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THE

BRIDE OF OMBERG.

BY

EMILIE F. CARLEN,

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THE BRIDE OF OMBERG.

CHAPTER I.

"What are you doing with my old blue frock-coat, Agneta? I hope you will not cut it in pieces."

The lady of the house answered this question with a smile, and the clipping scissors which were gliding through the cloth plainly announced the fate that awaited this unfortunate coat.

"Have you lost your senses? Have you lost your memory? Did not you consent to wed me the day I first put on that coat? I remember it as well as though it had been yesterday, that I had it made for the very purpose of bribing you. It was then a stately garment!"

"Yes, my little old fellow!" replied Mrs. Agneta, nodding pleasantly to her husband. "Then you used the coat as a decoy bird, and therefore you must not be cross if I put it to the same use again." With these words she drew a peculiarly-shaped pattern from her work-bag, and spreading the coat upon the table, placed the pattern upon it, and despite the imploring looks of the old gentleman, the scissors made their way rapidly through the faded cloth.

"Well, what are you making?"

"A decoy bird."

"Ah! yes, I might have thought so," growled the old man. "After you had used your own garment, as long as there was any of it left, to make decoy birds for the boy, you now trespass upon the father's coat. Truly, Agneta all this trumpery will come to a bad end yet."

"Well, well, dear husband, don't get into a rage about it," replied Mistress Agneta, as she laid the pieces she had cut according to the pattern, upon the table before her, and rolling up the balance of the cloth into a small bundle she thrust it quickly behind the cushioned back of the high arm-chair.

"Aye! I should think that one might be allowed to speak a word about the young gentleman. I only ask whether I fared as wildly when I was young, doing nothing else in the world but being a scarecrow for the birds of the air and the fishes of the sea?"

"Then you are not satisfied that he goes to catch fish?"

"I object neither to hunting nor fishing, if one only knows how to limit them; but I do not like that the young gentleman, who is destined to inherit the iron foundry, and smelting establishment, with twenty landed estates, and who could employ himself more usefully than in spending his time in fooleries which a peasant lout might perform as well as himself—"

"What are you thinking about?" said Mistress Agneta, who had commenced sewing the side of the decoy bird preparatory to stuffing it. "I hope that you do not think that these louts could manage a decoy bird as skillfully, or climb a tree and lay out upon the branches to decoy the hazel hen, as well as our Charles Augustus. No, they cannot do it. If we had only them for hunters we should never have any game for our table."

"Well, we might live without it."

"Hand me the pearl to make the eye with. Now tell me, don't the decoy look quite natural?"

"O, yes; but I again inquire how will all this end? Is it thus that our fields are cultivated, the trip-hammer put in motion, the coal-bins and barns made? If one does nothing but ramble around in the woods and ride upon the lake; and aside from this, if one is so very bashful that he dare not look even into the eyes of a pretty girl, he will certainly never amount to

anything, and will finally die an old bachelor."

"Husband! husband!"

"Wife—wife—I know what I say. When you and I are lying under the grass, his overseers, his workmen, and all of that beggarly tribe, will cheat him before his very eyes. He is worse, indeed, than—"

"Than what?" inquired Mistress Agneta, as she stuffed the bird until its breast filled out like the newly-wadded uniform of a militia officer;—"than what?"

"Than a fool—for a fantastic fellow is worse than a fool."

"Well, then, place him under arrest. Let the whole world say that Squire Kemner has shut up the mouth of his own son, because he was a bashful and silent youth, because he was fond of hunting and fishing, and because he never harmed any one when he was not angry. But this is all foolishness; tell me where I can find a little piece of red cloth to make eye-brows for my bird. Have you not some red flannel in your chest, my dear Johannes?"

"O, nonsense," growled the old gentleman, and taking his pipe he left the room.

About a half an hour afterwards, when Mrs. Agneta was about putting the last stitch into her work, the old gentleman returned with a small piece of red flannel in his hand.

"You are a downright fool," said he, throwing the rag upon the table.

Mistress Agneta picked it up and examined it carefully. "Ah! John," said she, her eyes glittering with joy, "have you not cut that from your own carpet-bag? O, no, you are not weak, *you!*"

"O, be still! You know I must have a new lining for my carpet-bag at any rate." And a little ashamed that he had been caught in the act of giving way to his weakness, the old gentleman stepped to the window and drummed upon the window-panes, an occupation that occupied his attention until he found an opportunity to scold at one of the servant girls, who had allowed a chicken to enter the garden, and scratch up the flower plots.

CHAPTER II.

Squire Kemner had inherited from his father large estates, connected with an immense iron-foundry and smelting establishment. His father had inherited the same from his own father, and thus the estates had fallen from father to son for many generations. From time immemorial the Kemner family had borne the reputation of honesty. They not only knew how to provide for themselves, but were the main props of their native country. They had been from father to son good men, good farmers, and report said they knew well how to look after their own interests, and withal were sensible and well-informed citizens. They had always turned their attention to matters within their own sphere, never troubling themselves with anything that was not connected with their own or their servants' affairs. They sometimes talked politics, but only for the purpose of amusement, when in the good society of the beer-can or the draught-board. But if the topic was a collection for the poor, or contribution for any benevolent design, the erection of a school-house, or the construction of a new road, then the family-name of Kemner could have been seen heading the list in large letters, that all might know that the Kemners never put themselves out of the way when charity was the theme, and that their wealth was not small.

