

A photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in a dark, starry sky. The aurora appears as vibrant green, flowing curtains of light. In the bottom right corner, a rugged, rocky mountain peak is visible, partially illuminated by the aurora's glow. The overall scene is serene and majestic.

***EDNA
LYALL***

***A HARDY
NORSEMAN***

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A Hardy Norseman

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CHAPTER I.

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“You say your things are all ready, Cecil? Then I’ll just go below and do up my Gladstone, and put it in your cabin. We shall be at Bergen before long, they say.”

The speaker was a young Englishman of three-or-four-and-twenty, and the sister addressed by him was still in the first flush of girlhood, having but a few days before celebrated her nineteenth birthday.

“Let me see to your bag, Roy,” she exclaimed. “It is a shame that you should miss this lovely bit of the fjord, and I shall do it in half the time.”

“The conceit of women!” he exclaimed, with a smile in which brotherly love and the spirit of teasing were about equally blended. “No, no, Cis, I’m not going to let you spoil me. I shall be up again in ten minutes. Have you not made any friends here? Is there no one on deck you can talk to?”

“I don’t want to talk,” said Cecil. “Truth to tell, I am longing to get away from all these English people. Very unsociable of me, isn’t it?”

Roy Boniface turned away with a smile, understanding her feeling well enough, and Cecil, with her back to the chattering tourist throng, let her eyes roam over the shining waters of the fjord to the craggy mountains on the further shore, whose ever-varying forms had been delighting her since the early morning.

She herself made a fair picture, though her beauty was not of the order which quickly draws attention. There was nothing very striking in her regular features, fair

complexion, and light-brown hair; to a casual observer she would have seemed merely an average English girl, gentle, well-mannered, and nice-looking. It was only to those who took pains to study her that her true nature was revealed; only at times that her quiet gray eyes would flash into sudden beauty with the pleasure of meeting with some rare and unexpected sympathy; only in some special need that the force of her naturally retiring nature made itself felt as a great influence.

Cecil had passed a year of emancipated girlhood, she had for a whole year been her own mistress, had had time and money at her disposal and no special duties to take the place of her school-work. It was the time she had been looking forward to all her life, the blissful time of grown-up freedom, and now that it had come it had proved a disappointing illusion. Whether the fault was in herself or in her circumstances she did not know; but like so many girls of her age she was looking out on life with puzzled eyes, hardly knowing what it was that had gone amiss, yet conscious of a great want, of a great unrest, of a vague dissatisfaction which would not be reasoned down.

“Cecil is looking poorly,” had been the home verdict; and the mother, not fully understanding the cause, but with a true instinct as to the remedy, had suggested that the brother and sister should spend a month abroad, grieving to lose Cecil from the usual family visit to the seaside, but perceiving with a mother’s wisdom and unselfishness that it was time, as she expressed it, for her young one to try its wings.

So the big steamer plied its way up the fjord bearing Cecil Boniface and her small troubles and perplexities to healthy old Norway, to gain there fresh physical strength, and fresh insights into that puzzling thing called life; to make friendships, spite of her avowed unsociableness, to learn something more of the beauty of beauty, the joy of joy, and the pain of pain.

She was no student of human nature; at present with girlish impatience she turned away from the tourists, frankly avowing her conviction that they were a bore. She was willing to let her fancy roam to the fortunes of some imaginary Rolf and Erica living, perhaps, in some one or other of the solitary red-roofed cottages to be seen now and then on the mountain-side; but the average English life displayed on the deck did not in the least awaken her sympathies, she merely classified the passengers into rough groups and dismissed them from her mind. There was the photographic group, fraternizing over the cameras set up all in a little encampment at the forecastle end. There was the clerical group, which had for its center no fewer than five gaitered bishops. There was the sporting group, distinguished by light-brown checked suits, and comfortable traveling-caps. There was the usual sprinkling of pale, weary, overworked men and women come for a much-needed rest. And there was the flirting group—a notably small one, however, for Norwegian traveling is rough work and is ill-suited to this genus.

“Look, here, Blanche,” exclaimed a gray-bearded Englishman, approaching a pretty little brunette who had a most sweet and winsome expression, and who was standing

so near to the camp-stool on which Cecil had ensconced herself that the conversation was quite audible to her. "Just see if you can't make out this writing; your eyes are better than mine. It is from Herr Falck, the Norwegian agent for our firm. I dare say your father told you about him."

