; she became confused and scarcely comprehended his words when he stood before her. She had, perhaps, not exchanged ten words with him in as many days, but she already knew his most trifling habit and peculiarity of dress. She noticed whether his soft brown hair was brushed behind his ears, or whether it had fallen forward; whether his gray hat was pushed back, or whether it was drawn down over his forehead; whether he wore gloves or not; whether he had a shawl thrown over his shoulders or not. And how was it in regard to herself? Two new summer dresses had been ordered by her, and she was now wearing one of them. She had also purchased a new hat. [64]

She believed that in music lay her vocation; but she felt no inclination to make any kind of a beginning. There was enough to satisfy her in her guest's playing, in his very proximity.

Day by day she developed in budding fullness of thought; her dream-life had prepared her for this; but music was the atmosphere that was essential to her existence: she knew it now. She did not realize that the refined nature of this man of genius, spiritualized and exalted by ill-health, was something new, delightful, thought-inspiring to her; she gave music alone the credit for the pleasure he instilled into her life. [65]

At school she took an interest in each scholar she had never experienced before; she even fell into the habit of chatting with the sailor's wife who did the work of her house. There daily unfolded a new blossom within her soul; she was as meek as a woman in the transition period, which she had never known. Books she had heard read aloud, or read herself at the parsonage, rose up before her as something new. Forms she had not noticed before stood out in bold relief,—they became invested with flesh, blood, and motion. Incidents in real life, as well as in books, floated past like a cloud, suddenly became dissolved and gave distinct pictures. She awoke, as an Oriental maiden is awakened, when her time comes, by song beneath her window and by the gleam of a turban.

CHAPTER V.

 [66]

ONE morning as Magnhild, after making her toilet, went into the sitting-room, humming softly to herself and in joyous mood, to open the window facing the street, she saw a lady standing at the open window of the house opposite.

It was a low cottage, surrounded by a garden, and belonged to a government officer who had moved away. Vines were trained about the windows of the house partially covering them, and the lady was engaged in arranging one of the sprays that was in the way. Her head was encircled

with ringlets, which were rather black than brown. Her eyes sparkled, her brow was low but broad, her eyebrows were straight, her nose was also straight but quite large and round, her lips were full, her head was so beautifully poised on her shoulders that Magnhild could not help noticing it. The open sleeves had fallen back during the work with the vines, displaying her arms. Magnhild was unable to withdraw her eyes. When the lady perceived Magnhild, she nodded to her and smiled.

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Magnhild became embarrassed, and drew back.

Just then a child approached the lady, who stooped and kissed it. The child also had ringlets, but they were fair; the face was the mother's, and yet it was not the mother's, it was the coloring which misled, for the child was blonde. The little one climbed upon a chair and looked out. The mother caught hold of the vine again, but kept her eyes fixed on Magnhild, and her expression was a most singular one. Magnhild put on her hat; it was time for her to go to school; but that look caused her to go out of the back door and return by the same way, when she came home an hour later.

He was playing. Magnhild paused for a while in her little garden and hearkened, until finally she felt that she must go in to see what effect this music had upon the beautiful lady. She went into her kitchen and then cautiously entered her sitting-room, shielding herself from observation. No; there was no beautiful lady at the window opposite. A sense of relief passed over Magnhild, and she went forward. She was obliged to move some plants into the sunshine, one of her daily duties, but she came very near dropping the flowerpot into the street, for as she held it in her hands the lady's head was thrust into the open window.

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"Do not be frightened!" was the laughing greeting, uttered in tones of coaxing entreaty for pardon, that surpassed in sweetness anything of the kind Magnhild had ever heard.

"You will allow me to come in; will you not?" And before Magnhild could answer, the lady was already entering the house.

The next moment she stood face to face with Magnhild, tall and beautiful. An unknown perfume hovered about her as she flitted through the room, now speaking of the lithographs on the wall, now of the valley, the mountains, or the customs of the people. The voice, the perfume, the walk, the eyes, indeed the very material and fashion of her dress, especially its bold intermingling of colors, took captive the senses. From the instant she entered the room it belonged to her; if she smelled a flower, or made an observation concerning it, forthwith that flower blossomed anew; for what her eyes rested upon attained precisely the value she gave it.

Steps were heard above. The lady paused. Magnhild blushed. Then the lady smiled, and Magnhild hastened to remark: "That is a lodger—who"—

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"Yes, I know; he met me last evening at the wharf."

Magnhild opened her eyes very wide. The lady drew nearer.

"My husband and he are very good friends," said she.

She turned away humming, and cast a glance at the clock in the corner between the bed-room wall and the window.

"Why, is it so late by your time here?" She drew out her own watch. "We are to walk to-day at eleven o'clock. You must go with us; will you not? You can show us the prettiest places in the wood behind the church and up the mountain slopes."

Magnhild promptly answered, "Yes."

"Listen: do you know what? I will run up-stairs and say that you are going with us, and then we will go at once—at once!"

She gave Magnhild's hand a gentle pressure, opened the door and sped swiftly up the stairs. Magnhild remained behind—and she was very pale.

There was a whirling, a raging within, a fall. But there was no explosion. On the contrary, everything became so empty, so still. A few creaking steps above, then not another sound.

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Magnhild must have stood motionless for a long time. She heard some one take hold of the door-knob at last, and involuntarily she pressed both hands to her heart. Then she felt an impulse to fly; but the little fair curly head of the child, with its innocent, earnest eyes, now appeared in the opening of the door.

"Is mamma here?" the little one asked, cautiously.

"She is up-stairs," replied Magnhild, and the sound of her own voice, the very purport of the words she uttered, caused the tears to rise in her eyes and compelled her to turn her face away.

The child had drawn back its head and closed the door. Magnhild had no time to become clear in her own mind about what had occurred; for the child speedily came down-stairs again and into her room.

"Mamma is coming; she said I must wait here. Why are you crying?" But Magnhild was not crying now. She made no reply, however, to the child, who presently exclaimed: "Now mamma is

coming."

Magnhild heard the lady's step on the stair, and escaped into her bedroom. She heard the interchange of words between mother and child in the adjoining room, and then to her consternation the bedroom door was opened; the lady came in. There was not the slightest trace of guilt in her eyes: they diffused happiness, warmth, candor through the whole chamber. But when her gaze met Magnhild's the expression changed, causing Magnhild to drop her eyes in confusion.

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The lady advanced farther into the room. She placed one hand on Magnhild's waist, the other on her shoulder. Magnhild was forced to raise her eyes once more and met a grieved smile. This smile was also so kind, so firm, and therefore so persuasive, that Magnhild permitted herself to be drawn forward, and presently she was kissed—softly at first, as though she were merely fanned by a gentle breath, while that unknown perfume which always accompanied the lady encompassed them both, and the rustle of the silk dress was like a low whisper; then vehemently, while the lady's bosom heaved and her breath was deeply drawn as from some life-sorrow.

After this, utter silence and then a whispered: "Come now!" She went on in advance, leading Magnhild by the hand. Magnhild was a mere child in experience. With contending emotions she entered the pretty little cottage occupied by the lady, and was soon standing in the midst of open trunks and a wardrobe scattered through two rooms.

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The lady began a search in one of the trunks, from which she rose with a white lace neckerchief in her hand, saying: "This will suit you better than the one you have on, for that is not at all becoming," and taking off the one Magnhild wore, she tied on the other in a graceful bow, and Magnhild felt herself that it harmonized well with her red dress.

"But how have you your hair? You have an oval face and your hair done up in that way? No"—and before Magnhild could offer any resistance she was pressed down into a chair. "Now I shall"—and the lady commenced undoing the hair. Magnhild started up, fiery red and frightened, and said something which was met with a firm: "Certainly not!"

It seemed as though a strong will emanated from the lady's words, arms, fingers. Magnhild's hair was unfastened, spread out, brushed, then drawn loosely over the head and done up in a low knot.

"Now see!" and the mirror was held up before Magnhild.

All this increased the young woman's embarrassment to such a degree that she scarcely realized whose was the image in the glass. The elegant lady standing in front of her, the delicate perfume, the child at her knee who with its earnest eyes fixed on her said, "Now you are pretty!"—and the guest at the opposite window who at this moment looked down and smiled. Magnhild started up, and was about to make her escape, but the lady only threw her arms around her and drew her farther into the room.

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"Pray, do not be so bashful! We are going to have such a nice time together;" and once more her attention was full of that sweetness the like of which Magnhild had never known. "Run over now after your hat and we will start!"

Magnhild did as she was bid. But no sooner was she alone than a sense of oppression, a troubled anxiety, wrung her heart, and the lady seemed detestable, officious; even her kindness was distorted into a lack of moderation; Magnhild failed to find the exact word to express what distressed her.

"Well? Are you not coming?"

These words were uttered by the lady, who in a jaunty hat, with waving plume, beamed in through the window. She tossed back her curls, and drew on her gloves. "That hat becomes you very well indeed," said she. "Come now!"

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And Magnhild obeyed.

The little girl attached herself to Magnhild.

"I am going with you," said she.

Magnhild failed to notice this, because she had just heard steps on the stairs. Tande, the composer, was coming to join them.

"How your hand trembles!" cried the little one.

A hasty glance from the lady sent the hot blood coursing up to Magnhild's neck, cheeks, temples—yet another from Tande, who stood on the door-steps, not wholly free from embarrassment, and who now bowed.

"Are we going up in the wood?" asked the little girl, clinging tightly to Magnhild's hand.

"Yes," replied the lady; "is there not a path across the fields behind the house?"

"Yes, there is."

"Then let us go that way."

They went into the house again, and passed out of the back door, through the garden, across the fields. The wood lay to the left of the church, and entirely covered the plain and the tower mountain slopes. Magnhild and the child walked on in advance; the lady and Tande followed.

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"What is your name?" asked the little girl.

"Magnhild."

"How funny, for my name is Magda, and that is almost the same." Presently she said: "Have you ever seen papa in uniform?"

No, Magnhild never had.

"He is coming here soon, papa is, and I will ask him to put it on."

The little girl continued to prattle about her papa, whom she evidently loved beyond all else upon earth. Sometimes Magnhild heard what she was saying, sometimes she did not hear. The pair walking behind spoke so low that Magnhild could not distinguish a single word they were saying although they were quite near. Once she gave a hasty glance back and observed that the lady's expression was troubled, Tande's grave.

They reached the wood.

"Just see! here at the very edge of the wood is the most charming spot in the world!" exclaimed the lady, and now she was radiant again, as though she had never known other than the most jubilant mood. "Let us sit down here!" and as she spoke she threw herself down with a little burst of delight and a laugh. Tande seated himself slowly and at a little distance, Magnhild and the child took their seats opposite the pair.

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The little one sprang directly to her feet again, for her mother wanted flowers, grass, ferns, and moss, and began to bind them at once into nosegays when they were brought to her. It was evidently not the first time Magda had made collections of the kind for her mother, for the child knew every plant by name, and came running up to the group with exclamations of delight whenever she found anything her mother had not yet noticed but which she knew to be a favorite of hers.

Various topics were brought forward, some of which, although not all, were dwelt upon by Tande, who had stretched himself out on the grass and seemed inclined to rest; but from the moment an affair of recent occurrence was mentioned, concerning a wife who had forsaken her husband, and had eventually been cast off by her lover, he took zealous part, severely censuring the lover, for whom Fru Bang made many excuses. It was absurd, she said, to feign an affection which no longer existed. But at least it was possible to act from a sense of duty, Tande insisted. Ah, to duty they had bid farewell, the lady remarked softly, as she busied herself in decking Magda's hat with flowers.

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Further conversation incidentally revealed that Fru Bang had been in the habit of mingling in the first circles of the land; that she had traveled extensively, and evidently had means to live where and how she pleased. And yet here she sat, full of thoughtful care for Magnhild, for Tande, for the child. She had a kindly word for everything that was mentioned; her fancy invested the most trifling remark with worth, just as she made the blades of grass she was putting into her nosegay appear to advantage, and managed so that not one of them was lost.

Tande's long pale face, with its marvelously beautiful smile, and the soft hair falling caressingly, as it were, about it, had gradually become animated.

The glowing, richly-tinted woman at his side was part of the world in which he lived and composed.

The spot on which they sat was surrounded by birch and aspen. The fir was not yet able to gain the mastery over these, although its scions had already put in an appearance. While such were the case grass and flowers would flourish—but no longer.

CHAPTER VI.

[78]

MAGNHILD awoke the next day, not to joyous memories such as she had cherished every morning during the past few weeks. There was something to which she must now rise that terrified her, and, moreover, grieved her. Nevertheless it attracted her. What should she pass through this day?

She had slept late. As she stepped into the sitting-room, she saw Fru Bang at the open window opposite, and was at once greeted with a bow and a wave of the hand. Then a hat was held up and turned round. Very soon Magnhild was so completely under the spell of the lady's kind-hearted cordiality, beauty, and vivacity that her school hour was nearly forgotten.

She was met by a universal outcry when she appeared at the school with her hair done up in a new style, and wearing a new hat and a white lace neckerchief over her red dress! Magnhild had already felt embarrassed at the change, and now her embarrassment increased. But the genuine, hearty applause that arose from many voices speedily set her at her ease, and she returned home in a frame of mind similar to that of a public officer whose rank had been raised one degree. [79]

The weather was fine as on the preceding day. A little excursion was therefore decided on for the afternoon. In the forenoon Tande played. All the windows in the neighborhood were open, and Fru Bang sat in hers and wept. Passers-by stared at her; but she heeded them not. There was something passionately intense and at times full of anguish in his playing to-day. Magnhild had never before heard him give vent to such a mood. Perhaps he, too, felt it to be a strange bewilderment; for rousing himself he now conjured up a wealth of bright, glittering bits of imagery which blended into the sunshine without and the buzzing of the insects. This dewy summer day became all at once teeming with discoveries; in the street, now parched and dry, the particles of dust glittered, over the meadows quivered the varied tints of green where the aftermath had sprung up, and of yellow and brown where it had not yet made its appearance. There was everywhere an intermingling of gold, red, brown, and green in the play of the forest hues. The loftiest pinnacle of the mighty mountain chair had never been more completely bathed in blue. It stood out in bold relief against the glowing grayish tone in the jagged cliffs about the fjord. The music grew more calm; pain was uppermost again, but it was like an echo, or rather it seemed as though it were dissolved into drops which ever and anon trickled down into the sunny vigor of the new mood. The lady opposite bowed forward until her head rested on her arm, and her shoulders quivered convulsively. Magnhild beheld this, and drew back. She did not like such an exposure. [80]

On the excursion that afternoon it again fell to Magnhild's lot to take the lead with the child; the other two came whispering after them. They found to-day a new tarrying-place, a short distance farther up the mountain than where they had assembled the previous day;—the lady had been weeping; Tande was silent, but he appeared even more spiritual than usual.

The conversation this time centred in the fjord scenery of Norway, and the depressing influence it must necessarily have on the mind to be so completely shut in by mountains. The various barriers in the spiritual life of the people were named; old prejudices, established customs, above all those regulations of the church which had become mere empty forms, hypocrisy, too, were all reviewed in the most amusing manner; the infinite claims of love, however, were freely conceded. [81]

"See, there she is sitting with her forefinger in her mouth again," laughed the lady; this greatly startled Magnhild, and created a fresh flow of merriment.

A little while after this Magnhild permitted her hair to be decked by Magda with flowers and grass. She hummed softly to herself all the while, a habit she had acquired during the days when she was practicing reading notes at the parsonage. This time her irregular song took higher flights than usual, inasmuch as thoughts filled it, just as the wind inflates a sail. The higher she sang, the stronger her voice became, until Magda exclaimed:—

"There comes mamma."

Magnhild was silent at once. True enough there came the lady, and directly following her Tande.

"Why, my child, do you sing?"

In the course of the day they had fallen into the habit of using the familiar "du;" that is, Fru Bang used it, but Magnhild could not do so.

"That is the highest, clearest soprano I have heard for some time," said Tande, who now drew near, and who was flushed from having taken a few steps at a more rapid pace than usual. [82]

Magnhild sprang to her feet, so hastily that there fell a shower of flowers and grass to the ground, at the same time putting up her hands to remove Magda's adornments from her hair, which called forth a bitter complaint from the little girl. Tande's words, appearance, and the look he now fastened on her had embarrassed Magnhild, and Fru Bang displayed most kindly tact in endeavoring, as it were, to shield her young friend.

It was not long before they were on their way home,—and they went at once to Tande's room to try Magnhild's voice.

Fru Bang stood holding her hand. Magnhild sang the scale, and every note was so firm and true that Tande paused and looked up at her. She was then obliged to admit that she had sung before.

A feeling of happiness gradually took possession of her; for she was appreciated, there could be no mistake about it. And when a little two-part song was brought forward and Magnhild proved able to sing the soprano at sight, and then a second one was tried and a third, such joy reigned in the little circle that Magnhild gained inspiration, which gave her a beauty she had never possessed at any previous moment of her life. [83]

Fru Bang had a fine alto; her voice was not so cultivated as it was sympathetic; nor was it strong, but for this reason it was all the better suited to Magnhild's voice, for although the latter doubtless was stronger, Magnhild had never been accustomed to letting out its full strength, nor

did she do so now.

As they gradually became more acquainted with the songs, Tande kept adding to the richness and fullness of the piano—the accompaniments.

The street had become crowded with people; such music had never been heard before in the little town. It was evident that a swarm of new ideas were let loose upon those heads. The thoughts and words of the ensuing evening were no doubt more refined than usual. Upon the children there surely dawned a foreboding of foreign lands. A drizzling rain was falling, the crests of the lofty mountains on both sides of the valley and surrounding the fjord were veiled, but towered up all the higher in fancy. The glorious forest hues, the placid surface of the fjord, now darkened by the rain, the fresh aftermath of the meadows, and not a disturbing sound save from the turbulent stream. Even if a wagon came along, it paused in front of the house. [84]

The silence of the multitude without harmonized with the mood of those within.

When the singing at length ended, Tande said that he must devote an hour each day to instructing Magnhild how to use her voice, so that she could make further progress alone when he and Fru Bang were gone. Moreover, they must continue the duet singing, for this was improving to the taste. Fru Bang added that something might be made of that voice.

Tande's eyes followed Magnhild so searchingly that she was glad when it was time to take leave.

She forgot some music she had brought with her, and turning went back after it. Tande was standing by the door. "Thanks for your visit!" he whispered, and smiled. This made her stumble on the threshold, and overwhelmed with confusion, she came near making a misstep at the head of the stairs. She entered her sitting-room in great embarrassment. Fru Bang, who was still there waiting to say "Good-night!" looked at her earnestly. It was some time before she spoke, and then the greeting was cold and absent-minded. She turned, however, before she had proceeded many steps, and descrying Magnhild's look of surprise, sprang back and clasped her in a fervent embrace. [85]

At no very remote period there had been an evening which Magnhild had thought the happiest of her life. But this—

When steps were again heard above she trembled in every fibre of her body. She could see Tande's expression, as he raised his eyes while playing. The diamond, cutting brilliant circles of light over the keys of the piano, the blue-veined hands, the long hair which was continually falling forward, the fine gray suit the musician wore, his silent demeanor,—all dissolved into the melodies and harmonies, and with them became blended his whispered "Thanks for your visit!"

At the cottage across the street it was dark.

Magnhild did not seek her couch until midnight, and then not to sleep; nor did he who was above sleep; on the contrary, just as Magnhild had retired he began to play. He struck up a melancholy, simple melody, in the form of a soprano solo at first, and finally bursting into what sounded like a chorus of female voices; his harmonization was exquisitely pure. Without being conscious herself of the transition of thought, Magnhild seemed to be sitting on the hill-side on the day of her confirmation, gazing at the spot where her home had stood. All her little brothers and sisters were about her. The theme was treated in a variety of ways, but always produced the same picture. [86]

At school the next morning Magnhild was accosted with many questions concerning the preceding evening; among other things whether *she* had really taken part in the singing, *what* they had sung, about the other two, and whether they would sing often.

The questions filled her with joy: a great secret, *her* secret, was in its innermost depths. She felt conscious of strange elasticity. She had never made such haste home before. She was looking forward to singing with him again in the forenoon!

And she did sing. Tande sent word down by the sailor's wife that he expected her at twelve o'clock. A little before this hour she heard once more that melancholy, pure composition of yesterday.

Tande met her without a word. He merely bowed and went straight to the piano and then turned his head as before to bid her draw nearer. She sang scales, he gave suggestions as a rule without looking at her; the whole hour passed as a calm matter of business; she was thankful for this. [87]

From her lesson she crossed the street to the lady. Fru Bang sat, or rather reclined, on the sofa, with an open book on her lap, and with Magda, to whom she was talking, in front of her. She was grave, or rather sorrowful; she looked up at Magnhild, but went on talking with the child, as though no one had entered. Magnhild remained standing, considerably disappointed. Then the lady pushed aside the child and looked up again.

"Come nearer!" said she, feebly, and made a motion with the hand that Magnhild did not understand.

"Sit down there on the footstool, I mean."

Magnhild obeyed.

"You have been with him?" Her fingers loosened Magnhild's hair as she spoke. "The knot is not quite right,"—then with a little caress, "You are a sweet child!"

She sat up now, looked Magnhild full in the eyes, gently raising her friend's head as she did so.

"I have resolved to make you pretty, prettier than myself. Do you see what I have bought for you to-day?"

On the table behind Magnhild lay the materials for a summer costume.

"This is for you, it will be becoming."

"But, dear lady!"

"Hush! Not a word, my friend! I am not happy unless I can do something of the kind—and, in this case, I have my own reasons into the bargain."

Her large, wondrous eyes seemed to float away in dreams.

"There, that will do!" said she, and rose hastily.

"Now we will dine together; but first we must have a short stroll, and in the afternoon a long stroll, and then we will have some singing and afterwards a delightful siesta; that is what he likes!"

But neither short nor long stroll was accomplished, for it rained. So the lady busied herself with cutting out Magnhild's dress; it was to be made in the neighborhood after Fru Bang's own pattern.

They sang together, and even longer than on the preceding day. A supply of songs for two voices was telegraphed for; a few days later the package arrived. During the days which followed most of the songs were gone through with the utmost accuracy. Every day Magnhild had her regular lesson. Tande entered into it with the same business-like silence as on the first day. Magnhild gained courage.

Wonderful days these were! Song followed upon song, and these three were continually together, chiefly at the lady's, where they most frequently both dined and supped. One day Fru Bang would be in the most radiant mood, the next tormented with headache, and then she would have a black, red, and brown kerchief tied like a turban, about her head, and would sit or recline on the sofa, in languid revery.

As they were thus assembled together one day, and Magda stood at the window, the little one said,—

"There goes a man into your house, Magnhild: he is lame."

Magnhild sprang up, very red.

"What is it?" asked Fru Bang, who was lying on the sofa with a headache, and had been talking in a whisper with Tande.

"Oh! it is"—Magnhild was searching for her hat; she found it and withdrew. From the open window she heard the child say: "A lame, ugly man, who"—

Skarlie was working this year on the sea-coast. A foreign ship had been wrecked there Skarlie and some men in Bergen had bought it; for they could repair it at a much less outlay than had originally been estimated. They had made an uncommonly good bargain. Skarlie supervised the carpentering, painting, and leather work of refitting the vessel. He had come home now after a fresh supply of provisions for the workmen.

His surprise on entering his house was not small. Everything in order! And the room filled with a pleasant perfume. Magnhild came—it was a lady who stood before him. Her whole countenance was changed. It had opened out like a flower, and the soft, fair hair floating about neck and drooping shoulders threw a lustre over head and form. She paused on the threshold, her hand on the door-knob. Skarlie had seated himself in the broad chair in the corner, and was wiping the perspiration from his bald head. As soon as his first astonishment was over, he said: "Good-day!"

No reply. But Magnhild came in now, and closed the door after her.

"How fine it looks here," said he. "Is it your lodger"—

He puckered up his lips, his eyes grew small. Magnhild looked at him coldly. He continued more good-naturedly,—

"Did he make your new dress, too?"

Now she laughed.

"How are you getting on?" she asked, presently.

"I am nearly through."

He had acquired the comfortable air of a man who is conscious of doing well in the world.

"It is warm here," said he; the sun had just burst forth after a long rain, and was scorching, as it can be only in September. He stretched out his legs, as far as the crooked one permitted, and lay back, letting his large hands hang down over the arms of the chair, exact pictures of the web-feet of some sea-monster.

"Why are you staring at me?" asked he, with his most comical grimace. Magnhild turned with a searching glance toward the window.

The room had become filled at once with the peculiar saddler odor which attended Skarlie: Magnhild was about to open the window, but thinking better of it stepped back again.

"Where is your lodger?"

"He is across the street."

"Are there lodgers there, too?"

"Yes, a Fru Bang with her daughter."

"So they are the people you associate with?"

"Yes!"

He rose, took off his coat, and also laid aside his vest and cravat. Then he filled his cutty with tobacco, lighted it, and sat down again, this time with an elbow resting on one arm of the chair and smoking. With a roguish smile he contemplated his other half.

"And so you are going to be a lady, Magnhild?"

She did not answer.

"Aye!—Well, I suppose I shall have to begin to make a gentleman of myself."

She turned toward him with an amused countenance. His chest, thickly covered with dark red hair, was bare, for his shirt was open; his face was sunburned, his bald head white.

"The deuce! how you stare at me! I am not nearly as good-looking as your lodger, I can well believe. Hey?"

"Will you have something to eat?" asked she.

"I dined on the steamer."

"But to drink?"

She went out after a bottle of beer, and placed it with a glass on the table beside him. He poured out the beer and drank, looking across the street as he did so.

"That's a deuce of a woman! Is *that* the lady?"

Magnhild grew fiery red; for she too saw Fru Bang standing at the window, staring at the half-disrobed Skarlie.

She fled into her chamber, thence into the garden, and there seated herself.

She had only been there a few minutes when she heard first the chamber, then the kitchen door open, and finally the garden door was opened by her husband.

"Magnhild!" he called. "Yes, there she is."

Little Magda's light curly head was now thrust out, and turned round on every side until Magnhild was seen, and then the child came slowly toward her. Skarlie had gone back into the house.

"I was sent to ask if you were not coming over to take dinner with us."