When Squire Kemner entered into the holy state of matrimony, he entertained the fond hope that his children would fully sustain the reputation of their forefathers. But he had the misfortune of losing his two eldest sons, who had displayed the fullest capacity of becoming nothing more nor less than their *father's sons*, and his sorrow was increased when he saw

that his third son Charles Augustus displayed none of the attributes of the Kemner family. As a child Charles Augustus evinced an obstinacy that irritated his father much, who vainly strove to conquer the spirit with the whip, and imprisonment in the dark and dreary cellar.

"This will not do," said his wife in a warning voice. "You will make the boy an idiot. When you whip him, he would bite off his tongue rather than cry; if you give him nothing to eat, he would die of hunger before he would beg for bread; and I am fearful that he will beat out his brains against the wall of that dark cellar."

Charles Augustus, however, did nothing of the kind. He outlived his severe training; but unfortunately he did not appear to have benefited by it.

Then Mr. Kemner would begin to preach morality, but Charles Augustus' heart was quite closed to the wisdom that flowed from his father's lips.

"Listen to me, my son," said the Squire, one day, when he was determined to make an impression upon the boy's mind. "You love your father, do you not?"

"Not too much," replied the boy, who had just entered his teens.

"What! not too much, you ungrateful scamp! You mean that you do not love your father? Do you not know that even the brutes love their parents? Don't you see how the colt gambols around his mother?"

"Yes, I do; but I never saw his mother kick him, starve him, or shut him up in a dark cellar. If she did so, the colt would run away and not be willing to return."

"I ought to have sent you away to school long ago," said his father, who wished to change the subject; "but your teacher says that you are good for nothing. What do you think—do you think that you are good for anything?"

"I don't know."

"Do you love to read?"

"O, yes, sometimes."

"This sometimes, happens rarely enough; but to run about in the woods, climb trees, and to do nothing at all, that pleases you, does it not?"

"O, yes; that is fine!"

"But now you are old enough to know that you must learn something, so that you can become a man like your father, your grandfather, your great-grandfather. They were worthy men, you may believe me. When they were as old as you they already knew how to count upon their fingers what was needed at the forge and upon the farm. But you do not even know how the ore is smelted, or how seed should be prepared for the field—or do you know?"

"No."

"Are you not, as I just said, a genuine——?"

"Blockhead," suggested Charles Augustus, for he had heard the phrase a hundred times before.

"Certainly, a blockhead, and one of the rankest kind. Now, please inform me, have you not the slightest idea of honor and shame? Are you not ashamed to be considered a blockhead?"

"Yes; and it is for this very reason that I would rather be out in the woods. When I am there I am never stupid."

"But will you not make an effort to become otherwise? Don't you know that it is horrible that you cannot become like other people, and know how to assist your father, and how to read as well as other boys of your own age? Don't you think of all this?"

"No, I don't!"

"Well, what have you to say about it?"

"Nothing; only I think that if I could only be left alone—if—if—" here he ceased, as though he had not the courage to continue.

"Well, do not be afraid to speak. I should like to know what you think of yourself."

"Yes, if they would only let me alone, and if you would not always call me a blockhead, I might by-and-by be good for something."

"Good for what?"

"I do not know."

"Did I not say so? Do you not show to me by your silly answer, that you are a perfect sheep in intelligence, and a bear in manners?"

Charles Augustus trembled with rage. "Send me where you please," said he; "let me only get away from here, or I will run away."

"Yes, he must be sent away," said the Squire. But the mother prayed with tearful eyes. "Do not send him away, out in the world, dear John. Nothing good will come of it."

In the mean time the rumor went through the whole neighborhood, that the Squire's silly son was to be sent away to gain wisdom for himself. But all foretold his quick return, for they knew him too well; and they pitied the worthy father, whose infinite trouble had been so poorly repaid.

"I assure you, my dear child," said his mother, to Charles Augustus, the night before the departure of her son, "I assure you that you are neither stupid nor simple, but on the contrary, a bright, intelligent boy, although your father does not wish to consider you so. But if he continues to trouble you in this manner, it would be quite probable that you would become a very simpleton. My dear child, oblige me, and give your mother honor, by remaining until your time is out. I have not a doubt but that you can read, if you have a mind to."

"Do you really think so, mother?"

"Yes; as I believe in the Scriptures. Do you not remember, Charles Augustus, how you read the little storybook when you was a little boy, and understood the pictures so well, whatever they were, either trees or birds; don't you remember?"

"Yes; but since then I cannot remember. I have often found that out, when I have been reading alone in the woods, which I often do, although no one knows it."

"My poor boy. Your father has punished you too much; but he will do so no more, and he has often repented it, after he has thought of it."

"He has repented? are you sure of that?"

"Certainly, my child; I have often noticed how much he was agitated after he had whipped you; he walked up and down the floor looking at you when you did not see him; and even when he shut you up in the cellar, he would stand before the door for a long time. I once saw him wipe the tears from his eyes, although I did not let him know that I saw him."

"Was I very naughty—tell me, dear mother, was I?" inquired the boy earnestly, his voice trembling with emotion. "Was I very naughty when father treated me so cruelly?"

"Yes, my dear boy, you were; but I think that you would not have been so, had you not been treated so harshly. Once—but it will only make you sorry if I tell you all."

"Never mind—tell me."

"Yes. Once you acted like a wild beast, because he would not allow you to have his gold-headed cane. Why, you even bit his hand."