"Yes, papa said he was one of the leading merchants out here and would advise us what to see, and where to go."

"Quite so. This letter reached me just as I was leaving home, and is to say that Herr Falck has taken rooms for us at some hotel. I can read it all well enough except the names, but the fellow makes such outrageous flourishes. What do you make of this sentence, beginning with 'My son Frithiof'?"

"Uncle! uncle! what shocking pronunciation! You must not put in an English 'th.' Did you never hear of the Frithiof Saga? You must say it quickly like this—Freet-Yoff."

"A most romantic name," said Mr. Morgan. "Now I see why you have been so industrious over your Norwegian lessons. You mean to carry on a desperate flirtation with Herr Frithiof. Oh! that is quite clear—I shall be on the lookout!"

Blanche laughed, not at all resenting the remark, though she bent her pretty face over the letter, and pretended to have great difficulty in reading Herr Falck's very excellent English.

"Do you want to hear this sentence?" she said, "because if you do I'll read it."

"My son Frithiof will do himself the honor to await your arrival at Bergen on the landing-quay, and will drive you to Holdt's Hotel, where we have procured the rooms you

desired. My daughter Sigrid (See-gree) is eager to make the acquaintance of your daughter and your niece, and if you will all dine with us at two o'clock on Friday at my villa in Kalvedalen we shall esteem it a great pleasure.'"

"Two-o'clock dinner!" exclaimed Florence Morgan, for the first time joining in the general conversation. "What an unheard-of hour!"

"Oh! everything is primitive simplicity out here," said Mr. Morgan. "You needn't expect London fashions."

"I suppose Frithiof Falck will be a sort of young Viking, large-boned and dignified, with a kind of good-natured fierceness about him," said Blanche, folding the letter.

"No, no," said Florence, "he'll be a shy, stupid country bumpkin, afraid of airing his bad English, and you will step valiantly into the breach with your fluent Norwegian, and your kindness will win his heart. Then presently he will come up in his artless and primitive way with a *Vaer saa god* (if you please) and will take your hand. You will reply *Mange tak* (many thanks), and we shall all joyfully dance at your wedding."

There was general laughter, and some trifling bets were made upon the vexed question of Frithiof Falck's appearance.

"Well," said Mr. Morgan, "it's all very well to laugh now, but I hope you'll be civil to the Falcks when we really meet. And as to you, Cyril," he continued, turning to his nephew, a limp-looking young man of one-and-twenty, "get all the information you can out of young Falck, but on no account allow him to know that your father is seriously thinking of setting you at the head of the proposed branch at

Stavanger. When that does come about, of course Herr Falck will lose our custom, and no doubt it will be a blow to him; so mind you don't breathe a word about it, nor you either, girls. We don't want to spoil our holiday with business matters, and besides, one should always consider other people's feelings."

Cecil set her teeth and the color rose to her cheeks; she moved away to the other side of the deck that she might not hear any more.

"What hateful people! they don't care a bit for the kindness and hospitality of these Norwegians. They only mean just to use them as a convenience." Then as her brother rejoined her she exclaimed, "Roy, who are those vulgar people over on the other side?"

"With two pretty girls in blue ulsters? I think the name is Morgan, rich city people. The old man's not bad, but the young one's a born snob. What do you think I heard him say as he was writing his name in the book and caught sight of ours. 'Why, Robert Boniface—that must be the music-shop in Regent Street. Norway will soon be spoiled if all the cads take to coming over.' And there was I within two yards of him."

"Oh, Roy! he couldn't have known or he would never have said it."

"Oh, yes, he knew it well enough. It was meant for a snub, richly deserved by the presuming tradesman who dared to come to Norway for his holiday instead of eating shrimps at Margate, as such cattle should, you know!" and Roy laughed good-humoredly. Snubs had a way of gliding off him like water off a duck's back.

“I should have hated it,” said Cecil. “What did you do?”

“Nothing; studied Baedeker with an imperturbable face, and reflected sapiently with William of Wykeham that neither birth nor calling but ‘manners makyth man.’ But look! this must be Bergen. What a glorious view! If only you had time to sketch it just from here!”