"Give greetings and thanks; I cannot come—now."

The child bestowed on her a mute look of inquiry, then asked: "Why can you not? Is it because that man has come?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

It was in Magnhild's mind to say, "He is my —"; but it would not cross her lips; and so without speaking she turned to conceal her emotion from the child. The little one stood silently waiting for some time; finally she asked,—

"Why are you crying, Magnhild?"

This was said so sweetly: it chimed in with the memory of the whole bright world which was once more closed, that Magnhild clasped its little representative in her arms, and bowing over the curly head burst into tears. Finally, she whispered,—

"Do not question me any more, little Magda; but go home now, this way, through the garden gate, and tell mamma that I cannot come any more."

Magda obeyed, but she looked over her shoulder several times as she walked away.

Magnhild removed all traces of tears, and went out to make some purchases; for her larder was nearly empty.

When she returned home, and passed through the sitting-room, Skarlie was still in his chair; he had been taking a little nap; now he yawned and began to fill his cutty.

"Did you tell me the lady across the street was married?"

"Yes."

"Is *he* married, too?"

"I do not know."

"I saw them kissing each other," said he.

Magnhild grew very pale and then red.

"I have never seen anything of the kind."

"No, of course not; they did not suppose that I saw them either," said he, and began to light his cutty.

Magnhild could have struck him. She went directly to the kitchen, but could not avoid coming back again. Skarlie greeted her with,—

"It is no wonder they make much of you, for you serve as a screen."

She had brought in a cloth to spread the table, and she flung it right at his laughing face. He caught it, however, and laughed all the louder, until the tears started in his eyes; he could not restrain his laughter.

Magnhild had run back into the kitchen, and she stood in front of the butter, cheese, and milk she had ready to carry into the adjoining room,—stood there and wept.

The door opened, and Skarlie came limping in.

"I have spread the cloth," said he, not yet free from laughter, "for that, I presume, was what you wanted: eh?" and now he took up one by one the articles that stood before Magnhild, and carried them into the next room. He asked good-naturedly after something that was wanting, and actually received an answer. After a while Magnhild had so far recovered her composure as to set the kettle on the fire for tea.

Half an hour later the two sat opposite each other at their early evening meal. Not a word more about those across the street. Skarlie commenced telling of his work on the steamer, but broke off abruptly, for Tande began to play. Skarlie had taste for music. It was a restless, almost defiant strain that was heard; but how it brightened the atmosphere. And it ended with the little melody that always transported Magnhild to the home of her parents, with the fair heads of her little brothers and sisters round about. Skarlie evidently listened with pleasure, and when the playing ceased, he praised it in extravagant terms. Then Magnhild told him that she was singing with Tande; that he thought she had a good voice. She did not get beyond this; for the playing began anew. When it had ceased again, Skarlie said,—

"See here, Magnhild! Let that man give you all the instruction he will; for he is a master—and with the rest you need not meddle."

Skarlie was still in extraordinarily high spirits when, weary from his journey, he went up to the room over the saddler workshop to go to bed. He filled his pipe, and took an English book and a light up-stairs with him.

Magnhild thoroughly aired the room after him, opening all the windows as soon as he was gone. She paced the room in the dark for a long while ere she laid herself down to sleep.

The next morning she stole out of the back door to school, and returned the same way.

She found the whole school in a state of rejoicing over the news Skarlie had just brought, that a quantity of hand-work for which he had undertaken to find purchasers in town had been sold to unusually great advantage. He had doubtless told her this in the course of the morning, but she had been so absorbed in her own affairs that it had made no impression on her. Scarcely was this theme exhausted when one of the young girls (there were both children and grown people in attendance at this hour) expressed her surprise at Magnhild's appearance, which was so different from that of the preceding days. The pupils inquired if anything was amiss. Magnhild did not wear the dress, either, that was so becoming to her, that is, the one given to her by the lady. It was hunch-back Marie, and tall, large-eyed Ellen who were the loudest of all in both delight and astonishment. Magnhild felt ill at ease among them, and took her departure as early as possible. As soon as she had reached home it was announced to her by the sailor's wife that Tande was expecting her. A brief struggle ensued; and then she put on the dress which became her best. She was received as she had been received yesterday, the day before, and every other day: he greeted her with a slight bow, took his seat at the piano and struck a few chords. She was so thankful for his reserve, and especially to-day, that she—her desire to show her appreciation failed to find utterance.

As she came down-stairs she saw Skarlie and Fru Bang standing by the lady's door, in close conversation; they were both laughing. Magnhild stole in unperceived and continued to watch them.

There was a changeful play of expression in the countenances of both, and herein they were alike; but here, too, the resemblance ceased, for Skarlie had never looked so ugly as he did now in the presence of this beautiful woman. Moreover, the smooth, glossy hat he wore completely covered his forehead, giving his face a contracted look; for the forehead alone was almost as large as all the rest of the face. Magnhild was conscious of him at this moment to the extreme tips of her fingers. [99]

The lady was all vivacity; it flashed from her as she tossed back her head and set all her ringlets in fluttering motion, or shifted her foot, accompanying the act with a swaying movement of the upper part of the body, or with a wave of her hand aided in the utterance of some thought, or indicated another with an eager gesture.

The hasty, assured glances the two exchanged gave the impression of combat. It seemed as though they would never get through. Were they interested in each other? Or in the mere act of disputing? Or in the subject they were discussing? Had not Tande come down-stairs, their interview would scarcely have drawn to a conclusion that forenoon. But as he approached with a bow Skarlie limped away, still laughing, and the other two went into the lady's house, she continuing to laugh heartily.

"A deuce of a woman!" said Skarlie, all excitement. "Upon my word she could very easily turn a man's head."

And while he was scraping the ashes from his cutty, he added: "If she were not so kind-hearted she would be positively diabolical. She sees everything!" [100]

Magnhild stood waiting for more.

He glanced at her twice, while he was filling his cutty from his leathern pouch; he looked pretty much as one who thought: "Shall I say it or not?" She knew the look and moved away. But perhaps this very action of hers gave the victory to his taunting impulse.

"She saw that there was light last night up over my workshop. I really thought she was going to ask whether"—

Magnhild was already in the kitchen.

At noon a wagon drove up to the door; Skarlie was obliged to go out into the country to buy meat for his workmen down on the sea-coast.

As soon as he was gone, the lady came running across the street. It was now as it ever had been. Scarcely did she stand in the room, shedding around her sweet smile, than every bad thought concerning her crept away abashed, and with inward craving for pardon, Magnhild yielded to the cordial friendliness with which the lady threw her arms about her, and kissed her and drew her head down caressingly on her shoulder. This time there was not a word spoken, but Magnhild felt the same sympathy in every caress that had accompanied every previous embrace and kiss. When the lady released her, they moved away in different directions. Magnhild busied herself in breaking off a few withered twigs from one of the plants in the window. [101]

Suddenly her cheek and neck were fanned by the lady's warm breath. "My friend," was softly whispered into her ear, "my sweet, pure little friend! You are leading a wild beast with your child hands."

The words, the warm breath which, as it were, infused magic into them, sent a tremor through Magnhild's frame. The tears rolled down her cheeks and fell on her hand. The lady saw this and whispered: "Do not fear. You have in your singing an enchanted ring which you only need turn when you wish yourself away! Do not cry!" And turning Magnhild round, she folded her in her arms again.

"This afternoon the weather is fine; this afternoon we will all be together in the wood and in the house, and we will sing and laugh. Ah! there are not many more days left to us!"

These last words stabbed Magnhild to the heart. Autumn was nigh at hand, and soon she would be alone again.

CHAPTER VII.

 [102]

THEY were up-stairs in the afternoon, standing by the piano singing, when they heard Skarlie come home and go into the sitting-room below. Without making any remarks about this, they went on singing. They sang at last by candle-light, with the windows still open.

When Magnhild came down-stairs Skarlie too had his windows open; he was sitting in the arm-chair in the corner. He rose now and closed the windows; Magnhild drew down the curtains, and in the mean time Skarlie struck a light. While they were still in the dark, he began to express his admiration of the singing to which he had been listening. He praised Magnhild's voice as well as the lady's alto, and of his wife's soprano he repeated his praise. "It is as pure—as you are yourself, my child," said he. He was holding a match to the candle as he spoke, and he appeared almost good-looking, so calm and serious was his shrewd countenance. But ere long there came the play of other thoughts. This indicated a change of mood.

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"While you were singing her husband, the captain of engineers, arrived." Magnhild thought he was jesting, but Skarlie added: "He sat in the window opposite listening." Here he laughed.

This so alarmed Magnhild that she was unable to sleep until late that night. For the first time it occurred to her that Fru Bang's husband might be repulsive to her, and she considered the lady's conduct from this point of view. What if those two people really loved each other? Suppose it were her own case? She found herself blushing furiously; for at once Tande's image rose distinctly before her.

When she awoke the next morning she involuntarily listened. Had the tempest already broken loose? Hurriedly putting on her clothes she went into the sitting-room, where Skarlie was preparing to start off again. A portion of the articles he was to have taken with him had not yet arrived; he was obliged to go with what he had and come again in a few days. He took a friendly leave of Magnhild.

She accompanied him as far as the school.

Scarcely had she returned home than she saw a man with red beard and light hair come out of the house opposite, holding little Magda by the hand. This must be Magda's papa. The little girl had his light hair and something of his expression of countenance; but neither his features, nor his form; he was of a heavy build. They crossed the street, entered the house, and went up-stairs. Surely there could be no quarrel when the child was along? Magnhild heard Tande go dress himself, and she heard an audible, "Good-day! Are you here?" in Tande's voice.

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Then nothing more, for now the door was softly closed. So filled with anxiety was she that she listened for the least unusual sound overhead; but she heard only the steps now of one, now of both. Soon the door opened, she heard voices, but no contention. All three came down-stairs and went out into the street where the lady stood waiting for them, in her most brilliant toilet, and with the smile of her holiday mood. Tande greeted her, she cordially held out her hand. Then the whole four walked past the house-door, and turned into the garden way to take the usual path across the fields to the wood and the mountains. At first, they sauntered slowly along in a group; later, the father went on in advance with the child, who seemed desirous to lead the way, and the lady and Tande followed, very slowly, very confidentially. Magnhild was left behind alone, overwhelmed with astonishment.

[105]

In the afternoon Magda came over with her papa. He greeted Magnhild with a smile and apologized for coming; his little daughter had insisted on his paying his compliments to her friend, he said.

Magnhild asked him to take a seat, but he did not do so at once. He looked at her flowers, talked about them with an air of understanding such as she had never heard before, and begged to be allowed to send her some new plants upon whose proper care he enlarged.

"It is really little Magda who will send them," said he, turning with a smile toward Magnhild. This time she was conscious that he was shyly observing her.

He looked at the pictures on the wall, the bridge at Cologne, the Falls of Niagara, the White House at Washington, the Caravan in the Desert, and "Judith," by Horace Vernet; examined also some photographs of unknown, often uncouth-looking men and women, some of them in foreign costumes.

"Your husband has been a traveler," said he, and his eyes glided from the portraits back to "Judith," while he stood stroking his beard.

"Have you been long married?" he presently asked, taking a seat.

[106]

"Nearly three years," she replied, and colored.

"You must put on your uniform so that Magnhild can see you in it," said the little girl; she had posted herself between her father's knees, now toying with his shirt studs, now with his beard. He smiled; certain wrinkles about the eyes and mouth became more apparent when he smiled, and bore witness of sorrow. Musingly he stroked the little one's hair; she nestled her head up against him, so lovingly, so trustingly.

He awoke at last from his reverie, cast a shy, wondering look at Magnhild, stroked his beard, and said,—

"It is very beautiful here."

"When will you send Magnhild the flowers you spoke of?" interrupted the little girl.

"As soon as I get back to town," said he, caressing the child.

"Papa is building a fort," explained Magda, not without pride. "Papa is building at home, too," she added. "Papa is all the time building, and now we have a tower to our house, and all the rooms are so pretty. You just ought to see."

And she fell to describing her home to Magnhild, which, however, she had often done before. The father listened with that peculiar smile of his that was not altogether a smile, and as though to turn the conversation he hastily observed: "We took a short stroll up the mountains this morning (here the little girl explained where they had been) and then"—There was undoubtedly something he wanted to say; but a second thought must have flashed across the first. [107]

He became absorbed again in thought. Just then Tande began to play overhead. This brought life to the countenance of Magda's father, a wondering, shy look stole over it, and bowing his head he began to stroke his little daughter's hair.

"He plays extraordinarily well," he remarked, and rose to his feet.

The next day the captain left. He might perhaps return later to meet the general of engineers, with whom he had to make a tour of inspection. The life of those left behind glided now into its accustomed channels.

One evening Magnhild appeared at Fru Bang's with a very carelessly arranged toilet.

As soon as the lady noticed this she gave Magnhild a hint, and herself covered her retreat. Magnhild was so much mortified that she could scarcely be prevailed upon to enter the sitting-room again; but amid the laughing words of consolation heaped upon her she forgot everything but the never-wavering goodness and loving forethought of her friend. It was so unusual for Magnhild to express herself as freely as she did now, that the lady threw her arms about her and whispered,— [108]

"Yes, my child, you may well say that I am good to you, for you are killing me!"

Magnhild quickly tore herself away. She sought no explanation with words, she was by far too much startled; but her eyes, the expression of her face, her attitude, spoke for her. The door was opened, and Magnhild fell from surprise to painful embarrassment. Tande had, meanwhile, turned toward Magda, humming softly, as though he observed nothing; he amused himself by playing with the little one. Later he talked with Magnhild about her singing, which he told her she must by no means drop again. If arrangements could be made for her to live in the city,—and that could so easily be brought about,—he would not only help her himself, but procure for her better aid than his.

Fru Bang was coming and going, giving directions about the evening meal. The maid entered with a tray, on which were the cream and other articles, and by some untoward chance Fru Bang ran against it directly in front of Magnhild and Tande, and her efforts to prevent the things from falling proved fruitless, because the others did not come speedily enough to her aid. Everything was overthrown. The dresses of both ladies were completely bespattered. Tande at once drew out his pocket handkerchief and began to wipe Magnhild's. [109]

"You are less attentive to me than to her," laughed the lady, who was much more soiled than Magnhild.

He looked up.

"Yes, I know you better than her," he answered, and went on wiping.

Fru Bang grew ashen gray. "Hans!" she exclaimed, and burst into tears. Then she hastened into the next room. Magnhild understood this as little as what had previously occurred. Indeed, it was not until months had elapsed that one day, as she was wandering alone through the wintry slush of a country road, with her thoughts a thousand miles away from the lady and the whole scene, she suddenly stood still: the full meaning of Fru Bang's behavior rushed over her.

Tande had risen to his feet, for Magnhild had drawn back in order not to accept any further assistance from him. That *she* could act so, and that *his* name was "Hans," was all that was clear to her at this moment. Tande slowly paced the floor. He was very pale; at least so it seemed to Magnhild, although she could not see very well, for it was beginning to grow dark. Should she follow the lady, or withdraw altogether? Magda was in the kitchen; she finally concluded to go to her. And out there she helped the little girl fill a dish with preserves. From the chamber which adjoined the kitchen she soon heard a low conversation and sobs. When Magda and she went into the sitting-room with the dish, Tande was not there. They waited so long for the evening meal that Magda fell asleep and Magnhild had to go home. [110]

Not long afterward she heard Tande, too, come home. The next forenoon she sang with him; he appeared quite as usual. In the afternoon she met the lady by chance in the street, and she made sundry criticisms on Magnhild's improvising, which she had heard, a little while before, through the open window; at the same time she straightened Magnhild's hat, which was not put on exactly right.

Skarlie came home again. He told Magnhild that on a trip to Bergen he had traveled with Captain Bang. [111]

There was a person on the steamer, he said, who knew about Fru Bang's relations with Tande and spoke of them. Magnhild had strong suspicions that Skarlie himself was that person; for after

he had been home the last time she had heard allusions to these relations from Tande's woman-servant, the sailor's wife, and several others.

"The captain is good-natured," said Skarlie; "he considers himself unworthy to be loved by so much soul and brilliancy. He was, therefore, rejoiced that his wife had at last found an equal."

"You seem delighted," Magnhild replied, "you appear more disgusting than you"—She was just going to Fru Bang's, and withdrew without deigning to complete the sentence.

She was to accompany Magda to an exhibition to be given by an old Swedish juggler, with his wife and child, on the square some distance behind the house.

When Magnhild came in, the lady met her all dressed; she was going to the show, too. The explanation of this speedily followed; that is to say, Tande appeared to accompany them. He reported that the general had arrived.

Then they set off, Magda and Magnhild, the lady and Tande. A crowd of people had assembled, most of them outside of the inclosure, where they could pay what they pleased. Within the inclosure there were "reserved" places, that is, benches, and to these the lady and her party repaired. [112]

The old juggler was already in his place, where, with the aid of his wife, he was preparing for the show. He bore a ludicrous resemblance to Skarlie, was bald, had a snub-nose, was large and strong-looking, and his face was not devoid of humor. Scarcely had Magnhild made this discovery than she heard Magda whisper to her mother,—

"Mamma, he looks just like Magnhild's husband."

The lady smiled. At the same moment the old juggler stepped up to them. Among the reserved places was one "especially reserved," a bench, that is, with a back to it. The old man was quite hoarse, and his language, so far as it could be comprehended, was such a droll mixture of Swedish and Norwegian, that those nearest laughed; and the clown-like courtesy of his manner also created a laugh, even among those at a distance. But so soon as the laugh began Tande stepped back a few paces. The lady went forward, and Magda and Magnhild followed. [113]

The old juggler had a wife much younger than himself, a black-haired, hollow-eyed, sorrowfully thin person, who had the general appearance of having been unfortunate. There soon came skipping out of the tent a little lad with curly hair, sprightly eyes, and an air of refinement over face and form which he did not get from his mother, still less from the old clown. He was dressed as a jester, but was evidently anything else. He paused at his mother's side and asked her some question. He spoke in French. The lady, who was annoyed by Tande's foolish shyness, addressed the boy in his native tongue. The little fellow came forward, but merely to pause at a short distance and stand viewing her with an expression of dignified inquiry. This amused her, and taking out her purse she handed him quite a large coin.

"*Merci, Madame!*" said he, making a low bow.

"Kiss the lady's hand!" commanded the old man. The boy obeyed, with shy haste. Then he ran back to the tent, whence was heard the barking of dogs.

Suddenly there arose a commotion in the crowd behind those who were seated. A woman with a child three or four years old in her arms was trying to push her way forward. She could not stand and hold the child forever, she said; she wanted to sit down. She was quite as good as any one else present. [114]

But there seemed to be no seat vacant except on the front bench. So to the front bench she went, to the great sport of the multitude; for she was well known. She was no other than "Machine Martha." Two years before she had come to the Point with a child and a large and a small sewing-machine, with which she supported herself, for she was capable. She had deserted her husband with an itinerant tradesman, who dealt, among other things, in sewing-machines. He had deceived her. Since then she had fallen into wretched habits of drunkenness, and had become thoroughly degraded. Her face was rough and her hair disheveled. Nevertheless, she still seemed to have sufficient energy left to raise a storm. She seated herself directly beside the lady, who shrank away, for Martha smelled strongly of beer.

The old juggler had noticed the involuntary movement the lady made. He was on hand at once, and, in a hoarse, rough voice, ordered Martha to take another place.

She must have been abashed herself by all the silk she had come into contact with, for she now got up and moved away. [115]

As she was watching her Magnhild descried Skarlie. At his side Martha paused. Soon she came forward again. "I will sit there, I tell you," said she, and resuming her seat she placed the child on the bench beside her.

The old juggler left his preparations. He had grown angry. "You cursed"—here he must have remembered the fine company he was in, for he continued: "It costs money to sit here." He spoke Swedish.

"Here is a mark!" said the woman, holding out the coin as she spoke.

"Very well," said he, hoarsely; "but sit on another bench. Will the ladies and gentlemen please

move closer together?" he begged of those on the nearest benches. Whether his directions were followed or not, Martha did not stir.

"The devil a bit will I move," said she.

"Let her stay where she is," whispered the lady.

"Not for any sum," replied the gallant old man. "These seats are reserved for the highest aristocracy," and he took hold of the child. But now Martha sprang up like one possessed.

"You Swedish troll!" cried she, "will you let my child alone?"

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The crowd burst into stormy shouts of laughter, and encouraged thereby, she continued: "Highest aristocracy? Pshaw! She is a—she, as well as I." The word shall remain unwritten; but Martha looked significantly at the lady. A volley of laughter, and then, as at the word of command, the silence of the grave.

The lady had started up, proud and beautiful. She looked around for her escort. She wished to leave. Tande was standing not very far off, with a couple of travelers, who had begged to be presented to the well-known composer. The lady's flaming eyes met his. He gazed back at her intently. Every one was looking at him. But no one could penetrate his gaze, any farther than they could have penetrated a polished steel ball.

And yet, however unfathomable those eyes, there was one thing they said plainly enough: "Madame, I know you not!" And his refined, arched brow, his delicately-chiseled nose, his tightly-compressed lips, his hollow cheeks, aye, the glittering diamond studs in his shirt, the aristocratic elegance of his attire, all said, "Touch me not!" Over his eyes were drawn veil after veil.

It was all the work of a moment. The lady turned to Magnhild as though to call on her to bear witness. And yet no! There was no one in the world beside him and herself who could know how great was the offering that now was burnt, how great the love he now flung from him.

[117]

Again the lady turned toward him a look, as brief as a flash of lightning. What indignation, what a great cry of anguish, what a swarm of memories, what pride, what contempt, did she not hurl at him. Magnhild received the quivering remains as she turned to her to—aye, what should she do now? Her face suddenly betrayed the most piteous forlornness, and at the same time a touching appeal, as that of a child. The tears rolled down her cheeks. Magnhild, entering completely into her mood, impulsively held out her hand. The lady grasped it and pressed it so vehemently that Magnhild had to exercise all her self-control not to scream aloud. The poor, wounded, repulsed woman gathered together all her inward strength through this outward expenditure of force, and thus she became uplifted. For at the same time she smiled. And lo! across that part of the square where the tight rope was stretched and where spectators were forbidden to intrude, there strode at this moment two officers, seen by all; but how could admittance be refused to a general's cap? And such a one was worn by the all-powerful individual who, with long strides and wide-swinging arms, as though he were himself both commander and army, advanced with his adjutant on the left flank. Already from afar he saluted, in the most respectful manner, his captain's beautiful wife. She hastened to meet her deliverer. On the general's arm she was led back to her place, while he himself took a seat by her side. The adjutant fell to Magnhild's lot, after the lady had introduced them. The general stole many a glance at Magnhild, and the adjutant was all courtesy. This was almost the only thing Magnhild noticed. She was quivering in every nerve.

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The lady sparkled with wit, sprightliness, beauty. But every now and then she would seize Magnhild's hand, and press it with remorseless energy. She strengthened herself in the reality of the moment. The bodily pain this caused Magnhild corresponded with the spiritual pain she experienced. She heard the adjutant at her side and Magda cry out in wonder. She, too, now saw several balls glittering in the air, and she saw a large one weighed by a spectator, and then cast into the air by the old athlete, as though it were a play ball, and caught again on his arm, shoulder, or breast; but at the same time she heard the lady tell the general that she would leave the next morning under his escort; she had been waiting for him since her husband could not come.

[119]

Magnhild well knew that all was now over: but would the end come as soon as the next morning? A loud outcry, coming chiefly from the voices of boys, cut through her pain. The old man had thrown the large ball into the air with both hands, and then quite a small ball, and continued to keep them in rapid motion for some time. To Magnhild the small ball represented herself; and the large one—? It was not in order to search for an adequate symbol, nor did she apply it, but everything became symbolic. The perpetual glitter of the balls in the air represented to her the icy glance which had just made her tremble.

"The old man is extraordinarily strong," said the adjutant. "I once saw a man in Venice with another man standing on his shoulders, who stooped and raised a third, and he worked his way up and stood on the second man's shoulders, and then, only think, they drew up a fourth, who managed to stand on the shoulders of the third. The first man walked about on the ground, carrying with him the other three, while the upper man played with balls."

[120]

"Were I to die at this moment," the lady was saying on the other side, "and the soul could forget everything here and have imparted to it a new series of wonderful problems, infinite vistas, so that enraptured discovery after discovery might be made—what could there be more glorious?"

"My imagination does not carry me so far," came in the general's firm voice. "I am ready to

stake my life that to live and die in the fulfillment of one's duty is the greatest happiness a healthily organized human being can feel. The rest is, after all, of little consequence."

Here Magnhild received a feverish pressure of the hand.

"Applaud, ladies and gentlemen, applaud," said the clown, hoarsely and good-naturedly. This raised a laugh, but no one stirred.

"Why do not the dogs come out?" asked Magda, who heard the animals impatiently barking in the tent.

About the mountain peaks clouds crisped and curled; a gust of wind betokened a change in the weather; the fjord darkened under the influence of a swiftly rising squall. There was something infinitely sublime in the landscape; something awe-inspiring. [121]

It began to grow cold. The people in the background felt hushed and gloomy. Now the clown's wife came forward; *she* was to go on the tight rope. The haggard, faded beauty wore a dress cut very low in the neck, and with short sleeves. The lady shivered as she looked at her, complained of cold feet, and rose. The general, the adjutant, and consequently Magnhild also, did the same; Magda alone, with looks of entreaty, kept her seat; she was waiting for the dogs. A single glance from her mother sufficed; she got up without a word.

They passed out the same way the officers had come in; not one of them looked back. The lady laughed her most ringing laugh; its pleasant tones rolled back over the assembled multitude. Every one gazed after her. The general walked rapidly, so that her light, easy movements appeared well at his side. The general's height invested hers with a peculiar charm; his stiff, martial bearing and figure heightened the effect of her pliant grace. The contrasts of color in her attire, the feather in her hat, an impression from her laughter, affected one man in the audience as he might have been affected by withdrawing music.