"I remember," replied the boy, his cheeks flushing; "but you have not said why I did so. I received so many blows because I had ventured to take the cane; and could not help turning upon him; indeed, I did not know what I was about."

"But now your boyish years are over," continued his mother, soothingly. "You are now thirteen years old, and you will prove to your father and the whole neighborhood that you possess as much capacity as all the rest, and have enough intelligence to preside over the foundry and farm as well as your father and grandfather did."

"And as well as my great-grandfather did," replied Charles Augustus, impatiently. "O, if I did not have to hear all the time what *they* have done. Father may leave his foundry and farm to whom he chooses, and he may send me to sea, and help himself and me at the same time."

But now his mother wept, and the boy's heart softened as it had often done before, until his father, with his harsh words, would change the soft heart into flint again.

It was fortunate for Charles Augustus that his departure had been finally decided upon. Had he remained at home, he would, under the hard treatment of his father, and the silly kindness of his fond mother, have soon become that which his father had so often predicted. In consequence of his father's exceeding harshness, which he had experienced in his early youth, there remained traces in the character of Charles Augustus, which could never be entirely eradicated.

Years rolled on, and Squire Kemner was surprised and somewhat mistrustful when he heard that his son was making rapid progress in his studies, and that his teachers had nothing to complain of; on the contrary, they thought that he applied himself too much to his books, for the benefit of his health.

"Now you see," said the Squire, overjoyed at the news. "Now you see, that I understood how to sift out the genuine gold. Yes, yes, I knew very well how it would turn out, but I did not want to say anything beforehand. But what do you think Augustus would have become had I allowed him to domineer over me? Thank God! he can now govern himself, and I hope that he will thank me for it hereafter."

They never thought that their son should enter into any state office; upon that point parents and son completely agreed. At the age of twenty-one, Charles Augustus had completed his studies, and returned home to assist his father in managing his estates and his iron-foundry.

At first all went well, Charles Augustus restrained himself and obeyed his father in every respect. Squire Kemner would boast, far and wide, of the skill and prudence of his son, and spoke of a journey to England, which Charles Augustus should take for the purpose of completing his agricultural studies, and which would have been carried into effect, undoubtedly, had the matter depended upon the father alone. Charles Augustus, however, did not evince the slightest desire to travel. He read all the agricultural works that his father furnished him, but he contended that a voyage over the sea would not repay for the trouble.

Four years had elapsed since Charles Augustus had returned home, but during all this time he had not accustomed himself to a life of activity which was necessary for an owner of such large estates. And even the good disposition which he had evinced at first to diminish his father's labors, soon totally vanished, and his occupation mainly consisted in hunting and fishing, two sports for which the Kemner estates, located on the borders of the sea, offered the most desirable opportunities.

In the meantime, the father's conduct toward his son had changed to a great extent. His conscience at length told him that he himself was the cause of the faults of his boy. If the old gentleman would sometimes growl, it was only when alone with his wife. As soon, however, as Charles Augustus returned, the father would appear friendly, and enquire with much apparent concern, how his hunting or fishing excursion had turned out. Although the worthy squire would talk much about the journey to England, and of all the elegant establishments which could be found "over there," as he would express himself, still Charles Augustus did not heed his hints, and therefore the old man desisted from them entirely.

The squire would allow himself to speak frequently concerning only one subject; and that was to the repugnance his son had of sociality. The old man had always been of the opinion that a man who could call an iron foundry and twenty estates his own, was certainly obliged to display as much outward appearance as any nobleman. He desired that his dear Lindafors, where he himself, as well as his father, his grandfather, and great grandfather had lived and ruled, should be at all times known by its hospitality, its wealth and its benevolence. Still, with a wise maintenance of a proper method. In short, he desired that his estate should be considered, not only among the first of the nation, but that it should take a

pre-eminence above all others.

But all these arguments, as well as all others, were of no avail with Charles Augustus. He seldom accompanied his parents in their visits to their neighbors, and when strangers made their appearance, he displayed uneasiness and discomfort, especially when ladies were the visitors.

If his mother would now and then remind him that this or that young lady had paid particular attention to him, it was certain that the young lady would be banished from the mind of Charles Augustus.

Mrs. Agneta, however, understood very well why she used such language. It was always intended for such young ladies who were poor but handsome, as she was fearful that they might strive to entrap the unwary youth. But in other cases, for instance when two wealthy ladies would visit them, the cunning dame would say: "The silly geese, they would not even look at you—they did not seem to care whether you were in the room or not." And then, when the same young ladies would make their appearance again, Charles Augustus could not resist thinking of them a little.

But what did Mrs. Agneta gain by this? For Charles Augustus would declare, as soon as they had departed, that he had never seen two such ugly creatures, or heard such sharp tongues before. Mrs. Agneta shook her head in despair. She could not think what kind of a wife she could procure for her dear Charles Augustus, for he preferred a well-made decoy bird to all the women of the country.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Agneta had scarcely placed the last eyebrow to a decoy bird, when the squire thought that he heard the hounds, and soon afterwards the loud barking of Woodman and Watch, Charles Augustus' favorite hounds, announced that their master was returning.

"O, the dear, Agneta!" said the squire, nodding pleasantly to his son, who now appeared at the end of the alley, "how fine the boy looks. He took that beautiful nose from his grandfather! Look at his forehead—his brow; earnestness and kindness have both assumed their seat there. How his cheeks glow! and how finely his curling hair looks, falling over his shoulders. But I am afraid no girl will fall in love with him, and only on account of his confounded timidity."