Cecil, after one quick exclamation of delight, was quite silent, for indeed few people can see unmoved that exquisite view which is unfolded before them as they round the fjord and catch the first glimpse of the most beautiful town in Norway. Had she been alone she would have allowed the tears of happiness to come into her eyes, but being on a crowded steamer she fought down her emotion and watched in a sort of dream of delight the picturesque wooden houses, the red-tiled roofs, the quaint towers and spires, the clear still fjord, with its forest of masts and rigging, and the mountains rising steep and sheer, encircling Bergen like so many hoary old giants who had vowed to protect the town.

Meanwhile, the deck resounded with those comments which are so very irritating to most lovers of scenery; one long-haired æsthete gave vent to a fresh adjective of admiration about once a minute, till Roy and Cecil were forced to flee from him and to take refuge among the sporting fraternity, who occasionally admitted frankly that it was “a fine view,” but who obtruded their personality far less upon their companions.

“Oh, Roy, how we shall enjoy it all!” said Cecil, as they drew near to the crowded landing-quay.

"I think we shall fit in, Cis," he said, smiling. "Thank Heaven, you don't take your pleasure after the manner of that fellow. If I were his traveling companion I should throttle him in a week."

"Or suggest a muzzle," said Cecil, laughing; "that would save both his neck and your feelings."

"Let me have your key," he said, as they approached the wooden pier; "the custom-house people will be coming on board, and I will try to get our things looked over quickly. Wait here and then I shall not miss you."

He hastened away and Cecil scanned with curious eyes the faces of the little crowd gathered on the landing-quay, till her attention was arrested by a young Norwegian in a light-gray suit who stood laughing and talking to an acquaintance on the wooden wharf. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with something unusually erect and energetic in his bearing; his features were of the pure Greek type not unfrequently to be met with in Norway; while his northern birth was attested by a fair skin and light hair and mustache, as well as by a pair of honest, well-opened blue eyes which looked out on the world with a boyish content and happiness.

"I believe that is Frithiof Falck," thought Cecil. And the next moment her idea was confirmed, for as the connecting gangway was raised from the quay, one of the steamer officials greeted him by name, and the young Norwegian, replying in very good English, stepped on board and began looking about as if in search of some one. Involuntarily Cecil's eyes followed him; she had a strange feeling that in some way she knew him, knew him far better than the

people he had come to meet. He, too, seemed affected in the same way, for he came straight up to her, and, raising his hat and bowing, said, with frank courtesy:

“Pardon me, but am I speaking to Miss Morgan?”

“I think the Miss Morgans are at the other side of the gangway; I saw them a minute ago,” she said, coloring a little.

“A thousand pardons for my mistake,” said Frithiof Falck. “I came to meet this English family, you understand, but I have never seen them.”

“There is Miss Morgan,” exclaimed Cecil; “that lady in a blue ulster; and there is her uncle just joining her.”

“Many thanks for your kind help,” said Frithiof, and with a second bow, and a smile from his frank eyes, he passed on and approached Mr. Morgan.

“Welcome to Norway, sir,” he exclaimed, greeting the traveler with the easy, courteous manner peculiar to Norwegians. “I hope you have made a good voyage.”

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Falck?” said the Englishman, scanning him from head to foot as he shook hands, and speaking very loud, as if the foreigner were deaf. “Very good of you to meet us, I’m sure. My niece, Miss Blanche Morgan.”

Frithiof bowed, and his heart began to beat fast as a pair of most lovely dark-gray eyes gave him such a glance as he had never before received.

“My sister is much looking forward to the pleasure of making your acquaintance,” he said.

“Ah!” exclaimed Blanche, “how beautifully you speak English! And how you will laugh at me when I tell you that I

have been learning Norwegian for fear there should be dead silence between us."

"Indeed, there is nothing which pleases us so much as that you should learn our tongue," he said, smiling. "My English is just now in its zenith, for I passed the winter with an English clergyman at Hanover for the sake of improving it."

"But why not have come to England?" said Blanche.

"Well, I had before that been with a German family at Hanover to perfect myself in German, and I liked the place well, and this Englishman was very pleasant, so I thought if I stayed there it would be 'to kill two flies with one dash,' as we say in Norway. When I come to England that will be for a holiday, for nothing at all but pleasure."