When the officers took their leave at the lady's door, she did not speak a word to Magnhild; she did not so much as glance at her as she went into the house. Magnhild felt her sympathy repulsed. Deeply grieved, she crossed the street to her own house. [122]

Tande returned late. Magnhild heard him walking back and forth, back and forth, more rapidly than ever before. Those light steps kept repeating: "Touch me not!" at last in rhythm; the glitter of the diamond studs, the aristocratic elegance of the attire, the deep reserve of the countenance, haunted her. The lady's anguish groaned beneath these footsteps. What must not *she* be enduring? "That amidst the thunder and lightning of her suffering she should think of me," thought Magnhild, "would be unnatural." In the first moment of terror she had sought refuge with her young friend, as beneath a sheltering roof, but immediately afterward all was, of course, forgotten.

Some one came into the hall. Was it a message from the lady? No, it was Skarlie. Magnhild well knew his triple time step. He gave her a searching glance as he entered. "It is about time for me to be off," said he. He was all friendliness, and began to gather together his things.

"Have you been waiting for a conveyance?" asked she. [123]

"No, but for the meat I ordered and had to go without the last time; it came a little while ago."

She said no more, and Skarlie was soon ready.

"Good-by, until I come again!" said he. He had taken up his things, and now stood looking at her.

"Skarlie," said she, "was it you who gave Machine Martha that mark?"

He blinked at her several times, and finally asked: "What harm was there in that, my dear?"

Magnhild grew pale.

"I have often despised you," said she, "but never so much as at this moment."

She turned, went into her bed-room and bolted the door. She heard Skarlie go. Then she threw herself on the bed.

A few bars were struck on the piano above, but no more followed; Tande was probably himself startled at the sound. These bars involuntarily made Magnhild pause. Now she was forced to follow the steps which began afresh. A new tinge of the mysterious, the incomprehensible, had fallen over Tande. She was afraid of him. Before this, she had trembled when he was near at hand; now a thrill ran through her when she merely thought of him. [124]

The steps above ceased, and she glided from the unfathomable to Skarlie; for here she was clear. How she hated him! And when she thought that in a fortnight he would come again and act as though nothing had occurred, she clinched her hands in rage and opened them again; for as it had been a hundred times before, so it would be again. She would forget, because he was so good-natured, and let her have her own way.

A profound sorrow at her own insufficiency fell like the pall of night on her fancy. She burst into tears. She was unable to cope with one of the relations of life, either those of others or her own; unable to grasp any saving resolution. Indeed, what could this be?

The steps began again, swifter, lighter than ever. Once more Magnhild experienced that inexplicable, not unpleasant tremor Tande had caused in her before.

It had finally grown dark. She rose and went into the next room. At the cottage opposite there was light, and the curtains were down. Magnhild also struck a light. Scarcely had she done so when she heard steps in the hall, and some one knocked at her door. She listened; there came another rap. She went to the door. It was a message from the lady for Magnhild to come to her. She put out the light and obeyed the summons. [125]

She found everything changed. All around stood open, already-packed chests, trunks, boxes, and traveling satchels; Magda lay sleeping on her own little hamper. A hired woman was assisting the maid in putting the room in order. The maid started up saying: "My lady has just gone into her bed-room. I will announce you."

Magnhild knocked at the door, then entered the chamber.

The lady lay on her couch, behind white bed curtains, in a lace-trimmed night-dress. She had wound about her head the Turkish kerchief which was inseparably associated with her headaches. The lamp stood a little in the background, with a shade of soft, fluttering red paper over it. She was leaning on one elbow which was buried deep in the pillow, and she languidly extended the free left hand; a weary, agonized gaze followed. How beautiful she was! Magnhild was hers again, hers so completely that she flung herself over her and wept. As though under the influence of an electric shock the sick woman sat up and casting both arms about Magnhild pressed her to her own warm, throbbing form. She wanted to appropriate all this comprehension and sympathy. "Thanks!" she whispered over Magnhild. Her despair quivered through every nerve of her body. Gradually her arms relaxed and Magnhild rose. Then the lady sank back among the pillows and begged Magnhild to fetch a chair and sit by her. [126]

"The walls have ears," she whispered, pointing to the door. Magnhild brought the chair. "No, here on the bed," said the lady, making room beside her.

The chair was set aside again. The lady took Magnhild's hand and held it in both of hers. Magnhild gazed into her eyes, which were still full of tears. How good, how true, how full of comprehension she looked! Magnhild bent down and kissed her. The lips were languid.

"I sent for you, Magnhild," said she, softly. "I have something to say to you. Be not afraid,"—a warm pressure of the hand accompanied these words; "it is not my own history—and it shall be very brief; for I feel the need of being alone." Here the tears rolled down over her cheeks. She was aware of it and smiled. [127]

"You are married—I do not understand how, and I do not wish to know!" A tremor ran through her and she paused. She turned her head aside for a moment. Presently she continued: "Do not attempt"—but she got no farther; she drew away both hands, covered her face, and flinging herself round, wept in the pillow. Magnhild saw the convulsive quivering of back and arms, and she rose.

"How stupid that was of me," she heard at last; the lady had turned round again, and now bathed eyes and brow with an essence which filled the room with perfume. "I have no advice to give you—besides, of what use would it be? Sit down again!" Magnhild sat down. The lady laid aside the phial and took Magnhild's hand in both of hers. She patted and stroked it, while a long, searching gaze followed. "Do you know that you are the cause of what happened to-day?" Magnhild flushed as though she were standing before a great fire; she tried to rise, but the lady held her fast. "Be still, my child! I have read his thoughts when we were together. You are pure and fine—and I—!" She closed her eyes and lay as still as though she were dead. Not a sound was heard, until at last the lady drew a long, long breath, and looked up with a gaze so full of suffering! [128]

Magnhild heard the beating of her own heart; she dared not stir; she suppressed even her breathing. She felt cold drops of moisture start from every pore.

"Yes, yes, Magnhild;—be now on *your* guard!"

Magnhild started up. The lady turned her head after her. "Be not proud!" said she.

"Is there any place where you can now go?" Magnhild did not hear what she said. The lady repeated her question as calmly as she had spoken before. "Is there any place where you can now go? Answer me!"

Magnhild could scarcely collect her thoughts, but she answered: "Yes," merely out of accustomed acquiescence to the lady. She did not think of any special place of refuge, only that she must go away from here now, at once. But before she could move, the lady, who had been watching her closely, said,—

"I will tell you one thing that you do not know: you love him."

Magnhild drew back, swift as lightning, her eyes firmly fixed on *hers*. There arose a brief conflict, in which the lady's eyes, as it were, breathed upon Magnhild's. Magnhild grew confused, colored, and bowed her head on her hands. The lady sat up and took hold of her arm. Magnhild still resisted; her bosom heaved—she tottered, as though seeking support; and finally leaned aside toward where she felt the pressure of the lady's hand. [129]

Then throwing herself on the lady's bosom she wept violently.

CHAPTER VIII.

[130]

WHILE he was still in bed the next morning there was brought to Tande by the sailor's wife a letter. It had a dainty, old-fashioned, somewhat yellow, glazed envelope, and the address was written in an unpracticed lady's hand, with delicate characters, of which those extending below the lines terminated in a little superfluous flourish, as if afraid of being round and yet with a strong tendency to become so.

"From whom can this be?" thought Tande.

He opened the letter. It was signed "Magnhild." A warm glow ran through him, and he read:—

HR. H. TANDE,—I thank you very much for your kindness to me, and for the instruction you have so generously given me. My husband has said that you have no room-rent to pay.

I am obliged to go away without waiting for an opportunity to tell you of this. Once more my best thanks.

MAGNHILD.

He read the letter through at least five times. Then he studied each word, each character. This epistle had cost fully ten rough sketches and discarded copies; he was sure of it. The word "Magnhild" was written with more skill than the rest; the writer must have had frequent practice in that early in life.

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But with such trifling discoveries Tande could not silence the terrible accusation that stared at him from this letter. He lay still a long time after letting the letter drop from his hands.

Presently he began to drum on the sheet with the fingers of his right hand; he was playing the soprano part of a melody. Had it reached the piano, and had Magnhild heard it, she would surely have recognized it.

Suddenly Tande sprang out of bed and into the adjoining room. Stationing himself behind the curtain he took a cautious survey of the opposite house. Quite right: the windows were all open, two women were at work cleaning; the house was empty. Tande paced the floor and whistled. He walked until he was chilled through. Then he began to dress. It usually took him an hour to make his toilet, during which he went from time to time to the piano. To-day he required two hours, and yet he did not once go near the piano.

In the forenoon he took a long walk, but not to the spots they had all visited together. During this walk what had occurred began to assume a shape which made him feel less guilty than he had felt at first. The next day he scarcely felt that he was in the least to blame. Toward evening of the third day his conscience began again to trouble him; but on the following morning he rose from his couch ready to smile over the whole affair.

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The first day he had twice commenced a letter to Magnhild but had torn up each effort. On the fourth day he found, instead of the attempted letter, a musical theme. This was capable of being developed into a complex, richly harmonized composition, full of magnificent unrest. Several bars of the simple, refined melody which had conjured up for Magnhild dreams of her childhood might be sprinkled through it. Could not the two motives be brought into conflict?

But as he failed to succeed to his satisfaction, Tande concluded that neither at this place nor at this time could it be accomplished. He remained at the Point one week longer, and then packing up his things he departed. The piano he left behind him, and the key with it. He set forth for Germany.

CHAPTER IX.

[133]

ABOUT five years had elapsed when one Sunday evening in spring, a party of young girls passed up the one large street of the coast town. They were walking arm in arm, and their numbers were continually increased; for the girls were singing a three part song as they went along.

In front of the saddler's house (which, by the way, was now without either sign-board or shop)

they slackened their speed, as though they especially desired their singing to be heard here. Perhaps they also expected to see a face at one of the low windows; but they saw none and soon moved onward.

When the last of the party had disappeared, a woman rose from the large chair in the corner. She was scarcely more than half dressed, had down-trodden slippers and disheveled hair. As she knew that no one lived opposite and saw no one in the street, she ventured to approach the window, and resting her arm on the sash she bowed her head in her hand and became absorbed in thought. And as she stood thus she dreamily listened to the harmonies which ever and anon floated back to her. [134]

This chorus was a reminder that Magnhild had once loved song and had believed that in it she had found her vocation. It was she who stood there, and who although, it was Sunday, or perhaps just because it was Sunday, had not thought it worth while to dress herself; it was six o'clock in the afternoon.

She was roused by the rattling of carriage-wheels from another direction. The steamer must have arrived. So accustomed was she to this one break in the desert-stillness of the town, that she forgot she was not dressed, and looked out to see who was coming. It proved to be two ladies; one with a child in her arms and a sunshade; the other with a fluttering veil, bright, eager eyes and a full face. She wore a Scotch plaid traveling suit, and as the carriage drove rapidly past she nodded to Magnhild, the travel-bronzed face all beaming; later she turned and waved her gloved hand.

Who in all the world could this be? In her surprise, which with her always gave place to embarrassment, Magnhild had drawn back into the room. Who could it be?

There was something familiar that was struggling in vain for the supremacy when the lady came running back toward the house. She moved on briskly in her light traveling costume, and now springing up the steps she soon stood in the door that was thrown open to receive her. She and Magnhild looked at each other for a moment. [135]

"Do you not know me?" asked the elegant lady, in the broadest dialect of the parish.

"Rønnaug?"

"Yes, of course!"

And then they embraced.

"My dear! I am here solely on your account. I want to tell you that all these years I have been looking forward to this moment. My dear Magnhild!"

She spoke an intermixture of three languages: English, the dialect of the parish, and a little of the common book language of Norway.

"I have been trying to speak Norse only a couple of months, and do not succeed very well yet."

Her countenance had developed: the eyes glowed with more warmth than of yore; the full lips had acquired facility in expressing every varied shade of humor, friendliness, and will. Her form was even more voluptuous than it had formerly been, but her rapid movements and the elegant traveling suit she wore softened the effect. Her broad hands, which bore the impress of her working days, closed warmly about Magnhild's hand, and soon they were sitting side by side while Rønnaug told her strange experiences of the past four or five years. She had not wanted to write about them, for no one would have believed her story if she had. The reason why she had not kept her promise to write immediately upon reaching her journey's end was simply because even during the voyage she had risen from the steerage to the first cabin, and what had caused this promotion would have been misinterpreted. [136]

When she sailed from Liverpool she was sitting forward on the gunwale of the large ship. A gentleman came up to her and in broken Norwegian claimed acquaintance with her, for just as she was sitting now, he said, she had sat a month before on the back of his cariole. Rønnaug, too, remembered him, and they talked together that day and many other days. After a while he brought a lady with him. The next day he and the lady came again and invited Rønnaug to go with them to the first cabin. Here the lady and she, with the aid of the gentleman, entered into an English conversation, which created much amusement. Others soon gathered about the group and the upshot of it all was that Rønnaug was compelled to remain in the first cabin, she really did not know at whose expense. She took a bath, was provided with new clothes from top to toe, several ladies contributing, and remained as a guest among the passengers. All were kind to her. [137]

She left the ship with the lady, who proved to be an aunt of the gentleman who had first spoken to Rønnaug and at whose expense, as she soon learned, she had traveled. He afterwards had her provided with instruction and the handsomest support, and it was at his expense they all three took frequent long journeys together. For the past two years she had been his wife, and they had a child about a year old whom she had with her. And this child Magnhild must see—not "tomorrow," nor "by and by," but "now," "right away!"

Magnhild was not dressed. Well, then she must speedily make her toilet. Rønnaug would help her—and in spite of all resistance they were both soon standing in Magnhild's chamber.

As soon as Magnhild had begun to dress Rønnaug wandered about in the rooms. As she did so

she asked one single question, and this was: why Magnhild was not dressed so late in the day. A long protracted "oh!" was the only answer she received. Rönnaug hummed softly to herself as she went out into the front room. By and by some words were uttered by her; they were English words, and one of them Magnhild heard distinctly: it was "disappointed." Magnhild understood English; during the past three winters Skarlie had read the language with her, and she could already read aloud to him from the American weekly paper, which, since his sojourn in America, it had been a necessity for him to take. She knew, therefore, that "disappointed" was the same as "*skuffet*."

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There are times when a change occurs in our mood, inasmuch as the sun which filled the whole room suddenly disappears, leaving the atmosphere gray, cold, within and without. In like manner Magnhild was involuntarily seized with an indescribable dread; and sure enough, the next time Rönnaug came humming past the open door (she was looking at the pictures on the wall), she cast a brief side glance in at Magnhild; it was by no means unfriendly; but it was felt, nevertheless, by Magnhild, as though she had received a shock. What in all the world had happened? or rather, what was discovered? It was impossible for her to conceive. She cast her eyes searchingly around the room, when she came in after dressing. But she sought in vain for anything which could have betrayed what she herself would have concealed, or indicated what could have caused displeasure. What was it? Rönnaug's face was now quite changed—ah! what was it?

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They set forth; both had grown silent. Even on the street, where there must be so much that was familiar, she who had but now spoken in three languages could hold her peace in them all. They met a man in a cariole, who was talking passionately with a younger man he had stopped; both bowed to Magnhild, the elder one with an air of indifference, the younger one with triumph in his pimpled face and flashing eyes. For the first time Rönnaug roused to interest. Although nearly five years had elapsed since she had served as "skyds" girl to the unknown man who had talked about Magnhild's destiny, and who had seen her herself in circumstances of which she was now ashamed, she recognized him at once. Hurriedly grasping Magnhild's hand, she cried:—

"Do you know him? What is his name? Does he live here?"

In her eagerness she quite forgot to use her mother-tongue.

Magnhild replied only to the last question:—

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"Yes, since last winter."

"What is his name?"

"Grong."

"Have you had any conversation with him?"

"More with his son; that was he who was standing by the cariole."

Rönnaug looked after Grong, who at this moment drove briskly, it might almost be said angrily, past them.

They soon came to the second hotel on the right hand side; a maid servant was asked if a lady had stopped there with a child. They were shown up-stairs. There stood the lady who had accompanied Rönnaug. The latter asked her in English where the child was, at the same time presenting Miss Roland to Mrs. Skarlie, after which all three went into the adjoining room.

"Ah, we have a cradle!" exclaimed Rönnaug in English, and threw herself on her knees beside the cradle.

Magnhild remained standing, at a little distance. The child was very pretty, so far as Magnhild could see. Rönnaug bent over it and for some time she neither looked up nor spoke. But Magnhild saw that great tears trickled down on the fine coverlet that was spread over the cradle. There arose a painful silence.

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Rönnaug rose to her feet at last, and with a side glance at Magnhild she went past her into the front room. Magnhild finally felt constrained to follow her. She found Rönnaug standing by the window. A carriage stopped at that moment in front of the hotel. Magnhild saw that it was drawn by three men. It was a new, handsome traveling carriage, the handsomest she had ever seen.

"Whose carriage is that?" asked she.

"It is mine," replied Rönnaug.

Betsy Roland came in and asked some question. Rönnaug went out with her, and when, directly afterward, she returned to the room, she went straight up to Magnhild, who still sat looking at the carriage. Rönnaug laid one arm about her neck.

"Will you go with me in this carriage through the country, Magnhild?" she asked, in English.

At the first contact Magnhild had become startled; she was conscious of Rönnaug's eyes, of her breath; and Rönnaug's arm encircled her like an iron bar, although there certainly was no pressure.

"Will you go with me through the country in this—in this carriage, Magnhild?" she heard once

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more, this time in a blending of the dialect of the parish and English, and the voice trembled.

"Yes," whispered Magnhild.

Rönnaug released her, went to the other window, and did not look round again.

"Is the carriage from America?"

"London."

"How much did you give for it?"

"Charles bought it."

"Is your husband with you?"

"Yes—ja," and she added, brokenly, "Not here; Constantinople—delivery of guns—in September we are to meet—Liverpool." And then she looked up at Magnhild with wide open eyes. What did she mean?

Magnhild wished to go. Rönnaug accompanied her down-stairs, and they both went out to inspect the carriage, about which stood a group of people who now fell back somewhat. Rönnaug pointed out to Magnhild how comfortable the carriage was, and while her head was still inside she asked,—

"Your rooms up-stairs, are they to let?"

"No, it would give me too much trouble."

Rönnaug hastily said "good-night," and ran up the steps.

Magnhild had not gone very far before she felt that she certainly ought to have offered those rooms to Rönnaug. Should she turn back? Oh, no.

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This was one of Magnhild's wakeful nights. Rönnaug had frightened her. And this journey? Never in the world would she undertake it.

CHAPTER X.

[144]

WHEN she left her chamber after ten o'clock, the first object she beheld was Rönnaug, who was coming up from the coast town, and was on her way to call on Magnhild—no, not on Magnhild, but on the priest, the young curate, who lived at Magnhild's house, in the former saddler workshop. Rönnaug at the priest's? At eleven o'clock she was still with him. And when she came out, accompanied by the curate, a shy young man, she merely put her head in Magnhild's door, greeted her, and disappeared again with the curate.

Magnhild found still greater cause for wonder, for later in the day she saw Rönnaug in company with Grong. This wounded her, she could scarcely tell why. The following day Rönnaug called in as she passed by; various people were discussed whom it had entertained Rönnaug to meet, but not a word was said about the journey. Several days went by, and it was still not mentioned. Perhaps it had been given up!

But finally Magnhild began to hear about this journey from others: first from the sailor's wife who did the work of her house, then from the woman of whom she bought fish, finally from every one. What should she do? For upon no account would she consent to go.

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Rönnaug told her that she was reading Norse with Grong, and also with the curate, in order that neither might have too much torment with her at any one time; she wrote exercises, too, she said, and laughed. In the same abrupt manner she touched upon sundry individuals and circumstances, mentioned them in the most characteristic way, and hurried on to something else. Magnhild was not invited to the hotel. Rönnaug often went by pushing her child in a little wagon she had bought; she would stop and show the child to every one she met, but she never brought it in to see Magnhild.

Rönnaug made the most extraordinary sensation in the town. It was no unusual thing at a sea-port town to see remarkable changes of fortune. Judging from the presents Rönnaug made, indeed from her whole appearance, she must be immensely wealthy, yet she was the most unassuming and sociable of all. Magnhild frequently heard her praises sounded; the young curate alone occasionally observed that she decidedly evinced that impatience which was characteristic of such a child of fortune.

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But what then did Rönnaug hear about Magnhild? For it might be assumed beyond all doubt that if she did not question Magnhild herself she at least asked others about her. This was true, but she proceeded very cautiously. There were, indeed, but two people to whom she put direct questions,—the young curate and Grong.

The curate said that during the whole time he had been at the Point, and that was now nearly a year, he had neither heard nor seen anything but good concerning Magnhild. Skarlie was a person who was less transparent; according to universal testimony he had settled in this town merely to study the prevailing conditions and utilize them for his own benefit—"without competition and without control." He was sarcastic and cynical; but the curate could not deny that it was sometimes amusing to talk with him. The curate had never heard that Skarlie was otherwise than considerate to his wife—or rather his adopted daughter; for other relations scarcely existed between them. And the shy young curate seemed quite embarrassed at being obliged to give this information.

Grong, on the contrary, called Magnhild a lazy, selfish, pretentious hussy. She would not even take the trouble to tie up her stockings; he had noticed this himself. The hand-work she had started here had long since been left to a hunchback girl named Marie and a tall girl by the name of Louise. Magnhild occasionally taught them something new, yet even that was due not to herself but to her husband, who picked up such things on his travels and spurred her on to introduce them. Upon the whole, Skarlie was a capable, industrious fellow, who had breathed life into this sleepy, ignorant parish, and even if he had victimized the people somewhat, it could scarcely be expected that so much knowledge should be gained for nothing. [147]

Magnhild's vocation? Bah! He had long since given up the idea of there being such a thing as a special destiny. In Nordland, many years before, he had seen an old man who in his childhood had been the only person saved out of a whole parish; the rest had been swept away by an avalanche. This man was a great dunce; he had lived to be sixty-six years of age without earning a farthing except by rowing, and had died a year before, a pauper. What sort of a destiny was that? Indeed, there were precious few who had any destiny at all.

Grong at this time was wretchedly out of humor: he had believed his gifted son to be destined for something; he lived for his sake alone—and the young man had accomplished nothing except falling in love. Rønnaug, who knew nothing of Grong's own experience, was shocked at his harsh verdict. Nor could she induce him to discuss the subject with her, for he declared point blank that Magnhild bored him. [148]

So she once more sought Magnhild herself, but found her so apathetic that it was impossible to approach her.

If she would persevere in her design, there was nothing left for her but to resort to strategy.

In the most indifferent tone in the world she therefore one day announced to Magnhild that in a couple of days she proposed starting; Magnhild would not need to take much luggage with her, for when they stopped anywhere they could purchase whatever they required. That was the way she always managed.

This was about nine o'clock in the morning, and until twelve o'clock Magnhild was toiling over a telegram to her husband who had just announced to her his arrival at Bergen. The telegram was at last completed as follows:—

"Rønnaug, married to the rich American, Charles Randon, New York, is here; wants me to go with her on a long journey.—Magnhild." [149]

She felt it to be treason when, on the stroke of twelve, she dispatched this telegram. Treason? Toward whom? She owed reckoning to no one. Meanwhile, in the afternoon, she went out in order that no one might find her. When she returned home in the evening a telegram was awaiting her.

"Home by the steamer to-morrow.—Skarlie."

Rønnaug sought Magnhild at eight o'clock the next morning: she wanted to surprise her with a traveling suit that was ready for her at the hotel. But it was all locked up at Magnhild's. Rønnaug went round the house and peeped in at the bed-room window whose curtain was drawn aside. Magnhild was out! Magnhild, who seldom rose before nine o'clock!

Well, Rønnaug went again at nine. Fastened up! At ten o'clock. The same result. After this she went to the house every quarter of an hour, but always found it fastened up. Then she became suspicious. At eleven o'clock she paid two boys handsomely to stand guard over the house and bring her word as soon as Magnhild returned.

Rønnaug herself stayed at the hotel and waited. It came to be one, two, three o'clock—no messenger. She inspected her guards; all was right. The clock struck four, then five. Another inspection. Just as the clock struck six a boy came running along the street, and Rønnaug, hat in hand, flew down the steps to meet him. [150]

She found Magnhild in the kitchen. Magnhild was so busy that Rønnaug could find no opportunity to speak a single word with her. She was passing incessantly to and fro between kitchen, yard, and inner rooms. She went also into the cellar and remained there for a long time. Rønnaug waited; but as Magnhild never paused, she finally sought her in the pantry. There she asked her if she would not go with her to the hotel for a moment. Magnhild said she had no time. She was engaged in putting butter on a plate.

"For whom are you making preparations?"

"Oh!"—

The hand which held the spoon trembled; this Rönnaug observed.

"Are you expecting Skarlie by the steamer—now?"

Magnhild could not well say "No," for this would speedily have proved itself false, and so she said "Yes."

"Then you sent for him?"

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Magnhild laid aside the spoon and went into the next room; Rönnaug followed her.

It now came to light how much good vigorous Norse Rönnaug had learned in the short time she had been studying, even if it were not wholly faultless. She first asked if this signified that Skarlie would prevent the journey. When Magnhild, instead of making any reply, fled into the bed-chamber, Rönnaug again followed her; she said that *to-day* Magnhild must listen to her.

This "to-day" told Magnhild that Rönnaug had long been wanting to talk with her. Had the window Magnhild now stood beside been a little larger, she would certainly have jumped out of it.

But before Rönnaug managed to begin in earnest, something happened. Noise and laughter were heard in the street, and ringing through them an infuriated man's voice. "And *you* will prevent me from taking the sacrament, you hypocritical villain?" After this a dead silence, and then peals of laughter. Most likely the man had been seized and carried off; the shouting and laughing of boys and old women resounded through the street, and gradually sounded farther and farther away.

Neither of the two women in the chamber had stirred from her place. They had both peered out through the door toward the sitting-room window, but they had also both turned away again, Magnhild toward the garden. But Rönnaug had been reminded by this interruption of Machine Martha, who in her day had been the terror and sport of the coast town. Scarcely, therefore, had the noise died away, before she asked,—

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"Do you remember Machine Martha? Do you remember something that I told you about your husband and her? I have been making inquiries concerning it and I now know more than I did before. Let me tell you it is unworthy of you to live under the same roof with such a man as Skarlie."

Very pale, Magnhild turned proudly round with:—

"That is no business of mine!"