"How can you say so?" said his wife, placing herself behind her husband, near the window. "And I would like to know how many girls there are in the whole country who have not already fallen in love with him? What a splendid form! He is full six feet, aye! more—for so I measured him on the door post last spring, and since then he has grown more, as I can see by his summer pantaloons. Only see how well he becomes his hunting dress! Such a stately boy cannot be found in the whole of our grenadier regiment."

During this conversation, Charles Augustus had entered the court-yard, and smilingly pointed at his game bag which was suspended from his manly shoulder. It appeared to be well stocked, and a pair of large hare's legs protruded from it, and crossed themselves over the breast of the young sportsman.

Charles Augustus stepped into the kitchen, where he was received by his mother with a hearty "Well, well, my dear child, what booty have you brought home? Two hazel hens and one hare! You are a true Nimrod, indeed. Are you not weary, my dear boy?"

"Not at all," replied the young man, kissing the hand and lips of his tender mother. "Dinner, however, will taste well to me; but I wish to rest a little before that."

After he had saluted his father, and received from him the latest newspapers, he hastened to his own room and threw

himself upon the sofa. He did not sleep, but took up a paper the corner of which was turned down—a sign that his father wished to draw his attention to a particular article. The article in question was a long discussion on a newly invented threshing machine. Although Charles Augustus read the words, he did it mechanically; and dissatisfied with himself, and perhaps a little with his father, he turned his face towards the wall with the firm intention to think of nothing at all.

But who does not know that one will think of the most when he endeavors to think of nothing? His mind will be filled with that which is necessary, and that which is unnecessary also. This was the case with Charles Augustus. The necessary thoughts—if we should be allowed to divide ideas into two classes—turned upon his own situation and circumstances. He thought of the friendly and exhorting looks of his father, when they both had stood together in the court-yard, one stepping towards the foundry and the other walking towards the forest. He heard no more reproaches for his carelessness and want of energy; but sometimes the reproach could be seen in his father's eye, and pained Charles Augustus deeply. But he would still rove around, like a man in a dream, seeking only for his own amusement.

"I only wish that it were possible for Charles Augustus to be otherwise; I wish it were in my power to render my good parents happy; and, if it was not so much adverse to my inclination to follow those pursuits which so much pleased my ancestors, I would be content. But in spite of my endeavors I cannot like those labors that are so tedious, and change my hours into an eternity.

"But of what benefit are all these thoughts—what am I thinking of? Of a thousand things which should not trouble a sensible man. Why am I so much more contented with the society of animals than that of men? Why does my heart bleed frequently when I place my rifle to my shoulder? It pains me to deprive the young creatures of their parents, and the birds of their mates. But I sometimes kill them, only that I may not be laughed at when I return home. Why do I sit there in the woods for whole hours, looking at nothing but a mere ant-hill? Still, it awakens thousands of thoughts within me. Why do the tears start to my eyes—why do I take so much delight in beholding the sun rise? Why should I desire to kiss away the dew-drops from the blades of grass? And why does life move with such renewed power within me, when I hear the morning songs of the birds? Why—why? Yes, because I am a dreamer, a fool, a good-for-nothing. One who does not know how to spend his time usefully, and will finally become a burden to himself and others.

"Suppose I should go forth into the world, and look around me, perhaps that would give you joy, you good kind parents, but—" here unfortunately his thoughts took a less favorable turn, "but what should I do in foreign countries—of what use would it be to me? What joy can I find there—is there a greater pleasure for me than the life in my forests? But do I not owe something more to myself? Am I not the owner of a large estate, and have I not sufficient means to follow my own desires, and live as I please? Every one has his own ideas; my father thought that he could whip reason into me, and acted as he best knew how. What was the consequence? My reason almost left me, and my anger was the more excited. His intentions were good, but they missed their aim, and that frequently happens. I have often intended to do as they desire—to live as my ancestors have lived; but I am not able to carry it out—and then another aim is missed."

Thus his thoughts wavered to and fro. He was near the point of becoming a downright good for nothing fellow. A youth may be a dreamer, but only to soar to a higher extent in after years. But such is not the case with the man; his dreaming will soon place him where assistance is unavailing.

Charles Augustus was possessed of Nature's best gifts; sentiments of the softest nature, and a warm sympathetic heart. But, biased by his early education, these characteristics were misled, and his great mistrust of himself and his capacities, must, after a time, have had an injurious effect upon him. Yes, the more injurious, as this mistrust was in conflict with his self pride, in which he was supported by the flattery of his mother.

The dinner-bell changed the tenor of his thoughts. He hastened to the dining-room, and the first object that caught his eye was the decoy bird which his mother had made for him. This was one of the thousand little surprises which the good mother ever and anon prepared for her much-loved son.

"Excellent," exclaimed Charles Augustus. "But, dear mother, you have already made me more decoy birds than I have brought hazel hens home."

"O, we will not speak of that, dear child; such an expert marksman as you deserves to be encouraged. We have visitors to-day."

Charles Augustus smiled, and followed his mother into the parlor, where she introduced him to two old ladies, sisters, who were accompanied by their niece, a charming young lady, and the heiress of her two unmarried aunts. They had

come to pay a friendly visit to the Kemner family. When Charles Augustus bowed lowly to the young lady, he observed that she appeared confused, and that her cheeks glowed. He immediately suspected that his mother and the two maiden aunts had concerted together to deprive him of his bachelorhood, and that the young lady had been let into the secret.