"Let me introduce my nephew," said Mr. Morgan, as Cyril strolled up. "And this is my daughter. How now, Florence, have you found your boxes?"

"Allow me," said Frithiof; "if you will tell me what to look for I will see that the hotel porter takes it all."

There was a general adjournment to the region of pushing and confusion and luggage, and before long Frithiof had taken the travelers to his father's carriage, and they were driving through the long, picturesque Strand-gaden. Very few vehicles passed through this main street, but throngs of pedestrians walked leisurely along or stood in groups talking and laughing, the women chiefly wearing full skirts of dark-blue serge, short jackets to match, and little round blue serge hoods surmounting their clean white caps; the men also in dark-blue with broad felt hats.

To English visitors there is an indescribable charm in the primitive simplicity, the easy informality of the place: and Frithiof was well content with the delighted exclamations of the new-comers.

“What charming ponies!” cried Blanche. “Look how oddly their manes are cut—short manes and long tails! How funny! we do just the opposite. And they all seem cream colored.”

“This side, Blanche, quick! A lot of peasants in sabots! and oh! just look at those lovely red gables!”

“How nice the people look, too, so different to people in an English street. What makes you all so happy over here?”

“Why, what should make us unhappy?” said Frithiof. “We love our country and our town, we are the freest people in the world, and life is a great pleasure in itself, don’t you think? But away in the mountains our people are much more grave. Life is too lonely there. Here in Bergen it is perfection.”

Cyril Morgan regarded the speaker with a pitying eye, and perhaps would have enlightened his absurd ignorance and discoursed of Pall Mall and Piccadilly, had not they just then arrived at Holdt’s Hotel. Frithiof merely waited to see that they approved of their rooms, gave them the necessary information as to bankers and lionizing, received Mr. Morgan’s assurance that the whole party would dine at Herr Falck’s the next day, and then, having previously dismissed the carriage, set out at a brisker pace than usual on his walk home.

Blanche Morgan’s surprise at the happy-looking people somehow amused him. Was it then an out-of-the-way thing

for people to enjoy life? For his own part mere existence satisfied him. But then he was as yet quite unacquainted with trouble. The death of his mother when he was only eleven years old had been at the time a great grief, but it had in no way clouded his after-life, he had been scarcely old enough to realize the greatness of his loss. Its effect had been to make him cling more closely to those who were left to him—to his father, to his twin-sister Sigrid, and to the little baby Swanhild (Svarnheel), whose birth had cost so much. The home life was an extremely happy one to look back on, and now that his year of absence was over and his education finished it seemed to him that all was exactly as he would have it. Faintly in the distance he looked forward to further success and happiness; being a fervent patriot he hoped some day to be a king's minister—the summit of a Norwegian's ambition; and being human he had visions of an ideal wife and an ideal home of his own. But the political career could very well wait, and the wife too for the matter of that. And yet, as he walked rapidly along Kong Oscars Gade, through the Stadsport, and past the picturesque cemeteries which lie on either side of the road, he saw nothing at all but a vision of the beautiful dark gray eyes which had glanced up at him so often that afternoon, and in his mind there echoed the words of one of Bjornson's poems:

"To-day is just a day to my mind,
All sunny before and sunny behind,
Over the heather."

But the ending of the poem he had quite forgotten.

CHAPTER II.

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Herr Falck lived in one of the pretty, unpretentious houses in Kalvedalen which are chiefly owned by the rich merchants of Bergen. The house stood on the right-hand side of the road, surrounded by a pretty little garden; it was painted a light-brown color, and, like most Bergen houses, it was built of wood. In the windows one could see flowers, and beyond them white muslin curtains, for æstheticism had not yet penetrated to Norway. The dark-tiled roof was outlined against a wooded hill rising immediately behind, with here and there gray rocks peeping through the summer green of the trees, while in front the chief windows looked on to a pretty terrace with carefully kept flower-beds, then down the wooded hill-side to the lake below—the Lungegaardsvand with purple and gray heights on the further shore, and on one side a break in the chain of mountains and a lovely stretch of open country. To the extreme left was the giant Ulriken, sometimes shining and glistening, sometimes frowning and dark, but always beautiful; while to the right you caught a glimpse of Bergen with its quaint cathedral tower, and away in the distance the fjord like a shining silver band in the sun.