"That is no business of yours? Why you live in his house, eat his food, wear his clothes, and bear his name,—and his conduct is no business of yours?"

But Magnhild swept past her and went into the sitting-room without vouchsafing a reply. She took her stand by one of the windows opening on the street.

"Aye, if you do not feel this to be a disgrace, Magnhild, you have sunk lower than I thought."

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Magnhild had just leaned her head, against the window frame. She now drew it up sufficiently to look at Rönnaug and smile, then she bowed forward again. But this smile had sent the blood coursing up to Rönnaug's cheeks, for she had felt their joint youth compared in it.

"I know what you are thinking of,"—here Rönnaug's voice trembled,—"and I could not have believed you to be so unkind, although at our very first meeting I plainly saw that I had made a mistake in feeling such a foolish longing for you."

But in a moment she felt herself that these words were too strong, and she paused. It was, moreover, not her design to quarrel with Magnhild; quite the contrary! And so she was indignant with Magnhild for having led her so far to forget herself. But had it not been thus from the beginning? With what eager warmth had she not come, and how coldly had she not been received. And from this train of thought her words now proceeded.

"I could think of nothing more delightful in the world than to show you my child. There was, indeed, no one else to whom I could show it. And you did not even care to see it; you did not so much as want to take the trouble to dress yourself."

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She strove at first to speak calmly, but before she finished what she was saying, her voice quivered, and she burst into tears.

Suddenly Magnhild darted away from the window toward the kitchen door—but that was just where Rönnaug was; then toward the bed-room door, but remembering that it would be useless to take refuge there, turned again, met Rönnaug, knew not where to go, and fled back to her old place.

But this was all lost on Rönnaug; for now she too was in a state of extreme agitation.

"You have no heart, Magnhild! It is dreadful to be obliged to say so! You have permitted yourself to be trailed in the mire until you have lost all feeling, indeed you have. When I insisted upon your seeing my child, you did not even kiss it! You did not so much as stoop to look at it; you

never said a word, no, not a single word, and you have no idea how pretty it is!"

A burst of tears again checked her flow of words.

"But that is natural," she continued, "you have never had a child of your own. And I chanced to remember this, otherwise I should have started right off again—at once! I was so disappointed. Ah! well, I wrote Charles all about it!" In another, more vigorous tone she interrupted herself with: "I do not know what you can be thinking of. Or everything must be dead within you. You might have full freedom—and you prefer Skarlie. Write for Skarlie!" She paced the floor excitedly. Presently she said: "Alas! alas! So this is Magnhild, who was once so pure and so refined that she saved me!" She paused and looked at Magnhild. "But I shall never forget it, and you *shall* go with me, Magnhild!" Then, with sudden emotion: "Have you not one word for me? Can you not understand how fond I am of you? Have you quite forgotten, Magnhild, how fond I have always been of you? Is it nothing to you that I came here all the way from America after you." [155]

She failed to notice that she had thus avowed her whole errand; she stood and waited to see Magnhild rouse and turn. She was not standing near enough to see that tears were now falling on the window-sill. She only saw that Magnhild neither stirred nor betrayed the slightest emotion. This wounded her, and, hasty as she was in her resolves when her heart was full, she left. Magnhild saw her hurry, weeping, up the street, without looking in. [156]

And Rönnaug did not cease weeping, not even when she had thrown herself down over her child and was kissing it. She clasped it again and again to her bosom, as though she wanted to make sure of her life's great gain.

She had expected Magnhild to follow her. The clock struck eight, no Magnhild appeared; nine—still no Magnhild. Rönnaug threw a shawl over her head and stole past the saddler's house. Skarlie must have come home some time since. All was still within; there was no one at the windows. Rönnaug went back to the hotel and as she got ready for bed she kept pondering on what was now to be done, and whether she should really start on her journey without Magnhild. The last thought she promptly dismissed. No, she would remain and call for assistance. She was ready to risk a battle, and that with Mr. Skarlie himself, supported by the curate, Grong, and other worthy people. She probably viewed the matter somewhat from an American standpoint; but she was determined.

She fell asleep and dreamed that Mr. Skarlie and she were fighting. With his large hairy hands he seized her by the head, the shoulders, the hands; his repulsive face, with its toothless mouth, looked with a laugh into her eyes. She could not ward him off: once more he had her by the head; then Magnhild repeatedly called her name aloud and she awoke. Magnhild was standing at the side of her bed. [157]

"Rönnaug! Rönnaug!"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is I—Magnhild!"

Rönnaug started up in bed, half intoxicated with sleep. "Yes, I see—you—It is you? No, really you, Magnhild! Are you going with me?"

"Yes!"

And Magnhild flung herself on Rönnaug's bosom and burst into tears. What tears! They were like those of a child, who after long fright finds its mother again.

"Good Heavens! What has happened?"

"I cannot tell you." Another burst of passionate weeping. Then quietly freeing herself from Rönnaug's arms, she drew back.

"But you will really come with me?"

There was heard a whispered "yes," and then renewed weeping. And Rönnaug stretched out her arms; but as Magnhild did not fly into them, she sprang out of bed and took her joy in a practical way by beginning to dress in great haste. There was joy, aye, triumph in her soul. [158]

As she sat on the edge of the bed, drawing on her clothes, she took a closer survey of Magnhild; the summer night was quite clear and light, and Magnhild had raised a curtain, opened a window, and was now standing by the latter. It was about three o'clock. Magnhild had on a petticoat with a cloak thrown over it; a bundle lay on the chair, it perhaps contained her dress. What could have happened? Rönnaug went to her parlor to finish dressing, and when Magnhild followed her, the new traveling suit was lying spread out and was shown to her. She uttered no word of thanks, she scarcely looked at the suit; but she sat down beside it and her tears flowed anew. Rönnaug was obliged to put the clothes on her. As she was thus engaged, she whispered:—

"Did he try to use force?"

"That he has never done," said Magnhild; "no, there are other things"—and now she became so convulsed with weeping that Rönnaug said no more, but finished dressing both Magnhild and herself as quickly as possible. She hastened into the bed-chamber to awaken her American friend, then down-stairs to rouse the people of the hotel: she wanted to start within an hour.

She found Magnhild where she had left her.

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"No, this will not do," said she. "Pray control yourself. Within an hour we must be away from here."

But Magnhild sat still; it was as though all her energy had been exhausted by the struggle and the resolve she had just come from. Rönnaug let her alone; she had as much as she could do to get ready. Everything was packed, and last of all the child was wrapped in its traveling blanket without being roused. Within an hour they and all their belongings were actually stowed away in the carriage.

The world around them slept. They drove onward in the bright, dawning morning, past the church. The sun was not visible; but the skies, above the mountains to the east, were flushed with roseate hues. The landscape lay in dark shadows, the upper slope of the mountains in the deepest of deep black-blue; the stream, not a streak of light over its struggle, cut its way along, like a procession of wild, angry mountaineers, recklessly dashing downward at this moment of the world's awakening, without consideration, without pausing for rest, and with shrill laughter at this mad resolve and the success which attended it.

The impressions of nature, and the feelings Magnhild might otherwise have experienced during this journey away from the griefs of many years, over the first miles, as it were, of a new career in the sumptuous traveling carriage of the friend of her childhood,—all were lulled into a weary, rapid drowsiness. Her daily life had been for years one monotonous routine, so that the emotions of a single evening had completely exhausted her strength. She longed now for nothing so much as for a bed. And Rönnaug, bent on fully carrying out the wonders of contrast, was not content with traveling in her own carriage with two horses (when the ascent began she would have four), she wanted also to sleep in one of the guest-beds at the post-station where she had once served. This wish was gratified, and three hours' sleep was taken by them all. The hostess recognized Rönnaug, but as she was a person Rönnaug had not liked, there was no conversation between them.

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After they had slept, eaten, and settled their account, Rönnaug felt a desire to write something with her own hand in the traveler's register. That was indeed too amusing. She read what was last written there, as follows: "Two persons, one horse, change for the next station," and on the margin was added,—

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"Birds encountered us two, tweewhitt!
'With *us* to tarry, think you,
tweewhitt?'

""We plan, we reason, no more, tra-ra!
Each other we adore, tra-ra!""

"What nonsense was this?" The rest of the party must see: it was translated into English for Betsy Roland. Now they remembered that as they drove into the station they had seen a carriage, with a gentleman and lady in it, driving quickly past them up the road. The gentleman had turned his face away, as though he did not wish to be seen; the lady was closely veiled.

They were still talking of this when they sat in the carriage and drove away, while all the people at the station had assembled to watch them. The travelers concluded that the verses must have been written by some happy new-married couple; and Magnhild, by one of those trains of thought which cannot be accounted for, called to mind the young couple, the gentleman in morocco slippers, and the lady with her hair so strangely done up, she had met at the next station, on her own wedding trip. This led her to recall her own wedding, then to think of what she had gone through in all these years, and of how aimless her whole life was,—aimless whether she looked into the past or into the future.

Day had meanwhile dawned in wondrous beauty. The sun had risen above the lofty mountains. The valley, although narrow, was so situated that it was thoroughly illumined by the sunshine. The stream now flowed in a narrower, more rocky bed, was white with foam where struggles arose, grass-green where they ceased, blue where there were overhanging shadows, and gray where the water formed eddies over a clay bottom. The grass here was filled with stubble, farther up it was studded with yellow cowslips, the largest they had ever seen.

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The peaks of the mountains sparkled, the dark pine forest in the bosom and lap of the chain displayed such a wealth of luxuriance, that whoever viewed it aright must inevitably be refreshed. Close by the road-side grew deciduous trees, for here the pines had been cut down, yet ever and anon they pushed their way triumphantly forth from their vigorous headquarters in the background. The road was free from dust. On the outskirts of the forest grew mountain flowers, all glittering with the last dew-drops of the day.

The travelers had the carriage stop that they might pluck some of the flowers; and then they sat in the grass and amused the child with them; they wove garlands and twined them about the little one. A short distance farther up, where the stream had sunk so far beneath them that its roar had ceased to sound above all else, they heard the jubilant song of birds. The thrush, singly and in groups, swung from tree to tree, and its vigorous chirping had a cheering tone. A startled wood-grouse, with strong wing-beats, flew shrieking among the branches. A dog who followed the horses set chase to the red grouse; they shrieked, flapped their wings, hid in the heather,

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shrieked, started up again and sought a circuitous way back. They must have nests here. There was also a rich growth of birch round about this little heath.

"Ah, how I have longed for this journey! And Charles, who gave it to me!" The tears stood in Rönnaug's eyes, but she brushed them away, after she had kissed her child. "No, no tears. Why should there be any?"

And she sang:—

"Shed no tear! Oh shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more! Oh weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the root's white core."

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[3] Keats.

"This is our summer trip, Magnhild! The summer travels in Norway. Now onward!"

But Magnhild bowed down and covered her face with her hands.

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"All shall be well with you, Magnhild. Charles is so good! He will do everything for you."

But here she heard Magnhild sob, and so she said no more.

The sunny day through which they rode onward, the fresh, aromatic mountain air they inhaled, the sounds of jubilee which burst forth from the forest, blending with childhood's memories, became too much for Rönnaug. She forgot Magnhild and began to sing again. Then she took the child and chatted playfully with it and with Miss Roland. She was surprised by Magnhild's asking:

"Do you love your husband, Rönnaug?"

"Do I love him? Why, when Mr. Charles Randon said to me: 'I will gladly provide for your education, Rönnaug; I hope you will let me have this pleasure,'—well, I let him have the pleasure. When Mr. Charles said to me: 'My dear Rönnaug, I am much older than you; yet if you could consent to be my wife, I am certain that I should be happy,'—well—and so I made him happy. And when Mr. Charles said: 'My dear Rönnaug, take good care of our little Harry, so that I may find you all in Liverpool in September, and your Norwegian friend with you,'—why, I determined that he should find us all in Liverpool in September, and little Harry well and hearty; and my Norwegian friend along, too!"—and she kissed the child and set it to laughing.

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They changed horses at the next post-station. Magnhild and Miss Roland kept their seats in the carriage. Rönnaug got out, partly to re-visit familiar haunts, partly to make an entry in the register. That was her duty, she said. Presently she came back, laughing, with the register. Under the entry: "Two persons for the next station,"—indicating that these two persons were too much absorbed to even trouble themselves with the name of the next station,—were the following lines:—

"Love is all the budding flower,
Perfect blossom, fruit mature.
When breaking boughs no more
endure,
Then "stop!" is shrieked to Winter's power.
Rather life to stop be driven;
No alternative is given!"

Rönnaug translated it for Betsy Roland, and now various conjectures were expressed by them all, in both Norwegian and English. They agreed in supposing the writers to be two lovers, on a journey, under peculiar circumstances; but whether they were a newly-married couple, or merely lovers; whether theirs was a runaway flight, or whether they were simply actuated by exuberance of spirits over happily overcome obstacles, or,—oh! there were manifold possibilities.

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Rönnaug wished to copy the verses, and Magnhild offered her a leaf from her pocket-book. As this was produced a letter fell from it. Magnhild was surprised, but she soon remembered that she had received the letter by mail the evening before, an hour after her husband's arrival. Wholly absorbed in her conflict with him, she had placed it for the time in her pocket-book. She never received letters, so she could not imagine from whom this could come. The two travelers from America did not notice that the letter bore a foreign stamp, but Magnhild saw this at once. She tore open the letter; it was written in a delicate hand, on fine paper, and was quite long. It was headed "Munich," and the signature was—did she read aright?—"Hans Tande." She folded the letter again, without knowing what she was doing, while the hot blushes spread over face and neck. The two others acted as though they had observed nothing; Rönnaug busied herself with copying the verses.

They drove rapidly on, and left Magnhild to her reflections. But her embarrassment increased to such a degree that it became positive torture to her to sit in the carriage with the others. She meekly begged to be allowed to get out and walk a little distance. Rönnaug smiled and ordered the coachman to stop,—they had just reached a level plain where the horses could rest a while. When the travelers had alighted, she took Magnhild by the hand and led her toward a thicket a

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few steps behind them.

"Come—go in there now and read your letter!" said she.

When Magnhild found herself alone in the wood she stood still. Her agitation had compelled her to pause. She peered about her, as though fearing even in this lonely spot the presence of people. The sun played here and there on the yellow pine needles that were strewn about, on the fallen decayed branches, on the dark green moss covering the stones, on the heather in the glades. Around her all was profoundly still; from the sunny margin of the wood there floated toward her the twittering of a solitary bird, the babbling of the child, and Rønnaug's laughter, which rang with the utmost clearness through the trees.

Magnhild ventured to draw forth the letter once more. She opened it. It was not folded in the original creases. She spread it out before her, and looked at it as an aged woman might gaze into the depths of a chest upon her bridal garments. A solitary sunbeam, breaking through the branches, played restlessly on the sheet, and was now round, now oblong. Magnhild saw within its shining ring one word, two words, more distinctly than the rest. "Great hopes—and failed!" were written there. "Great hopes—and failed." She read and trembled. Alas! alas! alas! Over and over again she read the words, and felt rich in expectation, in dread, in memories of bliss and of conflict; she could not sit still, she rose to her feet, but only to sit down again to fresh efforts. The ringing tones of Rønnaug's laughter broke upon her solitude, like a staff, which she grasped for support. She gained courage from Rønnaug's courage, and looked here and there in the letter, not to read, rather to find out whether she dare read. But she was too agitated to connect the broken sentences, and was led, almost unawares, to a continuous perusal. She did not understand all that she read. Still it was a communion; it was like the warm clasp of a hand. There was music wafted about her,—*his* music; she was once more in his presence, with the rare perfume, the look, the embarrassed silence, amid which she had experienced earth's highest bliss. The diamond cut its shining circlets over the piano keys, his white, refined hand played "Flowers on the Green." Wholly under his influence now, she became absorbed in re-reading the letter, comprehended it better than before, paused, exulted without words, read, while the tears trickled down her cheeks. She paused, without being aware of it, simply because she could not see, began again, without perceiving it, wept profusely, read on, finished only to begin anew—three, four, five times from beginning to end. She could read no more.

What had she not experienced during this perusal of thoughts and feelings she had had a thousand times before, and thoughts and feelings she had never dreamed of!

The first complete impression she gathered, in the humid forest shades, where she sat concealed from view, was like a shaft of quivering sunbeams. It was the foreboding which stole over her—it was not put into words, and yet it was breathed from every line (a thousand times sweeter so!) the foreboding, aye, the certainty, that he, yes, that he had loved her!—and the second was that he had at the same time been fully aware of her love, long, long before she had grasped it herself! and he had not hinted at this by so much as a look. How considerate he had been! And yet, what must he not have seen in her heart! Was it true? Could it be true?

Ah! it was all one! And yet amidst her grief the thought of being able to feel all this to the core as *he* had felt, was like the sun shining behind a misty atmosphere and gradually bursting through the layers of fog with thousands of undreamed-of light effects, above and below. How freely she could breathe again after the void, privation, brooding of many years.

Not until later did individual thoughts force themselves forward, then not fully until Rønnaug came to her. There was something labored in this letter; it read occasionally like a translation from a foreign language. But now for the *letter itself*:—

I have just returned from the south. I thought myself strong enough. Alas! The papers have doubtless informed you that I am ill; but the papers do not know what I now know!

The first thing I do in this new certainty is to write to you, dear Magnhild.

You will, of course, be painfully surprised at the sight of my signature. I awakened great hopes—and failed when they should have been fulfilled.

A thousand times since I have thought how impossible it would be for you to go to the piano and try over some song we three had studied together, or some exercise we two had gone through. A miracle would have been needed to compel you to do so.

A thousand times I have considered whether I should write to you, and tell you what I must now tell you, that this has been the deepest sorrow of my life.

You set me free from a once rich, but afterward unworthy relation, and this was my salvation. The germ of innocence in my soul was once more released. The entire extent of my emancipation, however, I did not realize so long as we were together.

And I repaid you for what you had done for me by desolating your life, so far as lay within my power. But I have also yearned to tell you what I now believe: our destiny upon earth is not alone what we ourselves have

recognized it to be, not alone what we believe to be the main purpose of our existences. When you, without being yourself conscious of it, gave me a purer, higher tendency, you were fulfilling a part of your destiny, dear Magnhild. It was perhaps a small part; but perhaps it was also only an hundredth part of still more which you had done for many others without so much as suspecting it yourself.

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Magnhild, I can say it now without danger of being misinterpreted, and also without doing harm; for you have become four years and a half older and I am going hence; indeed, I believe it will help you to hear it. Well, then, the innocence in your soul had become, amidst your peculiar circumstances, a moral atmosphere which in you, more than in any one I ever met, proclaimed itself to be a power. It was all the more beautiful because so unconscious in its manifestations. It was breathed from every manifestation of your bashfulness. It revealed itself to me not alone in your blushes, Magnhild; no, in the tone of your voice also, in the immediate relations you held with every one you had intercourse with, or looked upon, or merely greeted. If there were those in your presence who were not pure, you made them appear abhorrent; you taught even the fallen ones what beauty there is in moral purity.

You have the fullest right to rejoice over what I say. Aye, may it bring you more than rejoicing! It is not well to brood over a lost vocation, Magnhild, and the letters I receive from Grong lead me to suppose that this is what you are now doing. One who does not attain the first or greatest object of his ambition ought not to sink into listless inactivity; for do we not thus check the development of the thousand-leaved destiny of the tree of life? May not even disappointment be part of this?

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(Five days later.)

Magnhild, I do not say this in self-justification. Every time I think of your singing I realize what I have repressed. It possessed a purity, untouched by passion, and that was why it moved with such exalting influence through my soul. The perfume of tender memories was in it, memories of my childhood, my mother, my good teacher, my first conceptions of music, my first yearning for love, or thirst for beauty. It also revived the first, pure tintings of life, those which had not yet become glaring, still less tainted.

I think of your singing artistically schooled, radiant with spirituality—what a revelation! And this I checked in its growth.

I bought while we were together some of the brooches made by your father. I showed them to no one. Under the circumstances it would have caused suspicion and consequent annoyance. But in those brooches I felt the family calling, Magnhild, the family work, which your talent should have further continued. In your father's work there is innocent fancy, patience, in its imperfections, as it were, a sigh of far more significant, undeveloped power.

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Is all this now checked because your progress is checked, you who are the last of your family and without children? No, I cannot justify myself.

(I have been again compelled to lay aside my pen for many days. Now I must try if I can finish.)

Let not the wrong I did to you, and thereby, alas, to many both in the present and in the future, be used by you as an excuse for never making further progress! You can, if you will, give free scope to whatever power there is within you, if not in one way, in another. And do this now; do it, also, because I implore you! You can make the burden of my fault less heavy for my thoughts, now in the last hours of my life.

Aye, while I write this it grows lighter. The kindness you, in spite of all, surely cherish toward me (I feel it!) sends me a greeting.

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You will, so far as you can, rescue my life's work, where it failed to complete its efforts; you will build upon and improve, Magnhild!

You will, moreover, accept this request as a consolation?

(I could proceed no farther. But to-day I am better.)

If what I have written helps to open the world once more to you, so that you can enter in and take hold of life's duties; aye, if all that you have either neglected or only half performed can come to attain the rank of links in life's problem, and thus become dear to you,—then it will do me good; remember

this! Farewell!

Ah, yes, farewell! I have other letters to write, and cannot do much.
Farewell!

HANS TANDE.

(Eight days later.)

I copy in this letter to you the following lines from a letter to another:—

"It is not true that love is for every one the portal to life. Perchance it is not so for even half of those who attain *real life*.

"There are many whose lives are ruined by the loss of love, or by sacrificing everything to love. With some of them, perhaps, it could not have been otherwise (people are so different, circumstances excuse so much); but those whose existences I have seen thus blighted could unconditionally have gained the mastery over self and in the effort acquired a new power. Encouraged, however, by a class of literature and art whose short-sightedness proceeds from a maimed will, they neglected all attempts at gaining strength."

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CHAPTER XI.

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MAGNHILD and Rønnaug came arm in arm out of the wood where Rønnaug had finally been obliged to seek her friend, where so many confidences had been made, so much discussed and considered. They emerged into the open plain. How blue the haze about the mountains! And this was the frame for the pine forest, the surrounding heather, and the plain with Miss Roland and the child. The latter were sitting on blue and red rugs near the carriage. From this foreground the mother's eye wandered away more musingly than ever, and gained even stronger impressions of outline, light, color.

"The summer travels in Norway! The summer travels in Norway!" she kept saying to herself.

From the way in which she uttered these words it might be surmised that in the entire English vocabulary there was nothing which admitted of being repeated with such varied shades of meaning.

The two friends took a long ramble. Magnhild had become a new being to Rønnaug, her individuality enriched, her countenance illumined and thus transformed. For nearly five years Magnhild had been secretly brooding over her lost vocation, and her lost love, those two sisters that had lived and died together. At length she had opened her heart to another; thus something had been accomplished.

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The horses were now hitched to the carriage, and the party drove on. The noonday repose of nature was not disturbed by so much as the rumbling of the wheels, for the carriage wound its way slowly over the mountain slopes.

At the next post-station the following lines were found in the register:—

"There met us croaking ravens on our way:
We knew that Evil this to us did bode;
We made no off'rings, though, as on we
rode,
To angry gods—the mild are full of doubt.
Why should we care? One God to us feels
kindly.
He is with us! And Him we follow blindly:—
We laugh at all the omens round about."

These little verses began to affect the party like a chorus of birds.

But a joy to which we are unattuned is apt to jar; and here, moreover, the verses became prophetic, for the travelers had gone but a short distance when they gained a view of the church steeple on the heights where Magnhild's parents and brothers and sisters were buried, and of the stony ground in the mountain to the left where the home of her childhood had been situated.

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This barren patch of stones always rose up distinctly in Magnhild's mind when she thought of her own life, whose long desert wastes seemed to lay stretched out before her like just such a heap of ruins. Here it faced her once more. It was some time before the consolation she had newly grasped could find expression, for she was haunted by so much that was unsolved, so much that was doubtful. She was now approaching the starting-point of the whole; from the brow of the hill the parsonage was visible.

It had been agreed that they should stop here. The carriage rolled down toward the friendly gard through an avenue of birch-trees. Rönnaug was giving Miss Roland a most humorous description of the family at the parsonage when suddenly they were all terrified by having the carriage nearly upset. Just by the turn near the house-steps the coachman had driven against a large stone which lay with its lower side protruding into the road. Both Rönnaug and Miss Roland uttered a little shriek, but when they escaped without an accident they laughed. To their delight Magnhild joined in their laughter. Trifling as had been the occurrence, it had served to rouse her. She was surprised to find herself at the parsonage. And this stone? Ah, how many hundred vehicles had not driven over it! Would it ever be removed, though? There stood old Andreas, old Sören, old Knut? There, too, was old Ane, looking out! From the sitting-room came the sound of a dog's bark.

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"Have they a dog?" asked Magnhild.

"If they have," replied Rönnaug, "I will venture to say it came through its own enterprise."

Old Ane took the luggage, Rönnaug the child, and the whole party was ushered through the passage into the sitting-room, where no one was found except the dog. He was a great shaggy fellow, who at the first kind word relinquished his wrath, and in a leisurely way went from one to the other, snuffing and wagging his tail, then sauntering back to the stove, lay down, fat and comfortable.

A creaking and a grating could now be heard overhead; the priest was rising from the sofa. How well Magnhild knew the music of those springs! The dog knew it too, and started up, ready to follow his master. But the latter, who was soon heard on the groaning wooden stairs, did not go out but came into the sitting-room, so the dog only greeted him, and wagging his tail went back to the stove, where he rolled over with a sigh after his excessive exertion.

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The priest was unchanged in every possible particular. He had heard about Rönnaug, and was glad to see her; his plump hands closed with a long friendly clasp about hers and with a still longer one about Magnhild's. He greeted Miss Roland and played with the child, who was in high glee over the unfamiliar objects in the room, especially the dog.