Charles Augustus required but a slight hint to convince him of the truth of his suspicion, and he soon discovered that he had not shot far from the mark; for, after dinner, his mother and the two old ladies conversed with the utmost vivacity concerning the good qualities of the youthful Mr. Kemner, and the excellent disposition of the young lady.

When they parted, the family of Lindafor were urgently invited to return the visit as soon as possible. The invitation was accepted; and, after a few weeks, when Mrs. Kemner was preparing to fulfill her promise, she teased her son so much about his laziness and ungallantry, that he finally consented to accompany her. But this visit was the first and last one, for now his mother's intentions became so clear to him, that he found it advisable to say to her, that he never saw the woman whom he desired to marry.

"This arises from the fact that you never desired to make any acquaintances," said his mother. "If you would only try—yes, yes, do not look so morose; I have seen many a woman-hater who, at length, fell over head and ears in love."

"I am no woman-hater, mother. On the contrary, I like to converse with them, if they would only not immediately entertain the idea that I had fallen in love with them."

"Do you really think that they lay so much weight upon a few insignificant words?"

"If the young ladies do not, their mothers, fathers, aunts, and uncles, are inclined to do so. This is why I am afraid to be in proximity to them."

"But, for Heaven's sake! Charles Augustus, if you always think thus, you will never be able to approach a young lady, even though you have the inclination to do so; for I hope you will not be so foolish as to fall in love with one who has neither wealth nor family standing."

"Such a one, or none."

"Ah, what do you mean? I am fearful that you have a wrong notion on this subject. You should know that no lady will think the less of you, if you are the owner of an iron foundry and large estates. A man who has much himself, should look out for a wealthy wife."

This was a shot that did not miss its mark; for Charles Augustus was troubled at the thought of being chosen by a girl because he was considered wealthy. One whom he might sincerely love, might feign to love him, that she might become the wife of a rich man. His mother's remark pained him much. She, who was so well acquainted with woman's heart had spoken openly that which he had long secretly feared.

"Why are you so silent?" said Mistress Agneta, looking at her son, who had assumed a thoughtful mien.

"It pains me that you have taken from me my only pleasure—the thought that I could choose one for my wife, who would love me for myself alone."

"Ah, ah, my child, away with such romantic ideas! Is there none but poor girls who would love you for yourself? Your ideas are as much adverse to the general views of the world as they are to common sense. From time immemorial indigent girls have striven to become the wives of rich men. But rich girls, on the contrary, seldom marry a poor man. Thousands of examples might be quoted to prove this. Their choice, however, must always be less restrained, for they are not obliged to seek wealthy husbands."

"That may all be. I suppose the young lady we visited to-day is very rich. She is the heiress of her two aunts, is she not?"

"Yes, my dear son, and besides that she will inherit the property of her old uncle in Nerike. She, indeed, need not look for a wealthy husband. But, in truth, it is said that she does not wish to marry any one."

"Unpleasant news to those who have made certain plans concerning her; but, thank fortune, I do not belong to them; for I could never make up my mind to marry one who has two such old aunts, even though she was an angel."

Mistress Agneta did not continue the conversation longer; but this plan of matrimony so far exceeded any other she had

devised, and she had set her heart upon it so much, that she determined to call her husband to the rescue.

His exertions, however, met with no better success. Charles Augustus was obstinate, and would not change his mind, even when his mother privately told him that the young lady was so deep in love with him that she could not sleep, and wept night and day that her love was unrequited. Nay! he was unmoved when he was assured that she would give him her hand and heart even should he be deprived of all his property. He refused, for two important reasons, which were, the young lady had red hair, and had two rich, ugly and impudent aunts, whom he heartily detested.

But, to rid himself of all these disagreeable matters, and free himself from the daily importunities and tears of his mother, Charles Augustus suddenly made a rash determination.

"I have thought," said he, one morning, after going to the foundry after his father, and returning home with him, "I have thought that it would not be injurious to me to travel through the country, providing you, my dear father, would grant me permission."

"I have not the slightest objection, my son," replied his father. "You could do nothing better, unless you would marry a rich and handsome lady. In truth, I would rather you should first make a trip into the world. How would you like to visit England?"

"No, I do not desire to visit foreign lands; I would rather see Sweden first, for my own pleasure only."

"But, I hope, for your own benefit also," said Mr. Kemner.

"Very well; if pleasure and profit can be united."

"You will have to do something, then, to gain that object. When travelling, one has to look at things as they really are; not with imaginative eyes, for he might receive false impressions."

"I understand you. You wish me to cast poetry aside, and look at everything in a common sense way."

"The Lord protect you from doing otherwise. Let me tell you a good plan; would it not be well to keep a diary?"

"A diary!" cried Charles Augustus with a look of repugnance; for, next to a red-haired woman, he abominated keeping a diary. "No, no! a diary I shall never keep!"

"Why not?"

"Because it appears to me to be very stupid to note down one's thoughts, so as to read, a long time afterwards, that on the 21st day of June, I thought so and so, and did so and so, and went to such and such a place, and a lot of such kind of nonsense. I would be much afraid to read these dead thoughts, which would make me remember all the follies I had committed."

"As you please, my dear boy; I see that you are now, as ever, of a different opinion from your father. It is not my idea that you should note down all the fooleries that might run through your brain; for I am convinced that there would be much which I could not understand, and that is not the ostensible object of a diary."