As Frithiof walked along the grassy terrace he could hear sounds of music floating from the house; some one was playing a most inspiring waltz, and as soon as he had reached the open French window of his father's study a quaint pair of dancers became visible. A slim little girl of ten years old, with very short petticoats, and very long golden

hair braided into a pigtail, held by the front paws a fine Esquimaux dog, who seemed quite to enter into the fun and danced and capered most cleverly, obediently keeping his long pointed nose over his partner's shoulder. The effect was so comical that Frithiof stood laughingly by to watch the performance for fully half a minute, then, unable to resist his own desire to dance, he unceremoniously called Lillo the dog away and whirled off little Swanhild in the rapid waltz which Norwegians delight in. The languid grace of a London ball-room would have had no charms for him; his dancing was full of fire and impetuosity, and Swanhild, too, danced very well; it had come to them both as naturally as breathing.

"This is better than Lillo," admitted the child. "Somehow he's so dreadful heavy to get round. Have the English people come? What are they like?"

"Oh, they're middling," said Frithiof, "all except the niece, and she is charming."

"Is she pretty?"

"Prettier than any one you ever saw in your life."

"Not prettier than Sigrid?" said the little sister confidently.

"Wait till you see," said Frithiof. "She is a brunette and perfectly lovely. There now!" as the music ceased, "Sigrid has felt her left ear burning, and knows that we are speaking evil of her. Let us come to confess."

With his arms still round the child he entered the pretty bright-looking room to the right. Sigrid was still at the piano, but she had heard his voice and had turned round with eager expectation in her face. The brother and sister were

very much alike; each had the same well-cut Greek features, but Frithiof's face was broader and stronger, and you could tell at a glance that he was the more intellectual of the two. On the other hand, Sigrid possessed a delightful fund of quiet common-sense, and her judgment was seldom at fault, while, like most Norwegian girls, she had a most charmingly simple manner, and an unaffected light-heartedness which it did one good to see.

"Well! what news?" she exclaimed. "Have they come all right? Are they nice?"

"Nice is not the word! charming! beautiful! To-morrow you will see if I have spoken too strongly."

"He says she is even prettier than you, Sigrid," said Swanhild mischievously. "Prettier than any one we ever saw!"

"She? Which of them?"

"Miss Blanche Morgan, the daughter of the head of the firm, you know."

"And the other one?"

"I hardly know. I didn't look at her much; the others all seemed to me much like ordinary English tourists. But she! —Well, you will see to-morrow."

"How I wish they were coming to-night! you make me quite curious. And father seems so excited about their coming. I have not seen him so much pleased about anything for a long time."

"Is he at home?"

"No, he went for a walk; his head was bad again. That is the only thing that troubles me about him, his headaches seem to have become almost chronic this last year."

A shade came over her bright face, and Frithiof too, looked grave.

"He works very much too hard," he said, "but as soon as I come of age and am taken into partnership he will be more free to take a thorough rest. At present I might just as well be in Germany as far as work goes, for he will hardly let me do anything to help him."

"Here he comes, here he comes!" cried Swanhild, who had wandered away to the window, and with one accord they all ran out to meet the head of the house, Lillo bounding on in front and springing up at his master with a loving greeting.

Herr Falck was a very pleasant-looking man of about fifty; he had the same well-chiseled features as Frithiof, the same broad forehead, clearly marked, level brows, and flexible lips, but his eyes had more of gray and less of blue in them, and a practiced observer would have detected in their keen glance an anxiety which could not wholly disguise itself. His hair and whiskers were iron-gray, and he was an inch or two shorter than his son. They all stood talking together at the door, the English visitors still forming the staple of conversation, and the anxiety giving place to eager hope in Herr Falck's eyes as Frithiof once more sung the praises of Blanche Morgan.

"Have they formed any plan for their tour?" he asked.

"No; they mean to talk it over with you and get your advice. They all professed to have a horror of Baedeker, though even with your help I don't think they will get far without him."

"It is certain that they will not want to stay very long in our Bergen," said Herr Falck, "the English never do. What should you say now if you all took your summer outing at once and settled down at Ulvik or Balholm for a few weeks, then you would be able to see a little of our friends and could start them well on their tour."

"What a delightful plan, little father!" cried Sigrid; "only you must come too, or we shall none of us enjoy it."