And when he had lighted his pipe and had seated the others and himself on the embroidered chairs and sofas, the first thing he must tell them (for it was just about a month since the matter had been successfully terminated) was that the "little girls" were provided for. There had been secured for each an annuity. It was really on the most astonishingly favorable terms. God in his inconceivable mercy had been so good to them. About the "Fröken" (so the former governess was usually called), they had had greater cause for anxiety. They had, indeed, thought of doing something for her, too, although their means would scarcely have sufficed to make adequate provision for her, and she had grown too unwieldy to support herself. But God in his inscrutable mercy had not forgotten her. She no longer needed an annuity. She had gone to make a visit at the house of a relative not many miles distant, and while there God had called her to Himself; the journey had been too much for her. This intelligence had reached the parsonage a few days before, and the priest was in great uncertainty as to whether a bridal couple would postpone their wedding for a few days.

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"Thus it is, dear Magnhild, in life's vicissitudes," said he. "The one is summoned to the grave, the other to the marriage feast. Ah, yes! But what a pretty dress you have on, my child! Skarlie is truly a good husband to you. This cannot be denied."

The mistress of the house and her two daughters at length appeared. The moistened hair, the clean linen, the freshly ironed dresses, betokened newly-made toilets. They had not a word to say; the priest took charge of the conversation, they merely courtesied as they shook hands, and then, taking up their embroidery, sat down each on her own embroidered chair. One of the daughters, however, soon rose and whispered something to her mother; from the direction in which first her eyes then her mother's wandered, it might be concluded that she had asked whether the gauze covers should be removed from the mirror, the pictures, and the few plaster figures in the room. As the girl at once took her seat again, it must have been decided that the covers should not be removed.

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"Tell me about the Fröken who is dead," said Magnhild.

With one accord the three ladies dropped their embroidery and raised their heads.

"She died of apoplexy," said the priest's wife.

They all sat motionless for a moment, and then the ladies continued their embroidery.

The priest rose to let the dog out. The animal departed with the appearance of being excessively abashed, for which the priest gave him much praise. Then followed a lengthy account of the dog's virtues. He had come to them three years ago, the Lord alone knew from where, and He alone knew why the dog had come to the parsonage; for the very next summer the animal had saved the "Fröken's" life when she was attacked on her accustomed walk to the church by Ole Björgan's mad bull.

The third great event, that old Andreas had cut his foot, was next detailed at quite as great length. The priest was just telling what old Andreas had said when he, the priest, was helping him to the couch, when the narrative was interrupted by an humble scratching at the door; it came, of course, from the dog. The corpulent priest rose forthwith to admit the animal, and

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bestowed on him kind words of admonition, which were accepted with a timid wagging of the tail.

The dog glanced round the room; observing that the eyes of the priest's wife manifestly rested with especial friendliness on him, he walked up to her, and licked the hand extended to him.

At this moment Magnhild rose, and abruptly crossing the floor to where the priest's wife sat, she stroked her hair. She felt that every one was watching her, and that the mistress of the house herself was looking up in embarrassed surprise,—and Magnhild was now powerless to explain what she had done. She hastened from the room. Profound silence reigned among those left behind.

What was it? What had happened? It was *this*: in the forenoon Magnhild had received a letter, as we know, and it had caused her to look with new eyes on the life at the parsonage.

The tedium seemed uplifted, and behind it she beheld a kindness and an innocence she had always overlooked. And she began to understand the character of that home. [185]

There was not a word in the priest's narratives, from beginning to end, designed to call attention to the good he or any of his household had done. The listener was left to find this out for himself. But the dog had discovered it before Magnhild.

The dog returned thanks; had she ever done so? The thought had rushed over her with such force that it caused her to feel an irresistible impulse to express her gratitude. The universal astonishment caused by her effort to do so made her for the first time realize how unaccustomed her friends were to thanks, or indication of thanks from her, and she became frightened. This was the reason why she had left the room.

She took the road leading up toward the church, perhaps because it had just been mentioned. Her new views wholly absorbed her. Until now she had seen only the ludicrous side of the life at the parsonage. The members of the household had provoked, amused, or wearied her. But hitherto she had not been aware that what had just been praised in herself had been gained by her in this household whose influences had spread themselves protectingly over her soul, just as the embroidery was spread over the furniture in these rooms. Had all the weaknesses of the house served Skarlie as a means to ensnare her, in this same house she had acquired the strength wherewith to resist his power until the present time. [186]

If she had lived here without forming close relations with any one, the fault lay not alone in the monotonous routine of the house: it was due chiefly to herself, for even in the days of her life at the parsonage she had wrapped herself up in dreams. It must have required all the forbearance by which the family were characterized to bring her, notwithstanding all this, to the point she had reached. In any other family she would have been shown the door—dull, awkward, thankless as she had been.

Yes, thankless! Whom had she ever thanked? Aye, there was one—him who had done her the most harm but also the most good; for him she loved. But this could scarcely be counted.

But whom else? Not Skarlie, although he had been incessantly kind to her, even he. Not Fru Bang, and how kind she had been! Not Rönnaug; no, not Rönnaug either.

She was appalled. For the first time in her life she held true communion with herself, and she had done little else all her life than commune with herself. [187]

Now she comprehended, although once before she had been startled by a passing thought of the kind; now for the first time she comprehended what it must have been to Rönnaug after having longed for so many years to tell her about the rich change in her own life, to show her her child, to bring her freedom and increased happiness; and then to find a person who did not even care to take the trouble to walk to the hotel, not a hundred steps distant, because, forsooth, it would necessitate her dressing herself.

She sat once more on the heights facing the ruins of the home of her parents; and she covered her face in shame.

From the thoughts to which this spot gave birth she did not escape until evening, weary in body and in soul.

When late in the evening she said good-night to Rönnaug, she threw her arm round her, and leaned her head against hers. But words refused to come; they are not easily found the first time they are sought.

CHAPTER XII.

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THE next morning Rönnaug dreamed of singing; she still heard it when she awoke, and ere long she had so far collected herself as to consider whether it could really be Magnhild who was singing. This thought caused her to become wide awake and to leave her bed.

She scarcely waited to don her morning-gown before she opened a window. From the sitting-room, which was at the other end of the house, there came the sound of singing and a low piano accompaniment. The voice was pure and high; it must be Magnhild's.

Rönnaug made haste to complete her toilet and go down-stairs. She carried her boots out into the passage and put them on there lest she should awaken Miss Roland and the child. There was some one coming up the stairs. Rönnaug quickly put down her boots and stepped forward; for the head which was now displayed to her view was Grong's. What, Grong here?

He greeted Rönnaug with a keen, hasty glance, and, without a word, went into an apartment near hers. [189]

Rönnaug sat listening to the singing while she put on her boots. It flowed so equally and calmly; unquestionably there was joy in it, but the joy was subdued—it might be called pure.

She remained still until Magnhild ended, and even then paused a little while. She finally went down-stairs. The door of the sitting-room was half open, which accounted for her having heard so distinctly. Magnhild had turned round with the piano-stool and sat talking with the two friends of her childhood, who had seats one on each side of her. She had been singing for them, it would seem.

They all rose as Rönnaug entered. Magnhild called her friend's attention to the clock. Verily, the hour hand pointed to ten. Magnhild had been up a long time—and singing.

The girls withdrew to carry coffee, eggs, etc., into the dining-room. As soon as Magnhild saw that she and Rönnaug were alone, she hastened to ask if Rönnaug knew that Grong was at the parsonage. Rönnaug told about having just met him.

"Yes," whispered Magnhild, "he is traveling in search of his son. Only think, the young man has eloped with the girl to whom he is betrothed! He is twenty years old, she about sixteen." [190]

"So, then, the verses—?"

"Were of course by Grong's son. Grong is furious. He wanted to make a poet of his son, though!"

They both laughed.

The young man was really extraordinarily gifted, Magnhild further narrated, and for his sake his father had read extensively, besides taking long journeys with his son in Germany, France, Italy, and England. Plans had been made to give the young man an opportunity of gaining an impression of the scenery of his fatherland and of country life, but—pop!—the bird had flown.

Grong was now heard on the stairs, so nothing more was said. He gave the ladies a sharp glance as he entered, then began to pace the floor, as completely hidden by his beard as though it were a forest, and veiled by his spectacles as an image is veiled in a fountain.

They sat down to the late breakfast, and the priest's wife received them, one by one, with diffident friendliness. The priest had gone down to the school-house to attend a meeting.

After the meal was over, Grong, who had not opened his mouth for any other purpose than to eat and to drink, walked through the sitting-room and passage directly out to the door-steps. Rönnaug bravely followed; she wished to talk with him. He discovered this and made an effort to escape, but was overtaken and obliged to walk up the road with Rönnaug. When he heard what she wanted, he exclaimed:— [191]

"I have been so confoundedly bored with this tall woman and her tiresome vocation, that you will find it impossible to get one word out of me. Besides, I am expecting my 'skyds.'"

He was about to turn away; but Rönnaug held fast to him, laughing, and brought him back to the theme. Before she had succeeded, however, in laying before him the necessary facts, he interrupted with,—

"The fact is she has no vocation whatever; that is the whole secret of the matter. Her singing? Tande so often wrote to me about her singing. Well, I have been listening to her singing this morning, and do you know what I think about it? Technical correctness, good method, pure tone, in abundance; but no fancy, no inspiration, no expression; how the deuce could there be! Had she had fancy, she would have had energy, and with her voice, her natural technical ability, she would have become a singer, whether there was a Tande or not, whether she had married a Skarlie or a Farlie." [192]

Notwithstanding the harsh, blunt form in which this idea was framed, there might be sufficient truth in it to make it worth while to place Magnhild's history before Grong in its true light. Grong could not resist the fascination of a soul's experiences. He became all ear, forgetting both his ire and his "skyds."

He heard now about the Magnhild who would scarcely take pains to dress herself, and who let Skarlie do and say what he pleased, but who the moment Skarlie mentions Tande's name and hers together, in other words, invades her inner sanctuary, flees forthwith from him to America. Was there no energy in that?

He heard about the Magnhild who, checked in her highest aspirations, became wholly

indifferent. The relations with Tande were fully explained. Grong, indeed, had been partially acquainted with them by Tande himself. Rønnaug also thought it right to inform Grong of the purport of Tande's letter; she could recall it perfectly, for it had made a deep impression on her.

What an impression did it not make on Grong!

How much it must have cost this man in his time to renounce what he had originally believed to be his vocation. And now to have to give up his hopes for his son? How could she and Magnhild have laughed at this—as they had done that same morning. [193]

"Consolation in the idea that our calling is greater and more manifold than we ourselves are aware? Yes, for those who can blindly and without exercise of their own wills place themselves under subjection to the unknown guidance! I cannot do so!" He raised his clinched hand, but let it fall again. "Is it a crime to steer toward a definite goal, and concentrate one's will, one's responsibility upon its attainment? Look at yonder insect! It goes straight forward; it has a fixed aim. Now I crush it to death. See—thus!

"You should have seen my wife," he continued, presently. "She sped onward through life, with fluttering veil; her eyes, her thoughts sparkled. What was her goal? Just as she was beginning, with my aid, to comprehend her faculties, she expired. A meteor!

"I had a friend. What talents, and what aspirations! How handsome he was! When he was but little over twenty years of age, he fell during the siege of a Danish fortress, scarcely mentioned, scarcely remembered. A meteor! [194]

"But what solicitude for existences which neither can nor will be of any use in the world. That fisherman in Nordland was the only person who was saved from destruction out of a whole parish. And he lived more than sixty years as stupid as the codfish he drew out of the sea.

"For the sake of others? For the advancement of one's fellow-creatures? For the good of posterity? Aye, aye, find consolation in all this, if you can! Before I shall be able to do so I must see the benefit of it for myself. The mole's life in the dark, with chance alone for its guide, is not a life that I could lead, even though I might have a certificate guarantying that light should dawn on me one day, that is to say, on the other side of the grave. I admire those who can be content with such a lot."

"In other words, you despise them!" interposed Rønnaug.

Grong looked at her, but made no reply.

Rønnaug was anxious to know how it was best to advise Magnhild. Grong promptly answered,—
"Advise her to go to work."

"Without definite object? Merely for the sake of work?" [195]

He hesitated a moment, and then said,—

"I will tell you one thing, my good lady: Magnhild's misfortune has been that throughout her whole life she has had every want supplied, every meal, every garment. Had she been obliged to labor hard, or to bring up children, she would not have indulged so freely in dreams."

"So, then, work without definite aim?" repeated Rønnaug.

"There are so many kinds of aims," said Grong, peevishly,—and then he was silent. It was evident that he had been all round the circle and had returned to his wrath over what had befallen himself.

They had turned and were retracing their steps in the friendly birch avenue leading to the parsonage. The tones of a human voice were heard; they drew nearer, paused, and listened attentively. The windows were open, and every note rang out, clear and equal.

"Yes, there is purity in the voice," said Grong; "that is true. But purity is a mere passive quality."

They went on.

"Not technical skill alone, then?" queried Rønnaug.

To this Grong made no reply. He had fallen into a new train of thought. When they had reached the house, he roused himself. [196]

"She and I are, both of us, I dare say, bearers of a half-completed family history. Nevertheless, her family dies out with her; and mine? Oh, all this is enough to drive one mad! Where is my 'skyds?'"

With these words he strode past the main building to the court-yard behind. Rønnaug slowly followed. The "skyds" had not yet arrived. Grumbling considerably, Grong sauntered up to the coach-house, whose doors stood open, and in which he saw Rønnaug's carriage. She joined him, and they discussed the carriage together. It was too light for a traveling carriage, Grong thought. One fore-wheel must already have been damaged, for it had been taken off. So, then, it depended upon the blacksmith how long the ladies would remain at the parsonage? But he would start without further delay; for there—at last—came the "skyds."

He bade her a light farewell, as though he were merely going to the next corner, and then went into the house for his luggage. Rönnaug, however, determined to wait until he came out again.

She had a kindly feeling for him. She earnestly hoped that the son's case was not so bad as the father now thought. There was so much unrest in Grong. Was not this caused by his having a great variety of "talents," but no one special talent? She had once heard Grong half jestingly make a similar assertion about another person. All these endowments, however, might be combined in one main tendency, of this Rönnaug felt sure. It might be the same in the case of Magnhild; but perhaps there was not sufficient talent there. Technical ability? Aye, if that were her chief endowment she could doubtless render it available in singing.

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Rönnaug had failed to find the light she needed. This was truly discouraging; for counsel must be given, a resolution formed. She prayed God for her friend, and for this gloomy man now coming out of the house, accompanied by the priest's wife, who seemed to be the only person to whom he had said farewell.

"Present my greetings to my old teacher," he called down from the cariole, as he grasped the hand of the mistress of the house. "Tell him—tell him nothing!" and with this he whipped up his horse so suddenly that the "skyds" boy came near being left behind.

The priest's wife made some remarks about his surely being very unhappy, as she stood watching him drive away. While the ladies were still at the door, a woman came walking up the road toward them. She nodded and smiled at the mistress of the house as she passed on her way to the kitchen.

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"You made your sale?"

"Yes."

"I thought so from your looks."

Then turning to Rönnaug the priest's wife said,—

"This woman, you may well believe, made Magnhild happy this morning."

"How so?"

"Why, she stopped here with her work on her way to the dealer, who makes purchases for a merchant in town. Just as she stepped inside Magnhild came down into the kitchen. When the woman caught sight of her, she eagerly addressed her—she is a great talker—and she began to cry and to talk, to talk and to cry, telling how poor she had been and how well off both she and her children now were. Magnhild, you know, for many years taught an Industrial School up in these mountains, and this woman was one of her aptest pupils. This hand-work, I can assure you, has spread rapidly here; there are scarcely any poor people to be found in our parish now."

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"But Magnhild—was she glad?"

"She certainly must have been glad, for soon afterward we heard her singing. And the last time she was here—about four or five years ago—we could not persuade her to go near the piano."

Rönnaug now greeted Miss Roland, who was coming toward her with the child. A little later, as she was going through the passage to the sitting-room, the sounds of music once more floated out toward her. The priest's daughters were at the piano, singing a duet with feeble voices, one of which was more quavering than the other. They were drawling out,—

"All rests in God's paternal hand."

The door stood open. One of the girls sat at the piano, the other stood at its side. Magnhild sat facing them, leaning against the piano.

Peace radiated from the little hymn, because they who sang it were at peace. The small, yellow-haired heads above the stiff collars did not make a single movement, the piano almost whispered. But the sunshine, playing on the embroidered furniture and the embroidered covers, blended with the music a harmony from afar.

When they had finished singing, one of the girls told that a lady traveling that way had taught them the hymn, and the other, that her part had been arranged by the Fröken. Without uttering a word, without even changing her position, Magnhild held out her hand, which was clasped by the young lady nearest her.

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At this moment voices were heard out of doors. The priest was approaching, accompanied by several men. As they stopped at the door-steps, Rönnaug entered the sitting-room. Soon a tramping of many feet was heard on the steps; the group at the piano rose, Magnhild crossed the floor to where Rönnaug stood. First the dog, then the priest, entered in solemn procession, and slowly following them came dropping in, one by one, six or seven of the farmers of the little mountain parish, heavy, toil-worn men, all of them. Magnhild pressed close up to Rönnaug, who also drew back a little, so that they two stood in front of the gauze-covered mirror. The priest said good-morning, first to Mrs. Randon, then to Magnhild, and asked how they were. Then the men went round the room, one by one, and shook hands with every one present.

"Call mother," said the priest to one of his daughters, and cleared his throat.

The mistress of the house soon appeared, and again man after man stepped forward, shook hands, and returned to his place. The priest wiped his face, stationed himself in front of the frightened Magnhild, bowed, and said:—

"Dear Magnhild, there is no cause for alarm! The representatives of our little parish chanced to assemble to-day in the school-house, and as I happened to mention that you were making a journey and had stopped at the parsonage on your way, some one said: 'It is due to her exertions that the poor-rates of this parish are so small.' Several others expressed the same sentiments. And then I told them that this should be said to your face; they all agreed with me. I do not suppose thanks have ever been offered to you, my dear child, either here or down at the Point, where the results of your work are even greater than here and have spread to the parishes on both sides of the fjord.

"Dear child, God's ways are inscrutable. As long as we can discern them in our own little destinies we are happy, but when we fail to see them we become very unhappy." (Here Magnhild burst into tears.)

"When you were carried downward by the landslide, with your sled in your little hand, you were saved in order that you might become a blessing to many.

"Do not scorn the gratitude of this humble parish: it is a prayer for you to the Almighty. You know what He has said: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' May you realize this!"

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The priest now turned toward his wife, and in the same solemn tone said,—

"Have refreshments handed to these men!"

He strode round among the latter with playful remarks, but the whole house seemed to shake beneath his tread. The more deeply Magnhild seemed moved the happier the priest was.

Magnhild felt a strong impulse to say something to him; for had she not found a refuge in his house, none of the results for which she had just received such unmerited thanks would have been accomplished. But the priest's impetuosity restrained her.

Refreshments were handed round; then the men once more shook hands with every one and withdrew, led by the priest, whose voice could be heard almost all the way to the school-house.

CHAPTER XIII.

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IN the afternoon the mail from the Point arrived, bringing a letter for Magnhild. She was alarmed, and handed the letter to Rønnaug, who soon returned it to her, with the information that she need not be afraid to read it herself.

"You will see by this what your journey has already brought about," Rønnaug added.

The letter was from tall Louise.

DEAR MAGNHILD,—I was obliged to go up to your house to-day to ask for the pattern you had promised to explain to us. But I found only Skarlie at home, and he was not exactly—ah! what shall I call it? for I have never before seen so unhappy a person. He said you had gone on a journey.

I heard later that you were traveling with Mrs. Randon, and thinking it most likely that you are at the parsonage in the mountains I address you there. For you must not leave us, Magnhild, or if you do go away, you must come back to us again!

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We have all of us plainly seen that you were unhappy; but as you said nothing, we did not like to say anything either. But can you not stay with *us*?

How shall we make progress with the new work which has just been introduced? We cannot understand it without some one to explain it to us. And there is the singing, too! Dear Magnhild, so many people thank me and Marie; she and I take the lead now, it is true, but we all know to whom we owe our excellent means of support, the good times we have together, and our opportunities for helping one another. Now that you have left us it seems very dreadful to think that we never did anything to give you pleasure, and that you do not really know us.

I can assure you we could do much for you in return for your kindness to us if you would only let us. Do not leave us! Or if you must, come back to us when your journey is over!

There was added to the letter an extremely neat postscript from Marie.

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I was so grieved when Louise told me you had gone. She has more energy than I, poor hunchback. She has written and said what we all, yes, all of us, think of the matter.

But I have the *greatest* cause to write to you. What in the world would have become of me if you had not come to the school and made me skillful in work that is just suited to me. Without you I should have been a burden to others, or at least I should never have learned to take pleasure in work. Now I feel that I am engaged in something which is continually growing. Yes, now I am happy.

I have told you this at last. How often have I wished to open my heart to you, yet did not quite dare, because you were so reserved!

What delightful times we might have had together! But can we not have them yet?

Your
MARIE.

Postscript.—You may think I mean that you took no interest in us. No: I did not mean that. You were too patient with us for me to have any such thought. But it seemed as if you were indifferent to everything about you, people as well as all else; that is what I had in mind.

Cannot you, as Louise says, come to us? We will gather about you, as bees about their queen, dear Magnhild.

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There is no better way to express what now happened to Magnhild, than to say that a new life-spring welled up within her. This help from what she had never thought of as anything but a pastime and a monotonous routine worked wonders. She felt that she must endeavor to deserve this devotion; she knew now what it was her duty to do.

She was walking and talking with Rönnaug in the court-yard. Evening was drawing nigh; the fowls had already sought shelter and were settling themselves cackling on the roost; the cows were being driven home from the pasture, and slowly passed by. The perfume of hay was wafted toward the ladies, ever and anon, for loads were being hauled into the barn.

Rönnaug was so sure of what she was doing that she did not hesitate to tell Magnhild what the same mail had brought her: it was a newspaper containing a telegram from Munich announcing the death of Tande. These tidings produced no further effect upon Magnhild than to make both her and Rönnaug pause for an instant and then walk on in silence. Tande had always been thought of as one very far away, and now he seemed nearer. What he had recently sent her for her guidance became more profoundly true than ever.

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The first words she uttered were not about Tande but about Skarlie. Perhaps it would be best to send for him that they might have an explanation before she started on her journey. Rönnaug was not disinclined to agree to this; but she thought that she, not Magnhild, should attend to the explanation. In fact, there was nothing to say except to announce what Magnhild had resolved upon doing.

The conversation was spasmodic like their walk. All the people of the house were out making hay. Miss Roland and the child had also gone to the field. Magnhild and Rönnaug were about going there themselves when a boy came walking into the yard whistling, with his hands in his pockets. Seeing the ladies he stood still and stopped whistling. Then he took a stand on his right foot; the left heel he planted in the ground, and moved his leg in such a way that the sole of the foot stood erect and fanned the air.

Presently he drew nearer.

"Is it you they call Magnhild?" he asked, in the ringing dialect of the parish.

He addressed the question to the right one, who replied in the affirmative.

"I was sent to ask you to come down to our place, Synstevold; for there is a fellow there waiting to see you."

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"What is his name?" asked Rönnaug.

"I was told not to tell," said the boy, as he planted his left heel in the ground again, fanned the air with his foot, and stared at the barn.

Rönnaug broke into the dialect as she asked whether the "fellow" was not lame.

"That is very possible," answered the boy, with a grin, and an oath.

Here Rönnaug ran to meet old Andreas who was just coming out of the barn with an empty hay wagon to go after another load; the rumbling of the wheels prevented him from hearing her call; but she overtook him.

"Was it you who took one of the fore-wheels from my carriage?" asked she.

"Fore-wheel of the carriage," repeated old Andreas. "Is it off? Stand still, you fool there?" he cried, giving the reins such a jerk that one of the horses started to move backward instead of forward, for it was a young horse.

But in the mean time Rönnaug had gained light on the question, and left Andreas. In slow English she told Magnhild what she believed she had discovered; she did not want the boy who was standing by to understand. Andreas drove on. [209]

Magnhild laughed: "Yes, Skarlie has come. It is undoubtedly he!" and turning to the boy she said that she would accompany him at once.

Rönnaug tried to persuade Magnhild to remain where she was and let *her* go. No, Magnhild preferred to go herself. She was already on her way when Rönnaug called after her that she would soon follow herself to see how things were going. Magnhild looked back with a smile, and said,—

"You may if you like!"

So after a time Rönnaug set forth for Synstevold. She knew very well that Skarlie could offer nothing that would tempt Magnhild, but he might be annoying, perhaps rough. The fore-wheel was a warning.

There was perhaps no one to whom Skarlie was so repulsive as to Rönnaug. She knew him well. No one besides Rönnaug could surmise how he had striven, dastard as he was, to taint the purity of Magnhild's imagination, to deaden her high sense of honor. Magnhild's frequent blushes had their history.

What was it that so bound him to her? At the outset, of course, the hope that failed. But since then? The evening before, when the conversation had turned on the Catholic cloisters, the priest had remarked that Skarlie—who was a man that had traveled and thought considerably—had said that in the cloisters the monks prayed night and day to make amends for the neglected prayers of the rest of the people. That was the reason why people were willing to give their money so freely to the cloisters: it was like making a cash payment on the debt of sin. [210]

Rönnaug had sat and pondered. Had not Skarlie hereby explained his own relations with Magnhild? It was his way of making payments on his debt of sin.

And so, of course, he grudged giving her up.

Had he but been harsh and impatient, Magnhild would immediately have left him. That was just the misfortune; he was a coward, and he could not bear to renounce her. He was very humble whenever he failed in his attempts to win her, and when he had been especially malicious he forthwith made amends by being as friendly and interesting as possible. And this was what had kept the ball rolling.

Amid these and similar reflections, Rönnaug took the way across the fields in order not to be seen from the place. The grass where she walked had not been mown; she trampled it mercilessly under foot, but she paused before a patch of flowers whose varied hues and leaves she could not help contemplating. Suddenly she heard voices. In front of her there were several willow copses through whose branches she espied the pair she was seeking. [211]

There sat Skarlie and Magnhild in the grass, he in his shirt-sleeves and without a hat.

Half-frightened for Magnhild and utterly without respect for *him*, Rönnaug immediately stood guard. Concealing herself from view she took her post between two copses. Skarlie and Magnhild could be seen quite distinctly, for the space behind them was open.

"Then I shall certainly close up down at the Point, and I will follow you."