"What is the real object of a diary?"

"A diary or journal, is simply an account of real facts and events which we have witnessed, and, after that, all which we may consider remarkable, either in our thoughts or actions. For instance, you arrive at a city. If it is a sea-port, you are sure to be well received, for my iron is well known and popular wherever it is sent, and such bars as are manufactured at Lindafors cannot be found elsewhere. Well, you are in the city. You look at the City Hall, the Cathedral, the Academy and other objects of interest, of which one would like to speak in after days. Then, perhaps, you would make a few visits; and, if you should converse a little concerning the extraordinary quality of our iron and its great sales, it would do us no harm. If you are in the country, you will see many things which will cause you pleasure, if you really seek for it. Almost every landholder has his own peculiar manner of management, which is not to be found with his neighbor. If you should there see something which might prove valuable, you take your pencil and note it down for the sake of future reference. Do you now see the utility of a diary?"

"Yes, but all this adds to my dislike to it, for if it is unpleasant to see one's sentiments compelled to be fixed at a certain

point, how much more unpleasant it is to see such petty grocers' memorandums constantly staring one in the face! Instead of keeping a diary I will occasionally write you a letter, giving as full an account of what I have seen or heard, as possible."

"Accept my thanks. That is better than nothing. Only promise me that you will forbear speaking in your letters of those fantastic things, which, as you well know, do not please me."

"I will promise, but will write only when I feel in the vein."

"As you please; but now, where do you intend going?"

"I do not know myself, and I do not wish to know; my horse shall point out the way, as soon as we are fairly in the high road."

"Ahem! If I had been thus when a boy!"

"Shall I not pack a few decoy birds for you?" said Charles Augustus' mother, as she was engaged in packing the clothes of her favorite. "They might amuse you should you wish to hunt on the road."

"O no, dear mother, they had better be left at home. I hope that I shall be able to dispense with them."

On the day of the departure, Mr. Kemner and his wife accompanied their son as far as the cross roads, to see which direction the horse would take. Charles Augustus dropped the reins upon the neck of the animal, and left him to choose his own path, and then turned towards his parents.

"What do you prophecy, mother?" inquired Mr. Kemner.

"Man thinks, but God disposes; therefore, I will not prophecy."

But the decision had already been made. The horse took the south road, leading from Lindafors. With tender words, Charles Augustus took leave of his parents, his heart telling him he never loved them more than he did at this moment of separation.

CHAPTER IV.

Several weeks had elapsed since the departure of Charles Augustus; and, upon the arrival of every mail, Mr. Kemner would go for a letter. But none arrived; and then he would complain bitterly to his wife of his son's neglect. She found her consolation in keeping her son's room in order, and carefully brushing the dust from the decoy birds, which, in company with several stuffed specimens of the real birds, were placed against the wall opposite the bed.

It had never been Mistress Agneta's custom of complaining over any misfortune that might befall her; for she pretended to know by experience that women were made for misfortune, and that misfortune was not made for women. Ruled by this principle, which would have been an unfortunate one in a woman of a different temperament, she did not let her husband know that she mourned the absence of her son. When her husband grumbled she would remain silent, and when he was silent she would sing a little song, one which she used to sing when the blue coat was first made, which was afterwards crowned with such great success. When she sang this little song the old man would look cheerful, and when she ceased he would say:

"Commence again, Agneta."

"Good, good Agneta," said he one day from his corner of the sofa, as his good wife, with a half-finished stocking in her

hand, commenced singing:

"I see in your deep eyes so bright,
Another one is your delight."

But the rumbling of a coach in the court yard announced the arrival of the mail, and the lady ceased singing.

Mr. Kemner arose, and said with much energy, "he has been gone three weeks to-day. I hope there will be a letter this time."

And there was a letter.

"Read it," implored Mrs. Agneta, striving to govern her impatience.

"As you choose, my dear. From its size I should think that it contains a great deal of news. If it will only prove sufficiently sensible to repay for the trouble of reading it, I shall be satisfied."

"You don't deserve to have a letter," exclaimed his wife, who was annoyed at the expression; and as though her predictions should prove true, it happened, to Mr. Kemner's chagrin and surprise, that the greater part of the letter consisted of blank paper. The sheet was large, but Charles Augustus had written but a few lines, which were as follows:

"DEAR PARENTS:—Ten days have passed since I arrived at the small village of Grenna. It is beautifully situated at the base of a high mountain, the sides of which are clothed with verdure. The mountain overhangs the small dwelling-houses of the village until it seems to threaten them with destruction. It has but one street, and is, therefore, very quiet, and it gladdens my soul to see the small and neat gardens which are in front of the pretty cottages."

"Confound such nonsense!" exclaims Mr. Kemner "What is to be made out of this? I should like to know whether he visited the Burgomaster of Grenna, who is an old friend of mine; and, if I had known that Charles Augustus was going there, I should have given him a letter of introduction."

"Perhaps something is said about it yet. You have not yet finished the letter."

"No, not a word about it," said Mr. Kemner, as he resumed his reading of the letter.

"Nothing of any importance has yet happened me." (*"That's easily to be known," grumbled the old man, adjusting his spectacles; "what would ever happen to a man who never notices anything."*) "I have made no acquaintances yet—(*"how stupid!"*)

"O, do be silent and read on," interrupted Mistress Agneta, impatiently; "he has not yet had time to run around the village to call upon strangers. It is not his manner of making acquaintances to be so fast about it."