"I would run over for the Sunday, perhaps; that would be as much as I could manage; but Frithiof will be there to take care of you. What should you want with a careworn old man like me, now that he is at home again?"

"You fish for compliments, little father," said Sigrid, slipping her arm within his and giving him one of those mute caresses which are so much more eloquent than words. "But, quite between ourselves, though Frithiof is all very well, I shant enjoy it a bit without you."

"Yes, yes, father dear," said Swanhild, "indeed you must come, for Frithiof he will be just no good at all; he will be sure to dance always with the pretty Miss Morgan, and to row her about on the fjord all day, just as he did those pretty girls at Norheimsund and Faleide."

The innocent earnestness of the child's tone made them all laugh, and Frithiof, vowing vengeance on her for her speech, chased her round and round the garden, their laughter floating back to Herr Falck and Sigrid as they entered the house.

"The little minx!" said Herr Falck, "how innocently she said it, too! I don't think our boy is such a desperate flirt

though. As far as I remember, there was nothing more than a sort of boy and girl friendship at either place.”

“Oh no,” said Sigrid, smiling. “Frithiof was too much of a school-boy, every one liked him and he liked every one. I don’t think he is the sort of man to fall in love easily.”

“No; but when it does come it will be a serious affair. I very much wish to see him happily married.”

“Oh, father! surely not yet. He is so young, we can’t spare him yet.”

Herr Falck threw himself back in his arm-chair, and mused for a few minutes.

“One need not necessarily lose him,” he replied, “and you know, Sigrid, I am a believer in early marriages—at least for my son; I will not say too much about you, little woman, for as a matter of fact I don’t know how I should ever spare you.”

“Don’t be afraid, little father; you may be very sure I shant marry till I see a reasonable chance of being happier than I am at home with you. And when will that be, do you think?”

He stroked her golden hair tenderly.

“Not just yet, Sigrid, let us hope. Not just yet. As to our Frithiof, shall I tell you of the palace in cloud-land I am building for him?”

“Not that he should marry the pretty Miss Morgan, as Swanhild calls her?” said Sigrid, with a strange sinking at the heart.

“Why not? I hear that she is a charming girl, both clever and beautiful, and indeed it seems to me that he is quite disposed to fall in love with her at first sight. Of course were

he not properly in love I should never wish him to marry, but I own that a union between the two houses would be a great pleasure to me—a great relief.”

He sighed, and for the first time the anxious look in his eyes attracted Sigrid’s notice. “Father, dear,” she exclaimed, “wont you tell me what is troubling you? There is something, I think. Tell me, little father.”

He looked startled, and a slight flush spread over his face; but when he spoke his voice was reassuring.

“A business man often has anxieties which can not be spoken of, dear child. God knows they weigh lightly enough on some men; I think I am growing old, Sigrid, and perhaps I have never learned to take things so easily as most merchants do.”

“Why, father, you were only fifty last birthday; you must not talk yet of growing old. How do other men learn, do you think, to take things lightly?”

“By refusing to listen to their own conscience,” said Herr Falck, with sudden vehemence. “By allowing themselves to hold one standard of honor in private life and a very different standard in business transactions. Oh, Sigrid! I would give a great deal to find some other opening for Frithiof. I dread the life for him.”

“Do you think it is really so hard to be strictly honorable in business life? And yet it is a life that must be lived, and is it not better that such a man as Frithiof should take it up—a man with such a high sense of honor?”

“You don’t know what business men have to stand against,” said Herr Falck. “Frithiof is a good, honest fellow,

but as yet he has seen nothing of life. And I tell you, child, we often fail in our strongest point."

He rose from his chair and paced the room; it seemed to Sigrid that a nameless shadow had fallen on their sunny home. She was for the first time in her life afraid, though the fear was vague and undefined.

"But there, little one," said her father, turning toward her again. "You must not be worried. I get nervous and depressed, that is all. As I told you, I am growing old."

"Frithiof would like to help you more if you would let him," said Sigrid, rather wistfully. "He was saying so just now."

"And so he shall in the autumn. He is a good lad, and if all goes well I hope he will some day be my right hand in the business; but I wish him to have a few months' holiday first. And there is this one thing, Sigrid, which I can tell you, if you really want to know about my anxieties."