"You may if you choose. But spare me further threats. For the last time: I have resolved to go. I wish to travel in order to see and to learn. Some day I hope to return and teach others."

"Do you intend to come back to me?"

"That I do not know."

"Oh, you do know very well."

"Perhaps I do, for if you should lead a better life I presume I would come back to you; but I do not believe you capable of changing, and so I might just as well say at once that I shall not return to you." [212]

"You do not know all I mean to do for you."

"What, your last will and testament again? Suppose we drop this subject now."

She sat twirling a flower, upon which she was intently gazing. Skarlie had placed his shorter

leg under him; his face was all puckered up and his eyes stung.

"You have never appreciated me."

"No—that is true. I have much to thank you for which I have taken without thanks. Please God, I shall one day show my gratitude."

"Cannot we make it right now? What is it you want? To travel? We can travel; we have means enough."

"As I said before, let us drop this subject now."

He sighed, and taking up his cutty, he laid his forefinger over it. It was already filled; he produced a match-box.

"If you can smoke there is hope for you," said Magnhild.

"Oh! I am not smoking; it is nothing but habit,"—he drew a long sigh. "No, Magnhild, it is impossible for things to go well with me if you leave me. For that is about equal to closing up my house and driving me out into the world. The gossip of the people would be more than I could bear."

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He looked now positively unhappy. Magnhild plucked several flowers; but if he expected an answer from her it was in vain.

"It is hard for those who have strong natures," said he; "the devil gains the upper-hand over them in many ways. I thought *you* would have helped me. One thing I must say: if we two could have had a right cozy home together, and a child"—

But here she sprang up quickly, and the flowers fell from her lap.

"Let us have no more of this! He who means to do right does not begin as you did. But in spite of the beginning you might perhaps still have—Yet how did you act? I say: let us have no more of this!"

She moved away a few paces and came back again with: "No, I was not to blame when I gave myself to you, for you promised that I should do and live precisely as I pleased. And I was such an inexperienced child that I did not in the least understand how you were outwitting me. But I did wrong when I heard how matters really were and did not at once leave you. Also when I failed to do so later. However, this is connected with many things about which we will not talk at present. All we can do now is to make amends, as far as we can, for the past. Give me up, and try to do your duty toward others."

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"What do you mean by that?" His eyes blinked and his face grew sharp.

"I mean that you have outwitted others, so I have heard, for your own selfish ends. Try to make amends for your evil deeds, if you really desire improvement."

"That is not true. If it was, it is nothing to you."

"Alas! alas! There is little hope of improvement, I fear, in this as in other things. Aye, then, farewell! It shall be as I have said."

He looked up and distorted his face to a grin, making the eyes almost wholly disappear beneath the bushy brows.

"You cannot leave here without my consent."

"Oh!"

"Moreover, have you considered what you are doing? Are you right in the eyes of God?"

"You know very well what I think upon *this* subject."

"Pshaw! If you mean that talk about unholy marriages, it is sheer nonsense. There is not a word in the Bible about it. I have looked."

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She stroked the hair from her brow. "Then it is written here," said she, and turned to go.

Skarlie began to get up. He was very angry.

Rönnaug felt the necessity of making haste, for now she was in danger of being seen.

Suddenly the three stood face to face.

Rönnaug went right up to Skarlie, in the sweetest, most amiable manner, heartily shook his hand, and said in English that she was delighted to see him, he had often been so extremely kind to her. Then she began to jest; she was at once insinuating and daring. Skarlie could not help laughing and offering some remarks, also in English; then Rönnaug said something witty to which Skarlie could retaliate; soon they were both laughing heartily. The impression made on him by this handsome, finely developed woman, transported him, as it were, before he was aware, to other scenes and spread a new train of thoughts over his spirit. The jesting became livelier. English alone was spoken, which particularly pleased Skarlie; and it put him in a good humor, too, to have a chance of displaying his ready wit, of which he possessed an abundance. Finally, Rönnaug held him completely bound by the spell of her witchery, and thus made no unalloyed

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good impression on Magnhild, who was alarmed at this display of the powers Rönnaug had at her command. She wound her spell about him, with her look, her words, her challenging figure; but her eyes flashed fire, while she was laughing: she would have liked, above all things, to give him a good box on the ear! Women become wonderfully united when they have occasion to defend or avenge one another.

Amid the stream of conversation she gradually led the limping Skarlie round the willow copse, and when they stood on the other side she turned toward the copse which had concealed her while she was eavesdropping. Thrusting aside some of the branches, she asked Skarlie, with a laugh, if he would not be "gallant enough" to aid them in rolling home the wheel that lay concealed here. He could not possibly allow the ladies to do it alone, she said.

Skarlie heartily joined in her laughter, but showed no readiness to give her any assistance. He was in his shirt sleeves, he said; he must go after his coat if he was to accompany them to the parsonage.

Rönnaug assured him that his coat could be sent after him, and that he would find it far easier to roll the wheel without it. She went to work to raise the wheel unaided, shouting "Ahoy!" No sooner had she, with great effort, succeeded in getting it up, than it fell over again.

"It requires two to do this!" said she.

She once more stooped to take hold of the wheel, and while bending over it flashed her roguish eyes on Skarlie. His were irresistibly attracted to her face and superb form. The wheel was raised. Rönnaug and Skarlie rolled it forward between them, she skipping along on one side, he limping on the other, amid merry words and much laughter. Magnhild slowly followed. Rönnaug cast back a look at her, over the top of Skarlie's bald head; it sparkled with mirth and victory. But ere it was withdrawn, its fire was scorching enough to have left two deeply seared brown stripes on his neck and shoulders.

The distance was not very short. Skarlie groaned. Soon Rönnaug felt great drops of sweat rolling down from his face upon her hands. All the more swiftly did she roll. His sentences became words, his words syllables; he made a vigorous effort to conceal his exhaustion with a laugh. At last he could neither roll himself nor the wheel; he dropped down on the grass, red as a cluster of rowan berries, his eyes fixed in their sockets, his mouth wide open. He gasped to recover his breath and his senses.

Rönnaug called to old Andreas, who at this moment appeared on the road with a load of hay, to come and take the wheel. Then she drew her arm through Magnhild's, bowed and thanked Skarlie—still in English—"many thousand times for his admirable assistance." Now they could start the next morning early—and so, "farewell!"

From the road they looked back. The attitude of Andreas indicated that he was asking Skarlie how the wheel had come there. Skarlie made a wrathful movement of the hand, as though he would like to sweep away both the wheel and Andreas; or perhaps he was consigning them to a place where the inhabitants of Norway are very apt to consign their least highly-prized friends. The ladies now saw him turn his face toward them; Rönnaug promptly waved her handkerchief and cried back to him, "Farewell!" The word was echoed through the evening air.

The two friends had not proceeded many steps before Rönnaug paused to give vent to the residue of her wrath. She poured out a stream of words, in a half whisper. Magnhild could only distinguish a few of these words, but those she did make out were from the vocabulary of the old days of service on the road; they compared with Rönnaug's present vocabulary as the hippopotamus compares with the fly.

Magnhild recoiled from her. Rönnaug stared wildly at Magnhild, then composed herself and said in English, "You are right!" but immediately gave way to a new outburst of wrath and horror; for she was so forcibly reminded of the time when she herself crept along as best she could down among the slimy dwellers of the human abyss where darkness reigns, and where such as he down on yonder hill sat on the brink and fished. She thrust her hand into her pocket to draw forth Charles Randon's last letter, which she always carried about her until the next one came; she pressed it to her lips and burst into tears. Her emotion was so violent that she was forced to sit down.

It was the first time Magnhild had ever seen Rönnaug weep. Even upon the deck of the vessel on which she had set sail for America she had not wept. Oh, no, quite the contrary!

CHAPTER XIV.

THEY remained at the parsonage several days, for when it was announced that Magnhild was going with Rönnaug to America the good people were so startled that it was thought best to grant them time to become accustomed to the idea. Magnhild wished for her own sake, too, to pass a little time with them.

One day the ladies were all taking a walk along the road. Rønnaug and Miss Roland had little Harry between them, so they made but slow progress. From sheer solicitude for the child they all went quite out of the way of a large carriage which was overtaking them.

"Magnhild!" was called from the carriage, at the moment those walking had fully turned their faces toward it.

Magnhild looked up; a lady in black was smiling at her. Magnhild sprang directly toward her; the coachman stopped his horses. It was Fru Bang.

The lady drew Magnhild up to her and kissed her. A stout military man by the lady's side bowed.

The lady was thin. She wore a mourning suit of the latest style. Jet beads, strewed all over the costume, sparkled with every movement; from the jaunty hat, with waving plume, flowed a black veil which was wound about the neck. As from out the depths of night she gazed, with her glowing eyes, which acquired, in this setting, an especially fascinating radiance. Melancholy resignation seemed to command, as it were, the countenance, to hold sway over every nerve, to control the smile about the mouth, to languish in these eyes. [221]

"Yes, I am changed," said she, languidly.

Magnhild turned from the lady to the stout officer. The lady's eyes followed.

"Do you not recognize Bang? Or did you not see him?"

His size had increased tenfold, the flesh resembling heavy layers of padding; he occupied at least two thirds of the carriage, crowding his wife, for one shoulder and arm covered hers. He looked good-natured and quite contented. But when one looked from his plump, heavy face and body back to the lady, she appeared spiritualized—aye, to the very finger-tips of the hand from which she was now drawing the glove.

Steadfastly following Magnhild's eyes, she stroked back from Magnhild's brow a lock of hair which had crept forward, and then let her hand pass slowly, softly over her cheek. [222]

"You are in mourning?" asked Magnhild.

"The whole land should be in mourning, my child!" And after a pause, came a whispered, "He is dead!"

"You must remember that there is no time to lose if we would reach the steamer," said Bang.

The lady did not look up at her husband's words; she was busy with the lock she had just stroked back. Bang gave the coachman a sign, the carriage was set in motion.

"I am going to America," whispered Magnhild, as she descended from the carriage step.

The lady gazed after her a moment, then she seemed to grasp in its full extent what it implied that Skarlie's wife was going far, far away—what suppositions might be therewith connected and what consequences. For her face resumed somewhat of its old brightness, her frame regained its elasticity: at once she was on her feet, had turned completely round, and was waving her handkerchief. With what charming grace she did it!

Her husband would not permit the carriage to halt again. He contented himself with following his wife's example by waving one hand. The movement must have been accompanied by an admonition to sit down, for the lady disappeared forthwith. [223]

The plume in her hat waved over his shoulder. More could not be seen; she must have let herself glide back into her place. [224] [225]

DUST.

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CHAPTER I.

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THE drive from the town to Skogstad, the large gard belonging to the Atlung family, with its manufacturing establishment on the margin of the woodland stream, at the usual steady pace, might possibly occupy two hours; but in the fine sleighing we had been having it could scarcely take an hour and a half. The road was a chaussée running along the fjord. All the way from town I had the fjord on the right-hand side, and on the left broad fields, gently sloping down from the

heights and dotted with villas and gards, surrounded by hedges of trees and having avenues leading to them.

Farther on, the heights became mountains, and rose more abruptly from the shore; here, too, they became more and more rugged, and at last had no other growth than the pine forest, from the uppermost ridge all the way down to the fjord, forest, forest, far as the eye could reach. This belonged to Skogstad; the factory on the Skogstad River prepared the raw material.

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The Atlungs were of French descent, having settled here in the times of the Huguenots, and were people of plain origin who had bettered their condition by marrying into the once wealthy and influential Atlung family, taking its name, which sounded not unlike their own.

I thoroughly enjoyed the drive. It had recently been snowing, and the snow still lay on the trees; not a breath of wind had left its traces in the wood. On the other hand, it had been thawing a little, which the deciduous trees that here began to press forward farther down toward the road could not tolerate; the sole covering they wore was the new-fallen snow of the morning.

Between both the white landscape and the snow-laden air, the fjord appeared black. It was not far to the opposite side, and there still loftier mountains loomed up, now also white, but of that subdued tint imparted by the atmosphere.

Where I was driving the sea lay close up to the edge of the snow, only a few sea-weeds, some pebbles, and in some places not so much as these, separated the two forms and hues of the same element—reality and poetry, where the poetry is just as real as the reality, simply not so enduring.

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As soon as I had advanced as far as the forest, this attracted my undivided attention. The fir-trees held great armfuls of snow; in some places it had been showered around; nevertheless there was still so much uncovered that a shimmer of dark green overspread the whiteness of the entire forest. On a nearer view it could be seen that the single uncovered branches were thrust forth, as it were, defiantly, and that the red-tinted lower boughs had pierced the snow-drifts.

Higher up mighty trunks were visible, most of them dark, although some of the younger ones were brighter: taken all together an assemblage of well-laden giants, and this gave an air of solemnity to the thicket. The foremost trees, which were low enough not to impede the view, and which while growing had been disfigured either by man or beast, perhaps too by the storms (for they had borne the brunt of these), had not the regular shapes of the others; they were more gnarled, affording the snow an opportunity to commit what ravages it chose among them. Their lowest branches were in some places quite bowed to the ground, often making the tree appear like an unbroken mass of white; others were fantastically transformed into clumsy dwarfs, with only upper parts to their bodies, or into sundry human forms, each with a white sack drawn over the head, or a shirt that was not put on right.

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Alongside of these awkward figures I noticed small clusters of deciduous trees, over which but the faintest suspicion of snow was spread; a single one, which stood apart from the rest, looked as though its outmost white branches, as they grew finer and finer, gradually flowed into the air; then there were young spruce trees which formed pyramid upon pyramid of regular layers of snow. Close down by the sea, where there were more stones, might now and then be seen a bramble bush. The snow had spread itself on every thorn, so that the bush looked as if it were strewed over with white berries.

I rounded a naze with a crag upon it, and here is where Skogstad proper begins. The ridge recedes and is broken by the river. Again we see gently sloping fields, and here lies the gard. The river flows farther away; the red roof and a row of buildings alongside become visible. On either side of the gard lie the housemen's places with their surrounding grounds, but they are separated from the gard by fields on the one side and by a wood or park on the other.

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At the sight of the park I forgot all that had gone before. Originally it was intended to slope down to the sea; but the stony ground had evidently rendered this impossible, and so the trees on the lower square had been felled; but in the course of years, instead of pine woods a vigorous growth of deciduous trees had shot up. These, being of the same year's growth, were of an equal height, and extended all the way up to the venerable pine trees in the park. The effect of the delicate encircling the ponderous, the light opposed to the heavy, the low and perpetually level at the foot of the upward-soaring and powerful, was very fine.

The eye reveled in this, searching for forms; I would combine a hundred branches in one survey, because they ran parallel in the same curve, at about the same height; or I would single out one solitary bough from the rest and follow it from its first ramification through the branches of its branches to the most delicate twig,—a distended, transparent white wing, or a monstrous fern leaf strewed all over with white down. Then I was compelled once more to cease following the forms and turn to the colors; the unequal coating presented an infinite variety.

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I turned my back on my traveling companion, the fjord, and wound my way up to the gard. Where the park ended, the garden began, and the road followed this in a gradual ascent. Once there had been a wood here also, and the road had passed through it; but of the wood there was left but a few yards, on either side, thus forming the avenue. Large, old trees were about being replaced by young ones, whose growth was so dense that in some places I could not see the gard I was driving toward. But the snow-romance followed, decking the sinking giants with white flags, powdering the young and fresh ones, and playing Christmas masquerade with the

CHAPTER II.

THE impressions of nature play their part in our anticipations of what we are about to meet. What was there so white and refined in the experience that awaited me here?

She was not clad in white, to be sure, the last time I saw her, the bright attractive being whom I was now to meet again. On her wedding journey, and in Dresden, some nine years previous to this time, we had last been together. True, she was dressed in gala attire every day—a whim of the young bridegroom, in his blissful intoxication; but most frequently she wore blue, not once did she appear in white; nor would it have been becoming to her.

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I remember them especially as they sang at the piano, he sitting, because he was playing the accompaniment, she standing and usually with her hand on his shoulder; but what they sang was indeed white, at least it was always of the character of a more or less jubilant anthem. She was the daughter of a sectarian priest, and they had just come from the parsonage and from the wedding feast. Since then I had heard of them from time to time at the parsonage, and from that source I had received repeatedly renewed urgent entreaties to visit them the next time I was in their vicinity. I was now on my way to them.

I had heard the dwelling-house spoken of as one of the largest frame buildings in Norway. It was gray and immensely long. No Atlung had ever been satisfied with what his predecessor had built, and so the house had had an addition made to it by every generation and a partial remodeling of the old portions, so far as it was necessary to make these correspond with the new. I had heard that many and long passages (concerning which at festal gatherings rhymes without end were said to have been made) endeavor to unite the interior in the same successful or unsuccessful manner as the out-buildings, sloping roof, balconies, and verandas attempt to keep up the style of the exterior. I have heard how many rooms there are in the house, but I have forgotten it.

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The last addition was made by the present owner, and is in a sort of modernized gothic style.

Behind the dwelling the other buildings of the gard form a crescent, which, however, protrudes in rather an unsightly manner on one side. Between these and the dwelling I now drove in order to alight, according to the post-boy's advice, at a porch in the gothic wing. I did not see a living being about the gard, not even a dog. I waited a little but in vain, then walked through the porch into a passage, where I took off my wraps, and then passed on into a large bright front room to the right. Neither did I see any one here; but I heard either two children's voices and a woman's voice, or two female voices and one child's voice, and I recognized the song, for it was one that was just then floating about the country, the lament of a little girl that she was everywhere in the way except in heaven with God, who was so glad to have unhappy children with Him. It sounded rather strange to hear such a lament in this bright, lively room, filled with guns and other sporting implements, reindeer horns, fox skins, lynx skins, and similar substantial objects, arranged with the most exquisite taste.

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I knocked at the door and entered one of the most charming sitting-rooms I have seen in this country, so bright its outlook on the fjord, so large it was, so elegant. The brightly polished wooden panels of the wall were relieved by carved wooden brackets, each bearing a bust or a small statue; the stylish furniture was in every direction gracefully distributed about on the Brussels carpet. Moody and Sankey's dreamy melody flowed out over this like a white or yellow sheet. This hymn belongs to a collection of Christian songs which are among the most beautiful that I know; but it made the same impression here as if beneath this modern room there was a crypt from the Middle Ages where immured nuns were taking part in ceremonies for the dead, amidst smoking lamps, and whence incense and low chanting, inseparably blended, stole up into the bright conceptions and cheerful art of the nineteenth century.

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The singing proceeded from one woman and two boys, the elder of the latter seven years old or a little more, and the younger about six. The woman turned her face toward the door, and paused quite astonished at my entrance; the boys were gazing out of the window, and did not look at her; they were wholly absorbed in their singing, and therefore they continued a while after she had ceased.

Of these two boys the one resembled the father's family, the other the mother's; only the mother's eyes had been bestowed on them both. The elder of the boys had a long face, with high brow and sandy hair, and he was freckled like his father. The younger one had his mother's figure, and stooped slightly because the head was set forward on the shoulders. But in consequence of this his head was usually thrown somewhat backward in order to recover its equilibrium. The result of this again was that the lips were habitually parted, and then the large, questioning eyes and the bright curly hair encircling the fine arched brow were exactly like the mother's. The elder one was tall and thin, and had his father's lounging gait and small, outward turned feet. I observed all this at a glance, while the boys walked across the room to the table by

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the sofa, as their companion left them. She had advanced, after a moment's hesitation, to meet me; she was evidently not sure whether she knew me or not. On hearing my name, she discovered with a smile that it was only my portrait she had seen, the portrait in the album, a souvenir of the wedding journey of the heads of the house. She informed me that Atlung was at the factories, and would be home to dinner, that is to say in about an hour, and that the mistress of the house was at one of the housemen's places I had seen from the road; it seemed that there was an old man lying at the point of death there.

She made this announcement in a melodious, although rather feeble voice, and with a pair of searching eyes fastened on me. She had heard something about me. I had never thought that I should see one of Carlo Dolci's madonnas step down from a frame to stand in a modern sitting-room and talk with me, and therefore my eyes were certainly not less searching than hers. The way the head was poised on the shoulders, its inclination to one side, the profile of the face, and beyond all else the eyes and the eyebrows, indeed, the bluish green head kerchief, which was drawn far forward, imparting to the pale face something of its own hue—altogether a genuine Carlo Dolci!

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She walked noiselessly away, and left me alone with the boys, whom I at once attacked. The elder one was named Anton, and he could walk on his hands, at least, almost; and the younger one informed me that his name was Storm, and told me a great deal more about his brother, whom he regarded with unqualified admiration. The elder, on the other hand, assured me that his brother Storm was a very bad boy sometimes; he had recently been caught at some of his naughty tricks, and so papa had given him a flogging that same day; Stina had told papa about it. Stina was the name of her who had just left us.

After this not very diplomatic introduction to an acquaintance, they stood one on each side of me and prattled away about what at present was working in their minds, with most extraordinary force. They both now told me, the elder one taking the lead and the younger following with supplementary details, that yonder at one of the houseman's places, past which I had driven, lived Hans, little Hans; that is he *had* lived there, for the real, true little Hans was with God. He had come to the gard to play with the boys almost every day; though sometimes they too had been over at the housemen's places, which I soon perceived were to the boys the promised land of this earth. Then one evening, about a fortnight since, Hans had started to go home at dusk; it was before the snow came, and in the park, through which he had to pass, the fish pond lay spread before him so smooth and black. Hans thought he would like to slide on it and he climbed up from the path on to the pond, for the path ran right along it. But that same day there had been a hole cut in the ice for the people to fish, and they had forgotten to put a signal there, and so little Hans slid right into the hole. A child's cry of distress had reached the gard; the milkmaid had heard it, but only once, and she had not thought very much about it, for all the boys were in the habit of playing in the park. So little Hans had disappeared and no one could say where he was. Then the ice was cut away from the pond and they found him; but the boys were not allowed to see him. They had, however, been permitted to be present at the funeral with all the little boys and girls of the factory school. But Hans was not buried in the chapel where grandfather and grandmother lie; he was buried in the churchyard. Oh, what beautiful singing they had had! The school-master had sung bass with them, and the old brown horse had drawn Hans, who was in a white painted coffin that papa had bought in town, and there were garlands of flowers on it. Mamma and Stina had arranged them. All the children got cakes before they started and currant wine. And the song was the one the boys had just been singing; Stina had taught it to them. Hans had been very poor; but now he had all he wanted; he was with God; it was only the coffin that was put in the ground. What was in the coffin? Why, it was not the real Hans that was there, for Hans was quite new now. Angels had come down to the pond with everything that the new Hans was to wear, so that he did not feel cold in the pond; he was not there. All children who died went to God, and that together with a hundred thousand million very small angels. The angels were all round about us here too; but we could not see them because they were invisible, and Hans was now with them. The angels could see us, and they were so kind to us, especially to children, and they always wanted to have very unhappy little children with them; that was the reason why they took them. It is ever and ever and ever so much nicer to be with the angels than to be here. Yes, indeed, it is, for Stina said so. Stina too would rather be with the angels than here; it was only for mamma's sake that Stina did not go to them, for mamma would be so lonely without her. All angels had wings, and now Hans's father was lying ill, and he would soon be with Hans. He also would have wings and be a little angel and fly about here and wherever he himself chose—right up to the stars. For the stars were not only stars, they were as large, as large, when we got up to them, as large as the whole earth, and that was enormously large, larger than the largest mountain. And there were people on the stars, and there were many things that were not here. And that same afternoon Hans's father was to go right to God, for God was up in heaven. They would like so much to see Hans's father get his wings; but mamma would not let them go with her. And Hans's father had already become so beautiful, as he lay in his bed, that he almost looked like an angel. Mamma had said so; but they were not allowed to see him.

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Stina made her appearance as they came to the last words; she bade them come with her and they obeyed.

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A door stood open to the left; I could see book-shelves in the room to which it led, so that I presumed the library must be there. I felt a desire to know what the father of these boys was reading just then—provided that he read at all. The first thing I found open on the desk, by the side of letters, account-books, and factory samples, was Bain. And Bain's English friends were the

first books my eyes beheld on the nearest shelves. I took out one, and saw that it had been much read. This accorded with what I had heard of Atlung.

Just then bells were heard outside. I thought it must be the mistress of the house returning, and put back the books in the same order I had found them. In so doing I disarranged some behind them (for the books stood in two rows), and I felt a desire to examine also these that were hidden from view, which took time. I did not leave the library until just as the lady was entering the front door.

CHAPTER III.

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Fru^[4] Atlung was evidently glad to see me. She had a singular walk; it seemed as though she never fully bent her knees; but with this peculiar gait she advanced hastily toward me, grasped my hands with both of hers, and looked long into my eyes, until her own filled with tears. It was, of course, the wedding journey this look concerned, the most beautiful days of her life;—but the tears?

[4] Fru corresponds to the German Frau, and means Mrs.—Translator.

Nay, unhappy she could not be. She was so thoroughly the same as she was formerly, that had she not been somewhat plumper, I could not—at all events, not at once—have detected the slightest change. The expression of her countenance was exactly the same innocent, questioning one, not the slightest suggestion of a sterner line or a change of coloring; even the hair fell in the same ringlets about the backward thrown head, and the half parted lips had the same gentle expression, were just as untouched by will, the eyes wore the same look of mild happiness, even the slightly-veiled tone of the voice had the same childlike ring as of yore.

"You look as though you had not had a single new experience since last we met," was the first remark I could not help making to her.

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She looked up smiling into my face, and not a shadow contradicted my words. We took our seats, each in a chair that stood out on the carpet, near the library door; our backs were turned to the windows, and thus we faced a wall where between the busts and statues that rested on the carved wooden brackets, there hung an occasional painting on the polished panels.

I gave an account of my trip, received thanks for coming at last. I delivered greetings from her parents, of whom we talked a little. She said she had been thinking of her father to-day, she would have been so glad to have had him with her; for she had just come from a dying man, whose death-bed was the most beautiful she had ever witnessed. Meanwhile, she had assumed her favorite position, that is to say, she sat slightly bowed forward, with her head thrown back, and her eyes fixed on the upper part of the wall, or on the ceiling. As she sat thus, she pressed one finger against her open under lip, not once, but with a constant repetition of the same movement. Now and then the upper portion of her body swayed to and fro. Her eyes seemed to be fixed; they did not seek my face, either when she asked a question or when she received an answer, unless something special had attracted her from her position. Even then she would promptly resume it.