"Very true, my love; and, as it is not his humor to do so, he should have remained at home, for it seems that he sees nothing abroad which he cannot find here."

"How unjust! Did he not write about the village and steep mountain? I pity the poor people that live there; and don't he write about the little gardens there, too?"

"Little gardens, indeed," said the old gentleman, skillfully mimicking the sentimental manner of his wife; "that is very remarkable; but he don't say a word about the kind of trees or plants that grow there. But let us finish the letter."

"There is something cozy in the idea of being alone by yourself, (*"Yes, that is what he calls cozy,"*) and I have occupied my time in looking at all the remarkable things that are to be seen in the surrounding country. My first visit was to Visingsoe, that living monument of the time when the nobility possessed greater powers than many a petty king. I then visited the castle of Brahehecs, which is located upon a neighboring mountain. This old ruin, even in its now crumbling state, will last for centuries before it sinks into general decay.

"I shall continue my travels further to enjoy the beauties of the scenery around Lake Welter. I will soon write again, and now subscribe myself.

"Your
affectionate
son,

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired the old man, sarcastically. "Do you now know where he is, what he is doing, what acquaintances he has made? It would have been just as well if he had not written at all."

"O, I think it is a good, good letter," said his wife. "Give it to me, that I may read it alone by myself."

"With all my heart; but I insist that he should have had a higher aim. Although Grenna is a petty village, it has quite a brisk trade in cattle, and I should have liked to have heard about it."

Eight days after another letter arrived, bearing the postmark "Hjo." As Mr. Kemner was not at home his wife opened the letter herself, and read in the familiar writing of her beloved son:

"I write again, and this time from a little village in West Gothland. Hjo bathes its feet in the clear waters of Lake Welter, but is not so romantically situated as Grenna; though the surrounding country is very beautiful. My only objection to it is the dust in the unpaved streets. I have made no acquaintances, but every one I meet appears good natured and hospitable. They look as if they wished to say, 'Don't go around here like a hermit; ask and we will answer.' In the mean time it is quite hard for me to make the first advance; and, even should I do so, I am not certain whether I should be as contented as I now am in my seclusion.

"When I rise in the morning, which I do very early, I go down to the bank of the Lake to see what it is going to do through the day. Lake Welter is the most beautiful as well as the most eccentric of our inland waters. In one moment it will be as smooth as a mirror, and so clear that the fishes can easily be discerned in its depths. In the next moment it will arouse itself, and play such a rough game with its waves that even the Baltic would be envious. Then it is not mere child's play, and, although it is nothing but a lake, its rage strikes one with awe and admiration. It appears the most magnificent in the decline of the evening. Then one may stand upon its shore and look over to the eastern side, where the romantic Omberg towers up in the heavens. The steeples of the surrounding villages glitter in the rays of the setting sun; and when, at length, the sun sinks behind the mountain it leaves its shining marks glowing and quivering on the bosom of the lake, which, according to the belief of the villagers, are the foot-prints of St. Brigitta, as she walks over the lake to Vadstena. All this cannot be witnessed without the beholder confessing that Lake Welter possesses characteristics which can never be forgotten.

"Beyond the southern gate of Hjo, near the shore of the lake, stands a hill called Cossack Hill. I often visit it to think over the events which are said to have occurred there. After the battle of Narva, when a throng of Cossack captives were brought to Sweden, and twenty-five were quartered at Hjo, all of the unfortunate Russians died, and as the village pastor deemed them unworthy of burial in consecrated ground, they were buried together in a hill of sand. But they found no rest in Swedish land, which does not wish to hold a Russian in its lap. Often at night, when the lake is buried in a deep mist, one can see the troop of Cossacks, clothed in their light armor, and mounted on horses, ride over the water, until they vanish in the east, towards their own homes. Even I, one foggy evening, thought I saw them thus engaged. I will now stop, and finish my letter to-morrow.

"At length I can say that I have formed an acquaintance. Every day I looked out upon the lake endeavoring to see a ship, but could discover nothing save a few insignificant fishermen's boats. Last night, however, when I went to the wharf, I saw a full-rigged ship, and a veritable sailor standing upon the dock. This was a grand thing for me, for I have long wished to see a sea vessel, and a genuine sailor, and many moments had not elapsed before I opened a conversation with the Gothland captain. He complained of the exorbitancy of the pilot's fees, and of the difficult passage through the canal. He also grumbled a great deal concerning the chart, which had no landing places designated, so that he was obliged to employ a pilot, which would have been unnecessary had it been otherwise. 'As true as I am an honest man,' said the good captain, 'it cost me fifty-six thalers *banco*, to get into this miserable barber's basin. But,' he added, 'if I once get out, my ship shall never trouble it again.' The old tar appeared to me like a whale which has accidentally found its way out of the broad ocean into a small rivulet.^[1]

"This is all I have to say at present. To-morrow, if the wind is fair, I shall make an excursion over to the Omberg.

"With lasting love,

"Your,

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

It would have been an interesting study to peruse Mistress Agneta's countenance as she read this letter. At the commencement she read rapidly, but when she arrived at the words, "at length I can say that I have formed an acquaintance," a little romance entered her head, and her mortification can be imagined as she found that the acquaintance had nothing to do with a wealthy father and his daughter, but spoke only of an old sea-captain, and then the letter closed. She could not expect much from the next letter, for what would a journey to the Omberg Mountain amount to? "Yes, yes," said she to herself, "everything that Charles Augustus writes is very nice and pleasant, but it could have been made far more entertaining."