"Indeed I do, little father," she said eagerly.

"There are matters which you would not understand even could I speak of them; but you know, of course, that I am agent in Norway for the firm of Morgan Brothers. Well, a rumor has reached me that they intend to break off the connection and to send out the eldest son to set up a branch at Stavanger. It is a mere rumor and reached me quite accidentally. I very much hope it may not be true, but there is no denying that Stavanger would be in most ways better suited for their purpose; in fact, the friend who told me of the rumor said that they felt now that it had been a mistake all along to have the agency here and they had only done it because they knew Bergen and knew me."

“Why is Stavanger a better place for it?”

“It is better because most of the salmon and lobsters are caught in the neighborhood of Stavanger, and all the mackerel too to the south of Bergen. I very much hope the rumor is not true, for it would be a great blow to me to lose the English connection. Still it is not unlikely, and the times are hard now—very hard.”

“And you think your palace in cloud-land for Frithiof would prevent Mr. Morgan from breaking the connection?”

“Yes; a marriage between the two houses would be a great thing, it would make this new idea unlikely if not altogether impossible. I am thankful that there seems now some chance of it. Let the two meet naturally and learn to know each other. I will not say a word to Frithiof, it would only do harm; but to you, Sigrid, I confess that my heart is set on this plan. If I could for one moment make you see the future as I see it, you would feel with me how important the matter is.”

At this moment Frithiof himself entered, and the conversation was abruptly ended.

“Well, have you decided?” he asked, in his eager, boyish way. “Is it to be Ulvik or Balholm? What! You were not even talking about that. Oh, I know what it was then. Sigrid was deep in the discussion of to-morrow’s dinner. I will tell you what to do, abolish the romekolle, and let us be English to the backbone. Now I think of it, Mr. Morgan is not unlike a walking sirloin with a plum-pudding head. There is your bill of fare, so waste no more time.”

The brother and sister went off together, laughing and talking; but when the door closed behind them the master

of the house buried his face in his hands and for many minutes sat motionless. What troubled thoughts, what wavering anxieties filled his mind, Sigrid little guessed. It was, after all, a mere surface difficulty of which he had spoken; of the real strain which was killing him by inches he could not say a word to any mortal being, though now in his great misery he instinctively prayed.

“My poor children!” he groaned. “Oh, God spare them from this shame and ruin which haunts me. I have tried to be upright and prudent,—it was only this once that I was rash. Give me success for their sakes, O God! The selfish and unscrupulous flourish on all sides. Give me this one success. Let me not blight their whole lives.”

But the next day, when he went forward to greet his English guests, it would have been difficult to recognize him as the burdened, careworn man from whose lips had been wrung that confession and that prayer. All his natural courtesy and brightness had returned to him; if he thought of his business at all he thought of it in the most sanguine way possible, and the Morgans saw in him only an older edition of Frithiof, and wondered how he had managed to preserve such buoyant spirits in the cares and uncertainties of mercantile life. The two o’clock dinner passed off well; Sigrid, who was a clever little housekeeper, had scouted Frithiof’s suggestion as to the roast beef and plum-pudding, and had carefully devised a thoroughly Norwegian repast.

“For I thought,” she explained afterwards to Blanche, when the two girls had made friends, “that if I went to England I should wish to see your home life just exactly as it really is, and so I have ordered the sort of dinner we should

naturally have, and did not, as Frithiof advised, leave out the romekolle."

"Was that the stuff like curds and whey?" asked Blanche, who was full of eager interest in everything.

"Yes: it is sour cream with bread crumbs grated over it. We always have a plateful each at dinner, it is quite one of our customs. But everything here is simple of course, not grand as with you; we do not keep a great number of servants, or dine late, or dress for the evening—here there is nothing"—she hesitated for a word, then in her pretty foreign English added, "nothing ceremonious."

"That is just the charm of it all," said Blanche, in her sweet gracious way. "It is all so real and simple and fresh, and I think it was delightful of you to know how much best we should like to have a glimpse of your real home life instead of a stupid party. Now mamma cares for nothing but just to make a great show, it doesn't matter whether the visitors really like it or not."

Sigrid felt a momentary pang of doubt; she had fallen in love with Blanche Morgan the moment she saw her, but it somehow hurt her to hear the English girl criticise her own mother. To Sigrid's loyal nature there was something out of tune in that last remark.