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"Do you believe in immortality?" she asked, as though this were the most natural question in the world, and without looking at me.

But as I was surprised, and consequently compelled to look at her, I perceived that a tear was trickling down her cheek, and that those open eyes of hers were full of tears.

I felt at once that this question was a pretext; it was her husband's belief she was thinking of. Therefore I thought I would spare her further pretexts.

"What is your husband's opinion of immortality?"

"He does not believe in the immortality of the individual," replied she; "we perpetuate ourselves in our intercourse with those about us, in our deeds, and above all in our children: but this immortality, he thinks, is sufficient."

Her eyes were fixed as before, and they were still full of tears; but her voice was mild and calm; not a trace of discontent or reproach in the simple statement, which doubtless was correct.

No, she is not one of the so-called childlike women, I thought; and if she has the same innocent, questioning expression she had nine years ago, it is not because she has been without thought or research.

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"You talk, then, with Atlung about these subjects, I suppose?"

"Not now."

"In Dresden you seemed to be thoroughly united about these things; you sang together"—

"He was under father's influence then. Besides, I think he was not quite clear in his own mind at that time. The change came gradually."

"I saw some books, that are now placed behind the others."

"Yes, Albert has changed."

She sat motionless, as she gave this answer, except that her finger continued its play on the under lip.

"But who, then, attends to the education of the children?" asked I.

Now she turned half toward me. I thought for a while that she did not intend to answer but after a long time she did speak.

"No one," said she.

"No one?"

"Albert prefers to have it so for the present."

"But, my dear lady, if no one teaches them, at least one thing or another is told to them?" [247]

"Yes, there is no objection to that; and it is usually Stina who talks with them."

"And so it is left entirely to chance?"

She had turned from me, and sat in her former attitude.

"Entirely to chance," she replied, in a tone that was almost one of indifference.

I briefly related to her what Stina had told the boys about the life beyond the grave, about angels, etc., and I inquired if she approved of this.

She turned her face toward me. "Yes; why not?" said she. Her great eyes viewed me so innocently; but as I did not answer immediately the blood slowly coursed up into her face.

"If anything of the kind is to be told to them," said she, "it must be something that will take hold of their childish imaginations."

"It confuses the reality for them, my dear lady, and *that* is the same thing as to disturb the development of their faculties."

"Make them stupid, do you mean?"

"Well, if not exactly stupid, it would at least hinder them from using their faculties rightly."

"I do not understand you." [248]

"When you teach children that life here below is nothing to the life above, that to be visible is nothing in comparison to being invisible, that to be a human being is far inferior to being an angel, that to live is not by any means equal to being dead, *is that* the way to teach them to view life properly, or to love life, to gain courage for life, vigor for work, and patriotism?"

"Ah, in that way! Why, *that* is our duty to them later."

"Later, my dear lady? After all this dust has settled upon their souls?"

She turned away from me, assumed her old position, stared fixedly at the ceiling, and became absorbed in thought.

"Why do you use the word dust?" she began presently.

"By the word dust I mean chiefly that which has been, but which now having become disintegrated, floats about and settles in vacant places."

She remained silent a little while.

"I have read of dust which carries the poison from putrified matter. You do not mean that, I suppose?"

There was neither irony nor anger in the tone, so I failed to understand at what she was aiming. [249]

"That depends on where the dust falls, my dear lady; in healthy human beings it only creates a cloud of mist, prejudices which prevent them from seeing clearly; if there be stagnation this dust will oftentimes collect an inch thick, until the machinery is thoroughly clogged."

She turned toward me with more vivacity than she had yet shown, and leaning on the arm of her chair brought her face nearer to mine.

"How did you happen upon this idea?" asked she. "Is it because you have seen how much dust there is in this house?"

I admitted that I had seen this.

"And yet the chambermaid and Stina do nothing else but clean away the dust, and I did nothing

else either at first. I cannot understand it. At home at my mother's, there was nothing I heard so much about as dust. She was always busied about father with a damp cloth; he was constantly annoyed because she would disturb his books and papers. But she insisted that he gathered more dust than any one else. He never left his study that she was not after him with a clothes-brush. And later it came to be my turn. I was like my father, she said I accumulated dust, and I never could dust well enough to satisfy her. I was so weary of dust that when I married a Paradise seemed in prospect because I thought I should escape this annoyance and have some one to dust for me. But therein I was greatly in error. And now I have given it up. It is of no use. I evidently have no talent for getting rid of dust."

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"And so it is very singular," she continued, as she sank back in her chair, "that you too should come with this talk about dust."

"I hope I have not hurt your feelings?"

"How can you think—?" and then, in the calmest, most innocent voice in the world, she added: "It would not be easy to hurt the feelings of any one who had lived nine years with Albert."

I became greatly embarrassed. What possible good could it do for me to become entangled in the affairs of this household? I did not say another word. She too sat, or rather reclined in her seat, for a long time in silence, drumming with her fingers on the arms of her chair. Finally I heard, as from far away, the words: "Butterfly dust is very beautiful, though." And then some time afterward there glided forth from the midst of a long chain of thought which she did not reveal, the query, "refracted rays—the various prismatic colors—?" She paused, listened, rose to her feet; she had heard Atlung's step in the front room.

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I also rose.

CHAPTER IV.

THE door was thrown wide open, and Atlung came lounging in. This tall, slender man, in these capacious clothes that showed many a trace of the factories he had been visiting, bore in his face, his movements, his bearing, the unconcerned ease of several generations.

The gray eyes, beneath the invisible eyebrows, blinked a little when he saw me, and then the long face broadened into a smile. His superb teeth glittered between the full, short lips, as he exclaimed: "Is that you!" He took both my hands between his hard, freckled ones, then dropping one of them threw his arm around his wife's waist. "Was not *that* delightful, Amalie? What? Those days in Dresden, my dear?"

When he had relaxed his hold, he made eager inquiries about myself and my journey,—he knew I was to make a short trip abroad. Then he began to tell me what occupied *him* the most, and meanwhile he strolled up and down the room, took up one article between his fingers, handled it, then took up another. He did not hold any little thing as others do with the extreme tips of his fingers; he firmly grasped it in his hand so that his fingers closed over it. In conversation, too, it was just the same: there was a certain fullness in the way he took up each subject and flung it away again at once for something else.

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His wife had left the room, but returned very soon and invited us to dinner. Just at that moment Atlung was sauntering past the piano, on which was open a new musical composition, whose character he described in a few words. Then he began to play and sing verse after verse of a long song. When he was through, his wife again reminded him of the meal. This probably first called his attention to her presence in the room.

"See here, Amalie, let us try this duet!" he cried, and struck up the accompaniment.

Looking at me with a smile, she took her place at his side and joined in the song. Her somewhat veiled, sweet soprano blended with his rich baritone, just as I had heard it nine years before. The voices of both had acquired that deeper, fuller meaning which life gives when it has meaning itself; their skill, on the other hand, was about the same as of old.

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Any one who but a moment before might perhaps have found it difficult to understand how these two had come together, only needed to be near them while they sang. A lyric abandonment of feeling was common to both, and where there was any difference of sentiment they were perfectly content to waive it. They floated onward like two children in a boat, leaving the dinner behind them to grow cold, the servants to become impatient, the guest to think what he pleased, and the order of the house and their own plans for the day to be upset.

In their singing there was no energy, no school, no delicate finish of style of this simple number, which, moreover, they were doubtless singing for the first time; but there was a smooth, lazy, happy gliding over the melody. The light coloring of the voices blended together like a caress; and there was a charm in the way it was done.

They sang verse after verse, and the longer they continued the better they sang together, and the more joyously. When finally they were through and the wife, with her somewhat labored step, walked into the dining-room on my arm, and Atlung sauntered on before to give Stina the key to the wine-cellar, there was no longer any question in Fru Atlung's eyes, only joy, mild, beautiful joy, and her husband warbled like a canary bird.

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We sat down to table while he was still out, we waited an interminable time for him; either he had not found Stina or she had not understood him: he had gone himself to the cellar and had returned so covered with dust and dirt that we could not help laughing. His wife, however, paused in the midst of her laughter, and sat silent while he changed his clothes and washed.

He swallowed spoonful after spoonful of the soup in greedy haste, regained his spirits when his first hunger was satisfied, and began to talk in one unbroken stream, until suddenly, while carving the roast, he inquired for the boys. They had had their dinner; they could not wait so long.

"Have you seen the boys?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, and I spoke of their extreme artlessness, and what a strong likeness I thought one bore to his and the other to his wife's family.

"But," he interposed, "it is unfortunate that both families have comparatively too much imagination; there is an element of weakness in it, and the boys have inherited their share from both families. A very sorrowful occurrence took place here about a fortnight since. A little playfellow was drowned in the fish-pond. What the boys have made out of this—of course, with Stina's aid—is positively incredible. I was thinking about it to-day. I have not said anything, for after all it was extremely amusing, and I did not want to spoil their intercourse with Stina. But, indeed, it is most absurd. See here, Amalie, it would almost be better to send them away to school than to let them run wild in this way and get into all kinds of nonsense."

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His wife made no reply.

I wanted to divert his attention, and inquired if he had read Spencer's "Essay on Education."

Then he became animated! He had just settled himself to eat, but now he forgot to do so; he took a few bites and forgot again. Indeed, I should judge we sat over this one course a whole hour, while he expatiated on Spencer. That I who had asked if he had read the book in all probability had read it myself, did not trouble him in the least. He gave me a synopsis of the book, often point after point, with his own comments. One of these was that even if as Spencer desires, pedagogics was introduced into every school, as one of its most important branches—most people would nevertheless lack the ability to bring up their own children; for teaching is a talent which but few possess. He for his part proposed to send the boys, as soon as they were old enough, to a lady whom he knew to possess this talent and who also had the indispensable knowledge. She was an enthusiastic disciple of Spencer.

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He spoke as though this were a matter long since decided upon; his wife listened as though it were an old decision. I was much surprised that she had not told me of it when we were talking about the children a little while before.

I do not now remember what theme we were drifting into when Atlung suddenly looked at his watch.

"I had entirely forgotten Hartmann! I should have been in town! Yes, yes—it is not yet too late! Excuse me!"

He threw down his napkin, drank one more glass of wine, rose and left the room. His wife explained apologetically that Hartmann was his attorney; that unfortunately there was no telegraphic communication between the gard and the town, and that unquestionably there was some business that must be settled within an hour or thereabout.

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It would take an hour at least to drive to town, if for nothing else than to spare the horse; at least an hour there; and then an hour and a half back, for no one would drive such a long distance equally fast back and forth with the same horse. I sat calculating this while I finished eating, and became aware at the same time that my coming was most inopportune. Therefore I resolved that after coffee I too would take my leave.

We had both finished and now rose from the table. My hostess excused herself and went out into the kitchen, and I who was thus left alone thought I would look round the gard.

When I got out on the steps in front of the porch, I was met by a burst of loud laughter from the boys, immediately followed by a word which I should not have thought they would take in their mouths, to say nothing of shouting it out with all their might, and this in the open yard. The elder boy called it out first, the younger repeated it after him.

They were standing up on the barn bridge, and the word was addressed to a girl who stood in the frame shed opposite them, bending over a sledge. The boys shouted out yet another word, and still another and another, without cessation. Between each word came peals of merriment. It was clear that they were being prompted by some one inside of the barn door. The girl made no reply; but once in a while she looked up from her work and glanced over her shoulder—not at the boys but at some one behind the barn where the carriage-shed was situated.

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Then I heard the sound of bells from that direction. Atlung came forth, dressed for his trip and leading his horse. Great was the alarm of the boys when they saw their father! For they suddenly realized, though perhaps not distinctly, what they had been shouting,—at least they felt they had been making mischief for some one.

"Wait until I get home, boys," the father shrieked, "and you shall surely both have a whipping."

He took his seat in his sledge and applied the lash to his horse. As he drove past me, he looked at me and shook his head.

The boys stood for a moment as though turned into stone. Then the elder one took to his heels with all his strength. The younger followed, crying, "Wait for me! Say, Anton, do not run away from me!" He burst into tears. They disappeared behind the carriage-shed; but for a long time I heard the sobbing of the younger one.

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CHAPTER V.

I FELT quite out of spirits, and determined to leave at once; but as I entered the sitting-room my hostess was seated on the large gothic settee or sofa, near the dining-room door, and no sooner did she perceive me than she leaned forward across the table in front of her and asked,—

"What do *you* think of Spencer's theory of education? Do you believe we can put it into practice?"

I did not wish to be drawn into an argument, and so merely answered,—

"Your husband's practice, at all events, does not accord with Spencer's teachings."

"My husband's practice? Why, he has none."

Here she smiled.

"You mean he takes no interest in the children?"

"Oh, he is like most other men, I suppose," she replied; "they amuse themselves with their children, now and then, and whip them occasionally, too, when anything occurs to annoy them."

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"You believe that husband and wife should have equal responsibilities in such matters?"

"Yes, to be sure I do. But even in this respect men have made what division they chose."

I expressed a desire to take my leave. She appeared much astonished, and asked if I would not first drink coffee; "but, it is true," she added, "you have no one to talk with."

She is not the first married woman, I thought, who makes covert attacks on her husband.

"Fru Atlung!" I said, "you have no reason to speak so to me."

"No, I have not. You must excuse me."

It was growing dusk; but unless I was greatly in error, she was almost ready to weep.

So I took my seat on the other side of the table. "I have a feeling, dear Fru Atlung, that you desire to talk to some one; but I am surely not the right person."

"And why not?" she asked.

She sat with both elbows on the table, looking into my face.

"Well, if for no other reason, at least because such a conversation needs to be entered into more than once, because there are so many things to consider, and I am going away again to-day."

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"But cannot you come again?"

"Do you wish it?"

She was silent a moment, then she said slowly: "As a rule, I have but one great wish at a time. And it was fully in keeping with the one I now have that *you* should come here."

"What is it, my dear lady?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you, unless you will promise me to come again."

"Well, then, I will promise you to do so."

She extended her hand across the table with the words: "Thank you."

I turned on my chair toward her, and took her hand.

"What is it, my dear lady?"

"No, not now," she replied; "but when you come again. You must help me—if you believe it to be right to do so."

"Of course."

"Because you, I know, think in many particulars as Atlung does. He will listen to *you*."

"Do you think so?"

"He will not listen to me, at all events."

"Did you ever make an effort to be heard?"

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"No, that would be the worst thing I could do. With Atlung everything must come as by chance."

"But, dear me! I noticed that on the whole you seemed to hold most blessed relations with each other."

"Yes, to be sure we do! We often amuse ourselves exceedingly well together."

I had a feeling that she did not wish me to look at her, and I had turned away, so that I sat with my side to the table as before. The twilight deepened about us.

"You remember us, I dare say, as we were in Dresden?"

"Yes."

"We were two young people who were playing with life; it had been very amusing to be engaged, but to be married must be still more diverting, and then to come home and keep house, oh! so immensely entertaining; but not equal to having children. Well, here I am now with a house which I am utterly powerless to manage, and two children which neither of us can educate; at least Atlung thinks so."

"But do not you try to take hold?"

"Of the house, do you mean?"

"Well, yes, of the house."

"Dear me! of what use would that be? I usually get a scolding when I try."

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"But you have plenty of help, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is just the misfortune."

I was about to ask what she meant by this when the dining-room door was noiselessly opened; Stina entered with the lamps. She passed in and out two or three times; but the large room was far from being lighted by the lamps she brought in. Meanwhile, conversation ceased.

When Stina was about to leave, Fru Atlung asked for the children. Stina informed her they were being searched for; they were not on the gard. The mother paid no further attention to this, and Stina left the room.

"Who is Stina?" I asked, as the door closed behind her.

"Oh, she is a very unhappy person. She had a drunken father who beat her, and afterwards she had a husband, a bank cashier, who also became a hard drinker and beat her. Now he is dead."

"Has she been here long?"

"Since before my first child was born."

"But this is sad company for you, my dear lady."

"Yes, she is not *very* enlivening."

"Then most surely she should be sent away."

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"That would be contrary to the traditions of this house. An older person must always take charge of the children, and this older person must live and die in the family. Stina is a very worthy woman."

Again the subject of our conversation came noiselessly into the room; this time with the coffee. There was upon the whole something ghost-like about this blue-green Carlo Dolci portrait flitting thus over the rugs in the large room, where she was searching for a shade for the lamp on the coffee table, as though it were not dark enough here before. The shade was, moreover, a perforated picture of St. Peter's at Rome.

Stina departed, and the lady of the house poured out the coffee.

"And so you men are going to take from us the hope in immortality, with all the rest?" she abruptly asked.

To what this "all the rest" referred, I was allowed to form my own conjectures. She handed me

a cup of coffee and continued,—

"When I was driving this morning to the other side of the park to visit the dying man, it occurred to me that the snow on the barren trees is, upon the whole, the most exquisite symbol that could be imagined of the hope of immortality spread over the earth; is it not so? So purely from above, and so merciful!"

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"Do you believe it falls from the skies, my dear lady?"

"It certainly falls down on the earth."

"That is true, but it comes also from the earth."

She appeared not to want to hear this, but continued,—

"You spoke a little while ago of dust. But this white, pure dust on the frozen boughs and on the gray earth is truly like the poetry of eternity; so it seems to me," and she placed a singing emphasis on the "me."

"Who is the author of this poetry, my dear lady?"

She turned on me her large eyes, now larger than ever, but this time not questioningly; no, there was certainly in her look.

"If there is no revelation from without, there is one from within; every human being who feels thus possesses it."

She had never been more beautiful. At this moment steps were heard in the front room. She turned her head in a listening attitude.

"It is Atlung back again!" said she, as she rose and rang for another cup.

She was right; it was Atlung, who as soon as he had removed his out-door wraps opened wide the door and came in. His attorney, Hartmann, had grown anxious and had come to meet him. Atlung had attended to the entire business with him on the highway.

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His wife's questioning eyes followed him as he sauntered across the floor. Either she did not like his having interrupted us, or she noticed that he was out of humor. As he took the coffee cup from her hand, he recounted to her his recent experience with the boys. He did not mention any of the words the little fellows had shouted out with such jubilant merriment; but he added enough to lead her to surmise what they were. And while he was drinking his coffee, he repeated to her that he had promised them a whipping; "but," said he, "something more than the rod is needed in this case."

As she stood when she handed him the cup, so she remained standing after he had finished his coffee and gone. Terror was depicted in both face and attitude. Her eyes followed him as he walked about the room; she was waiting to hear this something else which was more than the rod.

"Now I will tell you what it is, Amalie," came from across the room, "the boys must leave tomorrow at latest."

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She sank slowly down on the sofa, so slowly that I do not think she was aware that she was seating herself. She watched him intently. A more helpless, unhappy object I had never seen.

"You surely think enough of the boys, Amalie, to submit? You see now the result of my humoring you the last time."

But if he goes on thus he will kill her! Why does he not look at her?

Whether she noticed my sympathy or not, she suddenly turned her eyes, her hands, toward me, while her husband walked from us across the floor; there was a despairing entreaty in this glance, in this little movement. I comprehended at once what was her sole wish: this was the matter in which I was to help her.

She had sunk down on her hands, and she remained lying thus without stirring. I did not hear sounds of weeping; probably she was praying. He strode up and down the room; he saw her; but his step kept continually growing firmer. The articles he picked up and crushed in his hand, he flung each time farther and farther away from him, and with increased vehemence.

The dining-room door slowly opened. Stina appeared again, but this time she remained standing on the threshold, paler than usual. Atlung, who had just turned toward us, stood still and cried: "What is it, Stina?"

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She did not reply at once; she looked at the mistress of the house, who had raised her head and was staring at her, and who at last burst out: "What is it, Stina?"

"The boys," said Stina, and paused.

"The boys?" repeated both parents, Atlung standing motionless, his wife springing up.

"They are neither on the gard, nor at the housemen's places; we have searched everywhere, even through the manufactory."

"Where did you see them last?" asked Atlung, breathless.

"The milkmaid says she saw them running toward the park crying, when you promised to give them a whipping."

"The fish-pond!" escaped my lips before I had time to reflect, and the effect upon myself, and upon all the others, was the same as if something had been dashed to pieces in our midst.

"Stina!" shouted Atlung,—it was not a reproach, no, it was a cry of pain, the bitterest I have ever heard,—and out he rushed. His wife ran after him, calling him by name.

"Send for lanterns!" I cried to the people I saw behind Stina in the dining-room. I went out and found my things, and returning again, met Stina, who was moving round in a circle with clasped hands. [269]

"Come now," said I, "and show me the way!"

Without reply, perhaps without being conscious of what she was doing, she changed her march from round in a circle to forward, with hands still clasped, and praying aloud: "Father in heaven, for Christ's sake! Father in heaven, for Christ's sake!" in touching, vigorous tones; and thus she continued through the yard, past the houses, through the garden, and into the park.

It was not very cold; it was snowing. As one in a dream, I walked through the snow-mist, following this tall, dark spectre in front of me, with its trail of prayer, in and out among the lofty, snow-covered trees. I said to myself that two small boys might of course go to the fish-pond in the hope of finding God and the angels and new clothes; but to spring into a hole if there was one, when there were two of them together—impossible, unnatural, absurd! How in all the world had I come to think of or suggest such a thing? But all the sensible things one can say to one's self at such a moment are of no avail; the worst and most improbable suppositions keep gaining force in spite of them; and this "Father in heaven, for Christ's sake! Father in heaven, for Christ's sake!" which sougled about me, in tones of the utmost anguish, kept continually increasing my own anxiety. [270]

Even if the boys had not gone to the fish-pond, or if they had been there and had not dared jump into the water, they might have tumbled into some other place. The father of little Hans was to receive wings that afternoon; might not they, with their troubled hearts, be sitting under a tree somewhere waiting for wings to be given them? If such were the case, they would freeze to death. And I could see these two little frozen mortals, who dared not go home, the younger one crying, the elder one finally crying too. I positively seemed to hear them—"Hush!"

"What is that?" said Stina, and turned in sudden hope. "Do you hear them?"

We both stood still; but there was nothing to hear except my own panting when I could no longer hold my breath. Nor was there anything resembling two little human beings huddled together.

I told her what I had just been thinking about, and drawing near me she clasped her hands, and, in tones of suppressed anguish, whispered: "Pray with me! Oh, pray with me!" [271]

"What shall I pray for? That the boys may die, and go to heaven and become angels?"

She stared at me in alarm, then turned and walked on as before, but now without a word.

We followed a foot-path through the wood: it led to the fish-pond, as I remembered from the story about little Hans; but we had to go more than half the length of the park in order to reach the latter. Through a ravine flowed a brook, and here a dam had been made. It was large so that the fish-pond had a considerable circumference. We had to step up from the foot-path in order to reach the edge of the pond. Stina continued to walk in front of me, and when she had climbed the bank and could see the pond and the two parents standing on it, she kneeled down, praying and sobbing. Now I was sorry for her.

When I also stood upon the bank and saw the parents, I was deeply affected. At the same time I heard voices in the wood behind me. They came from the people with the lanterns. The flickering light of the four lanterns that, subdued by the falling snow, was shed over human beings, the snow itself, the lower trunks of the trees, and the shadows into which some individuals in the party and some of the trees and certain portions of the landscape occasionally fell, all became fixed forever in my memory with the words I at that moment heard from the pond: "There is no hole in the ice!" [272]

It was Atlung's voice, quivering with emotion. I turned and saw his wife on his neck. Stina had sprung up with an exclamation which ended in a long but hushed: "God be praised and thanked!"

But the two on the ice still clung together, with some difficulty I climbed down from the bank and crossed to where they stood; the wife still hung on Atlung's neck and he was bowed over her. I paused reverently at a little distance; they were whispering together. The light shed by the lanterns on the pond was the first thing that roused them.

"But what next? Where shall we seek now?" asked Atlung.

I drew nearer. I now repeated to the parents, although more cautiously, what I had already said to Stina, that perhaps the children were sitting somewhere under a tree, waiting in their distress of mind for compassionate angels, and in that case there would be danger of their being already [273]

so cold that they would be ill. Before I had finished speaking, Atlung had called up to those on the bank: "Had the boys their out-door things on when they were last seen?"

"No," replied two of the by-standers.

He inquired if they had their caps on; and here opinions differed. I insisted that they did have them on; some one else said No. Atlung himself could not remember. Finally some one declared that the elder boy had his cap on, but not the younger one.

"Ah, my poor little Storm!" wailed the mother.

Among the people on the edge of the pond there were some who wept so loud that they were heard below. I think there were about twenty people, side by side, about the lanterns.

Atlung shouted up to them: "We must search the whole park through; we will begin with the housemen's places." And he came toward the bank, climbed up and helped his wife up after him.

They were met by Stina. "My dear, dear lady!" she whispered, beseechingly; but neither of the parents paid any attention to her.

I stared into the ravine below us. To look down on snow-laden trees from above is like gazing on a petrified forest. [274]

"Dear Atlung! will not you call?" begged the wife.

He took a position far in advance of the rest; all became still. And then he called aloud through the wood, slowly and distinctly: "Anton and little Storm! Come home to papa and mamma! Papa is no longer angry!"

Was it the air thus set in motion, or did the last flake of snow needed to break an overlaid branch fall just then, or had some one come into contact with such a branch; suffice it to say, Atlung received for an answer the snow-fall from a large bough, partly at one side, partly in front of us. It gave a hollow crash, rousing the echoes of the wood, the bough swayed to and fro, and rose to its place, and snow was showered over us. But this swaying motion finally caused all the heavy branches to loose their burdens; crash followed crash, and snow enveloped us; before we knew what was coming the nearest tree had cast the burden from all its branches at once. The atmospheric pressure now became so great that two more, then five, six, ten, twenty trees freed themselves, with violent din, from their heavy loads, sending an echo through the wood and a mist as from mighty snow-drifts. This was followed by cluster after cluster of trees, some at our sides, some at a long distance off, some right in front of us; the movement first passed through two great arms, which gradually spread into manifold divisions; ere long the whole forest trembled. The thunder rolled far away from us, close by us, now at intervals, now all at once, and seemed interminable. Before us everything was surrounded by a white mist; this loud rumbling of thunder through the wood had at first appalled us; gradually as it passed farther on and grew in proportion it became so majestic that we forgot all else. [275]

The trees stood once more proudly erect, fresh and green; we ourselves looked like snow-men. All the lanterns were extinguished, we lighted them again, and we shook the snow from us. Then we heard in a moaning tone: "What if the little boys are lying under a snow-drift!"