"Perhaps you and your cousin would like to see over the house," she said, by way of making a diversion. "Though I must tell you that we are considered here in Bergen to be rather English in some points. That is because of my father's business connection with England, I suppose. Here, you see, in his study he has a real English fireplace; we all like it

much better than the stoves, and some day I should like to have them in the other rooms as well."

"But there is one thing very un-English," said Blanche. "There are no passages; instead, I see, all your rooms open out of each other. Such numbers of lovely plants, too, in every direction; we are not so artistic, we stand them all in prim rows in a conservatory. This, too, is quite new to me. What a good idea!" And she went up to examine a prettily worked sling fastened to the wall, and made to hold newspapers.

She was too polite, of course, to say what really struck her—that the whole house seemed curiously simple and bare, and that she had imagined that one of the leading merchants of Bergen would live in greater style. As a matter of fact, you might, as Cyril expressed it, have bought the whole place for an old song, and though there was an air of comfort and good taste about the rooms and a certain indescribable charm, they were evidently destined for use and not for show, and with the exception of some fine old Norwegian silver and a few good pictures Herr Falck did not possess a single thing of value.

Contrasted with the huge and elaborately furnished house in Lancaster Gate with its lavishly strewn knick-knacks, its profusion of all the beautiful things that money could buy, the Norwegian villa seemed poor indeed, yet there was something about it which took Blanche's fancy.

Later on, when the whole party had started for a walk, and when Frithiof and Blanche had quite naturally drifted into a *tête-à-tête*, she said something to this effect.

"I begin not to wonder that you are so happy," she added; "the whole atmosphere of the place is happiness. I wish you could teach us the secret of it."

"Have you then only the gift of making other people happy?" said Frithiof. "That seems strange."

"You will perhaps think me very discontented," she said, with a pathetic little sadness in her tone which touched him; "but seeing how fresh and simple and happy your life is out here makes me more out of heart than ever with my own home. You must not think I am grumbling; they are very good to me, you know, and give me everything that money can buy; but somehow there is so much that jars on one, and here there seems nothing but kindness and ease and peace."

"I am glad you like our life," he said; "so very glad."

And as she told him more of her home and her London life, and of how little it satisfied her, her words, and still more her manner and her sweet eyes, seemed to weave a sort of spell about him, seemed to lure him on into a wonderful future, and to waken in him a new life.

"I like him," thought Blanche to herself. "Perhaps after all this Norwegian tour will not be so dull. I like to see his eye light up so eagerly; he really has beautiful eyes! I almost think—I really almost think I am just a little bit in love with him."

At this moment they happened to overtake two English tourists on the road; as they passed on in front of them Frithiof, with native courtesy, took off his hat.

"You surely don't know that man? He is only a shopkeeper," said Blanche, not even taking the trouble to

lower her voice.

Frithiof crimsoned to the roots of his hair.

"I am afraid he must have heard what you said," he exclaimed, quickening his pace in the discomfort of the realization. "I do not know him certainly, but one is bound to be courteous to strangers."

"I know exactly who he is," said Blanche, "for he and his sister were on the steamer, and Cyril found out all about them. He is Boniface, the music-shop man."

Frithiof was saved a reply, for just then they reached their destination, and rejoined the rest of the party, who were clustered together on the hill-side enjoying a most lovely view. Down below them, sheltered by a great craggy mountain on the further side, lay a little lonely lake, so weird-looking, so desolate, that it was hard to believe it to be within an easy walk of the town. Angry-looking clouds were beginning to gather in the sky, a purple gloom seemed to overspread the mountain and the lake, and something of its gravity seemed also to have fallen upon Frithiof. He had found the first imperfection in his ideal, yet it had only served to show him how great a power, how strange an influence she possessed over him. He knew now that, for the first time in his life, he was blindly, desperately in love.

"Why, it is beginning to rain," said Mr. Morgan. "I almost think we had better be turning back, Herr Falck. It has been a most enjoyable little walk; but if we can reach the hotel before it settles in for a wet evening, why, all the better."

"The rain is the great drawback to Bergen," said Herr Falck. "At Christiania they have a saying that when you go to Bergen it rains three hundred and sixty-six days out of the