It was the mother who spoke. Several hastened to say that it could not in any way harm them, that the worst possible result would be that they might be thrown down, perhaps stifled for a little while; but they would surely be able to work their way out again. There was one who said that unquestionably the children would scream as soon as they were free from the snow, and Atlung called out: "Hark!" We stood for more than a minute listening; but we heard nothing except a far-off echo from some solitary cluster of trees that had just been drawn into the vortex with the rest. [276]

But if the boys were in one of the remote recesses of the wood, their voices could scarcely reach us; on either side of us the edges of the ravine were higher than the banks of the pond where we stood.

"Yes, let us go search for them," said Atlung, deeply moved; as he spoke, he went close to the brink of the pond, turned toward the rest of us who were beginning to step down, and bade us pause. Then he cried: "Anton and little Storm! Come home again to papa and mamma! Papa is no longer angry!" It was heart-rending to hear him. No answer came. We waited a long time. No answer.

Despondently he returned, and came down on the path with the rest of us; his wife took his arm.

CHAPTER VI.

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WE reached the edge of the wood, and then our party divided, keeping at such a distance apart

that we could see one another and everything between us; we walked the whole length of the wood up and then took the next section down, but slowly; for all the snow from the trees was now spread over the old snow on the ground; in some places it was packed down so hard that it bore our weight, but in other places we sank in to our knees. When we assembled the next time, in order to disperse anew, I inquired if after all it were likely that two small boys would have the courage to remain in the wood after it had grown dark. But this suggestion met with opposition from all. The boys were accustomed to be busied in the wood the whole day long and in the evenings too; they had other boys who constructed snow-men for them, forts and snow-houses, in which they often sat with lights, after it was dark.

This naturally drew our thoughts to all these buildings, and the possibility of the boys having taken refuge in one or other of them. But no one knew where they were situated this year, as the snow had come so recently. Moreover, they were in the habit of building now in one place, now in another, and so nothing remained but to continue as before.

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It so happened that Stina walked next to me this time, and as we two were in the ravine, and this was winding in some places, we were brought close together, and had no locality to search. She was evidently in a changed frame of mind. I asked her why this was.

"Oh," said she, "God has so plainly spoken to me. We are going to find the boys! Now I know why all this has happened! Oh, I know so plainly!"

Her Madonna eyes glowed with a dreamy happiness; her pale, delicate face wore an expression of ecstasy.

"What is it, Stina?"

"You were so hard toward me before. But I forgive you. Dear Lord, did not I sin myself? Did not I doubt God? Did not I murmur against the decrees of God? Oh, His ways are marvelous! I see it so plainly—so plainly!"

"But what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Fru Atlung has for the last half year prayed God for only one single thing. Yes, it is her way to do so. She learned it of her father. Just for one single thing she has prayed, and we have helped her. It is that the boys may not be separated from her; Atlung has threatened to send them away. Had it not been for what has happened this evening he would surely have kept his word; but God has heard her prayer! Perhaps I too have been an instrument in his hands; I almost dare believe that I have. And the death of little Hans, yes, most certainly the death of little Hans! If those two sweet little souls are sitting and freezing somewhere, waiting for the angels, oh, the dear, dear boys, they surely have these with them! Do you doubt this? Ah, do not doubt! If the boys are made ill—and they most surely will be ill—it will be most fortunate for them! For when the father and mother sit together beside the sick-bed, oh, then the boys will never be sent away. Never, no never! Then Atlung will see that it would be the death of his wife. Oh, he sees it this evening. Yes, he unquestionably sees it. He has already made her a solemn promise; for the last time we met, she gave me a look of such heartfelt kindness, and that she did not do a little while ago. It was as though she had something to say to me—and what else could it possibly be in the midst of her anxiety than this? She has discerned God's ways, she too God's marvelous ways. She thanks and praises Him, as I do; yes, blessed be the name of God, for Jesus Christ's sake, through all eternity!"

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She spoke in a whisper, but decidedly, aye, vehemently; the last, or words of thanksgiving, on the contrary, with bowed head, clasped hands, and softly, as to her own soul.

We drifted apart, although now and then we drew near together again, when the ravine obliged us to do so, and all attempt at searching on our part ceased.

"There is one thing I need to have explained," I whispered to her. "If everything from the time of the sorrowful death of little Hans has happened in order that Atlung's boys may remain with their mother; then this great fall of snow we have recently seen and heard must be part of the whole plan. But I cannot see how?"

"That? Why that was simply a natural occurrence; a pure accident."

"Is there such a thing?"

"Yes," replied she; "and it often has its influence on the rest. To be sure, in this instance I cannot see how. It is a great mercy though, that I can see what I do. Why should I ask more?"

We peered about us; but we felt convinced that the boys were not in the ravine. What I had last said seemed to absorb Stina.

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"What did *you* think about the snow-fall?" asked she, softly, the next time we were thrown together.

"I will tell you. Shortly before we came out into the park, Fru Atlung had been saying to me that the hope of immortality descended from heaven on our lives, just as hushed, white, and soft as the snow on the naked earth"—

"Oh, how beautiful!" interposed Stina.

"And so I thought when the shock came, and the whole forest trembled, and the snow fell from

the trees with the sound of thunder,—now do not be angry,—that in the same way the hope of immortality had fallen from the mother of the boys, and you and all of us, in our great anxiety for the lives of the little fellows. We rushed about in sorrow and lamentation, and some of us in ill-concealed frenzy, lest the boys had received a call from the other life, or lest some occurrence here had led them to the brink of eternity."

"O my God, yes!"

"Now we have had this hope of immortality hanging over us for many thousand years, for it is older, much older than Christianity; and we have progressed no farther than this."

"Oh, you are right! Yes, you are a thousand times right! Think of it!" she exclaimed, and walked on in silent brooding. [282]

"You said before that I was hard toward you, and then I had done nothing but remind you of the belief in immortality you had taught the boys."

"Oh, that is true; forgive me! Oh, yes indeed!"

"For you know that you had taught them that it was far, far better to be with God than to be here; and that to have wings and be an angel was the highest glory a little child could attain; indeed, that the angels themselves came and carried away unhappy little children."

"Oh, I beg of you, no more!" she moaned, placing both hands on her ears. "Oh, how thoughtless I have been!" she added.

"Do not you believe all this yourself, then?"

"Yes, to be sure I believe it! There have been times in my life when such thoughts were my sole consolation. But you really confuse me altogether."

And then she told me in a most touching way that her head was no longer very strong; she had wept and suffered so much; but the hope of a better life after this had often been her one consolation.

Atlung's mournful call, with always the same words, was heard ever and anon, and just at this moment fell on our ears. With a start we were back again in the dreadful reality that the boys were not yet found, and that the longer the time that elapsed before they were found, the greater the certainty that they must pay the penalty of a dangerous illness. It continued to snow so that notwithstanding the moonlight we walked in a mist. [283]

Then a cry rang through forest and snow from another voice than Atlung's and one of quite a different character. I could not distinguish what was said; but it was followed by a fresh call from another, then again from a third, and this last time could be distinctly heard the words: "I hear them crying!" It was a woman's voice. I hastened forward, the rest ran in front of and behind me, all in the direction whence came the call. We had become weary of wading in the heavy snow; but now we sped onward as easily as though there were firm ground beneath our feet. The light from the lanterns skipping about among us and over our heads, shone in our eyes and dazzled us; no one spoke, our breathing alone was heard.

"Hush!" cried a young girl, suddenly halting, and the rest of us also stood still; for we heard the voices of the two little ones uplifted in that piteous wail of lamentation common to children who have been weeping in vain for long, long hours and to whom sympathy has finally come. [284]

"Good gracious!" exclaimed an elderly man,—he well knew the sound of such weeping. We perceived that the boys were no longer alone; we walked onward, but more calmly. We reached and passed the fish-pond, and came to a place a little beyond the ravine, where the trees were regular in their growth; for the spot was sheltered and hidden. The weeping, of course, became more distinct the nearer we approached, and at last we heard voices blended with it. They were those of the father and mother, who had been the first to gain the spot. When we had reached an opening where we could see between the trees into the snow, our gaze was met by two black objects against something extremely white; it was the father and mother, on their knees, each clinging to a boy; behind them was a snow fort, or rather a crushed snow house, in which, sure enough, the boys had sought refuge. When the lanterns were brought near, we saw how piteously benumbed with the cold the little fellows were: they were blue, their fingers stiff, they could not stand well on their feet; neither of them had on caps; these no doubt lay in the heap of snow, if the boys had had them with them at all. They replied to none of the tokens of endearment or questions of their parents; not once did they utter a word, they only wept and wept. We stood around them, Stina sobbing aloud. The weeping of the boys, and the lamentations, questions, and tokens of endearment of the parents, together with the accents of despair and joy, which alternately blended therewith, were very affecting. [285]

Atlung rose and took up one child; it was the elder one. His wife rose also, and gathered up the other in her arms. Several offered to carry the boy for her; but she made no reply, only walked on with him, consoling him, moaning over him, without a moment's pause between the words, until she made a misstep and plunging forward fell prostrate on the ground over her boy. She would not have help, but scrambled up with the boy still in her arms, walked on, and fell again.

Then she cast a look up to heaven, as though she would ask how this could happen, how it could be that this was possible!

Whenever I now recall her in her faith and in her helplessness, I remember her thus, with the boy in front of her stretched out in the snow, and she bending over him on her knees, tears streaming from the eyes which were uplifted with a questioning gaze toward heaven.

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Some one picked up the boy, and Stina helped his mother. But when the little fellow found himself in the arms of another, he began to cry: "Mamma, mamma!" and stretched forth his benumbed hands toward her. She wanted to go to him at once and take him again in her arms, but he who carried the child hastened onward, pretending not to hear her, although she begged most humbly at last. They had scarcely come down on the footpath before she hastened forward and stopped the man; then with many loving words she took her boy again in her arms. Atlung was no longer in sight.

I allowed them all to go on in advance of me.

But when I saw them a short distance from me, enveloped in snow between the trees and heard the weeping and the soothing words, I drifted back into my old thoughts.

These two poor little boys had accepted literally the words of the grown people—to the utter dismay of the latter! If we were right in our conjectures (for the boys themselves had not yet told us anything and would not be likely to tell anything until after the illness they must unquestionably pass through); but *if* we were right in our conjectures, then these two little ones had sought a reality far greater than ours.

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They had believed in beings more loving than those about us, in a life warmer and richer than our own; because of this belief they had braved the cold, although amid tears and terror, waiting resolutely for the miracle. When the thunder rolled over them, they had doubtless tremblingly expected the change—and were only buried.

How many had there been before them with the same experience?

CHAPTER VII.

I LEFT Skogstad at once, and without taking leave of the parents, who were with their children. I got a horse to the next station, and was soon slowly driving along the chaussée. The snow which had fallen made the road heavier than when I had come that way. A few atoms still swept about through the air but the fall was lightening more and more, so that the moonlight gradually gained in force. It fell on the snow-clad forest, which still stood unchanged, with fantastic power; for although the details were lost the contrasts were striking.

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I was weary, and the mood I was in harmonized with my fatigue. In the still subdued moonlight the forest looked like a bowed-down, conquered people; its burden was greater than it could bear. Nevertheless, it stood there patiently, tree after tree, without end, bowed to the ground. It was like a people from the far-distant past to the present day, a people buried in dust. Yonder "heaven-fallen, merciful snow"—

And just as all symbols, even those from the times of old, which mythology dimly reveals to us, became fixed in the imagination, and gradually worked their way out to independence, so it was now with mine. I saw the past generations enveloped in a cloud of dust, in which they could not recognize one another, and that was why they fought against one another, slaying one another by the millions. Dust was being continually strewed over them. But I saw that it was the same with all those who were wounded, or who must die. I saw in the midst of these poor sufferers many kind, refined souls, who in thus strewing dust were rendering the highest, most beautiful service they knew, like those priestly physicians of Egypt, who offered to the sick and dying magic formulas as the most effectual preventive of death, and placed on the wounds a medicine, the greater part of which was composed of mystic symbols.

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And I saw *all* the relations of life, even the soundest, strewed over with a coating of dust, and the attempt at deliverance to be the world's most complete revolution, which would wholly shatter these relations themselves.

And as I grew more and more weary and these fancies left me, but what I had recently experienced kept rising uppermost in my mind, then I plainly heard weeping in among the snow-flakes that were no longer falling; it was the boys I heard. They wept so sorely, they lamented so bitterly, while we tenderly bore them from dust to more dust.

I passed through the forest and drove along its margin up to the station. When I had nearly reached this I cast one more look downward over the tree-tops, which were radiant in the moonlight. The forest was magnificent in its snowy splendor.

The majesty of the view struck me now, and the symbol presented itself differently.

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A dream hovering over all people, originating infinitely long before all history, continually assuming new forms, each of which denoted the downfall of an earlier one, and always in such a

manner that the most recent form lay more lightly over the reality than those just preceding it, concealing less of it, affording freer breathing-space—until the last remnants should evaporate in the air. When shall *that* be?

The infinite will always remain, the incomprehensible with it; but it will no longer stifle life. It will fill it with reverence; but not with dust.

I sat down in the sledge once more, and the monotonous jingle of the bells caused drowsiness to overcome me. And then the weeping of the boys began to ring in my ears together with the bells. And weary as I was I could not help thinking about what further must have happened to the two little fellows, and how it must appear at first in the sick-room at Skogstad, and in the surroundings of those I had just left.

How different was the scene I imagined from what actually occurred!

I could not but recall it when, two months later, I drove over the same road with Atlung and he related to me what had taken place. I had then been abroad and he met me in town. [291]

And when I now repeat this, it is not in his words, for I should be totally unable to reproduce them; but the substance of his story is what follows.

The boys were attacked with fever, and this passed into inflammation of the lungs. From the outset every one saw that the illness must take a serious turn; but the mother was so sure that all had come to pass solely in order that she might keep her boys, that she inspired the rest of the household with her faith.

However serious the illness might be, it would only be the precursor of happiness and peace. While yet in the wood she had obtained a solemn promise from her husband that their children should not be sent away; but that a tutor should be engaged for them who would have them continually under his charge. And by the sick-bed, when through the long nights and silent days they met there, Atlung repeated this promise as often as his wife wished. She had never been more beautiful, he had never loved her more devotedly; she was in one continual state of ecstasy. She confided to Atlung that from the first time, about half a year before, he had declared that the boys must go away, she had prayed the Lord to prevent it, prayed incessantly, and in all this time had prayed for nothing else. She knew that a prayer offered in the name of Jesus must be granted. She had prayed in this way several times before in regard to circumstances which seemed to herself to be brought into her life under the guidance of faith, brought into it in the most natural way. This time she had called her father to her aid and finally Stina; both of them had promised to pray only for this one thing. It did not seem to occur to her for a moment that there was another way of gaining her point, for instance, as far as lay within her power, and as far as her faith permitted it, to study Atlung's ideas on education, and to endeavor to persuade him to unite with her in an attempt, that it might be proved whether they were equal to the task. She started from the standpoint that she was utterly incompetent; what, indeed, was she able to do? But God could do what He would. This was his own cause, and that to a far higher degree than any other matter concerning which he had granted her prayers, and so she was sure He would hear her. Every occurrence, every individual who came to the gard, was sent; in one way or another everything must be a link in the chain of events, which was to lead Atlung to other thoughts. When she told Atlung this, in her innocence and her faith, he felt that, at all events, there was no human power which could resist her. He was so completely borne along in the current of her fancies that he not only became convinced that the boys would recover, but he even failed to perceive how ill she was. [292]

The long stay in the park, without any out-door wraps and with wet feet, the overstrained mental condition and long night vigils, the pursuit of one fixed idea, without any regard to its effect on herself, being so wholly absorbed in it that she forgot to eat, indeed, no longer felt the need of food—wholly robbed her of strength at last. But the first symptoms of illness were closely united with her restless, ecstatic condition; neither she herself, nor the rest of the household paid any heed to them. When finally she was obliged to go to bed, there still hovered over her such joy, awe, and peace, that the others had no time for anxiety. Her feverish fancies blended in such a way with her life, her wishes, her faith, that it was often not well to separate them. They all understood that she was ill and that she was often delirious, but not that she was in any danger. The physician was one of those who rarely express an opinion; but they all thought that had there been danger he would have spoken. Stina, who had undertaken the supervision of the sick-room, was absorbed in her own fancies and hope, and explained away everything when Atlung showed any uneasiness. [293]

Then one noon he came home from the factories, and after warming himself, went up-stairs to the large chamber where the invalids all lay, for the mother wanted to be where the boys were. Her bed was so placed that she could see them both. Atlung softly entered the room. It was airy and pleasant there, and deep peace reigned. No one besides the invalids, as far as he could see at first, was in the room; but he afterwards discovered that the sick-nurse was there asleep in a large arm-chair, which she had drawn to the corner nearest the stove. He did not wake her; he stood a little while bending over each of the boys, who were either sleeping or lying in a stupor, and thence he stepped very softly to his dear wife's bed, rejoicing in the thought that she too was now peaceful, perhaps sleeping; for he did not hear her babble which usually greeted him. A screen had been placed between the bed and the window, so he could not see distinctly until he came close to her. She lay with wide-open eyes; but tear after tear trickled down from them. [294]

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"What is it?" he whispered, startled. In her changed mood he saw at once how worn, how frightfully worn, she was. Why, in all the world, had he not seen this before. Or had he observed it, yet been so far governed by her security that he had not paid any attention to it. For a moment it seemed as if he would swoon away, and only the fear that he might fall across her bed gave him strength to keep up.

As soon as he could he whispered anew, "What is it, Amalie?"

"I see by your looks that you know it yourself," she whispered slowly, in reply; her lips quivered, the tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks: but otherwise she lay quite still. Her hands—oh, how thin they were; the ring was much too large on her finger, and this he remembered having noticed before; but why had he not reflected on what it meant?

Her hands lay stretched out on either side of the body which seemed to him so slender beneath the coverlet and sheet. The lace about her wrists was unrumpled, as though she had not stirred since she was dressed for the morning, and that must now be several hours since.

"Why, Amalie," he burst out, and knelt down at her bedside.

"It was not thus I meant it," replied she, but in so soft a whisper that under other circumstances he could not have heard it.

"What do you mean by 'thus,' Amalie? Oh, try once more to answer me! Amalie!"

He saw that she wanted to reply, but either could not, or else had thought better of it. Tears filled her eyes and trickled down her cheeks, filled her eyes and were shed again, her lips quivered, but as noiselessly as this occurred, just so still she lay. Finally she raised her large eyes to his face. He bowed closer to her to catch the words: "I would not take them from—you," spoken in a whisper as before; the word "you" was uttered by itself, and in the same low tone as the rest, encompassed with a tenderness and a mournfulness which nothing on earth could exceed in strength.

He dared not question further, although he failed to understand his wife. He only comprehended that something had occurred that same forenoon which had turned the current of life to that of death. She lay there paralyzed. Her immobility was that of terror; something extraordinary had weighed her down to this speechless silence, had crushed her. But he also comprehended that behind this noiseless immobility there was an agitation so great that her heart was ready to burst; he knew that there was danger, that his presence increased the danger, that there must be help sought; in other words, he comprehended that if he did not go away himself, his face as it must now look was enough to kill her. He never knew how he got away. He can remember that he was on a stairway, for he recollects seeing a picture that his wife herself must have hung up, it was one representing St. Christopher carrying the child Jesus over a brook. He found himself lying on the sofa in the large sitting-room, with something wet on his brow, and a couple of people at his side, of whom one was Stina. He struggled for a long time as with a bad dream. At the sight of Stina his terror returned. "Stina, how is it with Amalie?" The answer was that she was in a raging fever.

"But what happened this forenoon while I was absent?"

Stina knew nothing. She did not even understand his question. She was not the one who had attended Fru Atlung in the forenoon; she had watched in the night, and then the patient's fever fancies were happy ones, as they had again become. Had the doctor been with her in the forenoon? No, he was expected now. He had said yesterday that to-day he would not come until later than usual. This indicated a feeling of security on the doctor's part.

Had Fru Atlung spoken with any one else? If so it must be the sick-nurse. "Bring her here!" Stina left the room. Atlung also sent away the others who had assembled around him, he needed to collect his thoughts. He sat up, with his head between his hands, and before he knew it he was weeping aloud. He heard his own sobs resounding through the large room and he shuddered. He felt sure; oh, he felt but too sure, that he would sit here alone and hear this wail of misery for weeks. And in this sense of boundless bereavement, her image stood forth distinctly: she came from her bed in her white garment and told him word for word what she had meant. Her prayer to God had been to be allowed to keep her boys, and now this had been granted in a terrible way for she was to have them with her in death. It was this which had paralyzed her. And the beloved one repeated: "I did not mean it thus, I would not take them from—you."

But how had this idea suddenly occurred to her? *Why* was her security transformed into something so terrible?

The sick-nurse knew nothing. Toward morning the dear lady had fallen into a slumber, and this had gradually become more and more calm. When she awoke rather late in the morning, she lay still a little while before she was waited on. She was excessively weak; the housekeeper helped care for her. Not a word was said to her about her condition, not a single word. She had not spoken herself, except once; it was after she had had a little broth, then she said: "Oh, no, never mind!" She lay back and closed her eyes. Her attendants urged her to take some more; but she made no reply. They stood a little and waited; then they left her in peace.

As the evening wore on, the fever increased; by the doctor's advice she was carried into the next room. She understood this to mean that she was being borne into Paradise, and while they were moving her, she sang in a somewhat hoarse voice. She talked, too, now, without cessation;

but with the exception of that hymn about Paradise there was nothing in her words which indicated that she remembered anything that had occupied her thoughts in her moments of consciousness. All was now happiness and laughter once more. Toward morning she slept; but she woke very soon, and at once the unspeakable pain she had had before came over her, but at the same time came also the death-struggle. Amid this she became aware that the beds of the boys were not near hers. She looked at Atlung and opened her hand, as if she would clasp his. He understood that she thought the boys had gone on before and wanted to console him. With this cold little hand in his, and with its gentle pressure through the struggle with the last message from this receding life, he sat until the end came.

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But then, too, he gave way wholly to his boundless grief. The responsibility he felt for not having attempted to draw her into his own vigorous reading and thought; for having left her to live a weak dream-life; to bear the burden of the housekeeping and the bringing up of the children, but not in community of spirit and will, partly out of consideration for her, partly from a careless desire to leave her as she was when he took her; for having amused himself with her when it struck his fancy to do so, but not having made an effort to work in the same direction with her,—this was what tormented his mind and could find no consolation, no answer, no forgiveness.

Not until the following night when he was wandering about out of doors, beneath a bright starlit sky, came the first soothing thoughts. Would she under any circumstances have forsaken the ideas of her childhood to follow his? Were not they an inheritance, so deeply rooted in her nature that an attempt to alter them would only have made her unhappy? This he had always believed, and it was this which ultimately determined him to live *his* life while she lived hers. The image of his beautiful darling hovered about him, and the two boys always accompanied her. Whether it was because of his own weariness, or whether his self-reproaches had exhausted themselves and let things speak their own natural language—his guilt toward her and toward them was shifted slightly and spread over many other matters, which were painful enough; but not as these were.

[301]

What these matters were, he did not tell me; but he looked ten years older than before.

The doctor sought an interview with him the next day, and said that he felt obliged to tell him that if he had not pronounced his wife's condition dangerous it was because he had felt sure that she would recover. Her own happy frame of mind would help her, he thought. But something most have happened that forenoon.

[302]

Atlung made no reply. The doctor then added that the boys were past all danger; the elder one, indeed, had never been in any.

Atlung had not yet for a moment separated mother and boys in his thoughts. During their illness he felt with her that they must live; for the last twenty-four hours he had been convinced that they must follow her in death. He could not think of the mother without them.

And now that he must separate them, the first feeling was—not one of joy: no, it was dismay that even in this matter the dear one had been disappointed! It seemed as though she were living and could see that it was all a mistake, and that this last mistake had needlessly killed her.

The two little boys, clad in mourning, were the first objects we met on the gard. They looked pale and frightened. They did not come to meet us, nor did they return their father's caress.

In the passage Stina met us; she too looked worn. I expressed my honest sympathy for her. She answered calmly that God's ways were inscrutable. He alone knew what was for our good.

Atlung took me with him to the family burial-place, a little stone chapel in a grove near the river. On the way there, he told me that every time he tried to talk confidentially with the boys and endeavor to be both father and mother to them, his loss rushed over him so overwhelmingly that he was forced to stop. He would learn with time to do his duty.

[303]

The sepulchral chamber was a friendly little chapel, in which the coffins stood on the floor. The door, however, was not an ordinary door, but an iron grating which now stood open; for there was work going on in the chapel. We removed our hats, and walked forward to her little coffin. We did not exchange a word. Not until after we had left it and were looking at the other coffins and their inscriptions, did Atlung inform me that his wife's coffin was to be placed in one of stone. I remarked that in this way we would eventually have more of our ancestors preserved than would be good for us. "But there is reverence in it," he replied, as we walked out.

There was warmth in the atmosphere. Over the bluish snow, the forest rose green or dark gray and the fjord was defiantly fresh. Spring was in the air, although we were still in the midst of winter.



Transcriber's Note:

The [Contents](#) did not appear in the original publication. Punctuation has been standardised. Spelling and hyphenation have been retained as they appear in the original except as follows:

Page 58

a piano in the box," though Magnhild *changed to* a piano in the box," [thought](#) Magnhild

Page 78 and now her embarrassment increased *changed to*

and now her [embarrassment](#) increased

Page 166 Ronnaug wished to copy the verses *changed to*

[Rønnaug](#) wished to copy the verses

Page 249 But she inisted *changed to*

But she [insisted](#)

Page 227 chaussé running along the fjord *changed to*

[chaussée](#) running along the fjord

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAGNHILD; DUST ***

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