Mr. Kemner, however, said, when he read the letter, "That is something at any rate, my dear Agneta. I hardly thought that he would be able to distinguish a fishing-boat from a ship. I find that he is becoming more attentive to what he sees; that which he said of the Gothland captain is not very bad. It proves that he is beginning to think of what he sees and hears. The nonsensical stories of the mountain, lake, and Cossacks, don't amount to much; but as a whole the letter is a very good one. Fill my pipe, Agneta, and brew me a drink. I wonder why he did not go to the Omberg before—but this is just like him."

CHAPTER V.

More impatient than before, Mr. Kemner now awaited the coming of the next letter. It was not long before he received it. It was longer than the two preceding ones, and contained the two departments, as the old man said, one consisting of foolishness and the other of common sense. The letter was dated at Hjo, and written on the evening of Charles Augustus' return from the Omberg. It was as follows:

"BELOVED PARENTS:

"I can now say that I have lived, indeed. Yes; I have really lived during this day, and have had joy, much joy.

"In my last letter I informed you that I intended to ascend the Omberg, the crown of East Gothland. It looks so enticing, when one views it from the opposite shore, that he feels an intense desire to ascend to its summit. So I felt.

"One beautiful morning I hired a small boat, and procuring a couple of stout men to manage the sails, and row the boat, for both sails and oars are necessary here, set sail for the western shores of the lake. I had supplied myself with a chart of the lake, a telescope, and my dear *Oxenstjerna*, ^[2] to amuse myself during the sail. The light breeze, which was favorable on the start, died away, so that our sails were useless. In the mean time, I confess that I was rejoiced at this fact, for I would have had but little pleasure in observing my fresh water sailors had they been obliged to battle against the wind and waves. Their method of managing the sails was very awkward, and their rude attempts with the helm were so ridiculous that the veriest dunce from our sea-coast would have laughed at them. I had no hesitation in telling them so, when one of them answered me quietly, "Well, if we do not go fast, at least, we can go slow." This, of course, I could not contradict; and as the boat was propelled very slowly by their laborious and awkward rowing, I had sufficient time to compare them with our more expert seamen.

"Come here, Calle,' one would say, 'let us drink;' and he would put the flask to his lips with such a cunning twinkle of his eye, that plainly proved how well he liked the liquor. 'Certainly,' the other would reply, and although he did not drink as much, still, by their united efforts, the bottle was soon emptied. The cake, however, which they nibbled at from mouth to mouth, was not half consumed, when seven hours after we arrived at Halsthalm, at the southern base of the mountain.

"During the passage from shore to shore, the grotesque Omberg is to be seen, changing its form as it is approached, until its whole magnificence is disclosed, and one is involuntarily moved with feelings of awe as he looks upon the perpendicular rock, as it springs from the water to its great height. The water is said to be two hundred feet deep at the base of the rock. This is the deepest portion of the lake, and as the other shores are flat, it is supposed that the gigantic mountain was thrown from the bottom of the lake, by some great convulsion of nature, to its present location. But be that as it may, the giant now stands there in all his majesty, raising his forest-crowned head far above the surrounding country, and covered with verdure from base to summit. It is also a protector of mariners, being a landmark that can be seen at a great distance.

"It was sunset when we arrived at Haltshalm. I ordered a room, and after partaking of some refreshments, returned to the boat, and directed my men to row me into the grottoes. This remarkable mountain has at its base large grottoes or caverns—their entrances being so placed that they can be easily entered with a boat. I shall never forget that evening; the sky—the water—every thing was replete with beauty, such as my eye never before beheld, and perhaps will never again behold.

"As the boat glided along upon the smooth surface of the water, the setting sun glowed upon it in purple and gold. It was not water, but liquid gold the oars disturbed. Behind us the moon shone forth from a light purple cloud, which dissolved itself into airy shapes. As the boat shot over the water, the rays of the moon followed in our wake kissing the bubbles of spray, which were encircled with the purple glow of the declining evening, like pearls set in crimson coral. And on that beautiful night, there stood the giant mountain with water at its feet, and the sky its canopy, clothed in a shadowy mist, and the nearer we approached, the more distinctly the open mouth of the mountain-cavern yawned upon us.

"We stopped in front of the Redfork grotto, which is the largest of them all.

"The entrance, or rather doorway—for the mountain bears no small resemblance to a huge castle—is draped grotesquely with overhanging cliffs. On the south side the wall, or rock, is split in twain, admitting light into the cavern. Through this aperture the moonbeams streamed, casting a pale mellow light throughout the cave. Soon, however, the moon hid itself behind a cloud, and night enveloped the Omberg in its dark mantle. From the interior, I thought I could hear long deep-drawn sighs—sighs of the imprisoned spirits of the mountain; or, perhaps it was Queen Omma, from whom, tradition says, the mountain derived its name, who was performing her evening devotions.

"I could scarcely breathe, as the boat slowly entered the dark cavern. The waves dashed sullenly against the black walls, and the flash of the oars was feebly reiterated by a dull echo. The sighs were heard more distinctly as we advanced towards the centre of the mountain.

"But I wished to make the scene as magnificent as possible, so I directed the boat to be landed at the foot of a sloping rock, which I ascended, and having piled up the wood I had brought with me, set fire to it. The bright flames glared out upon the surface of the water, illumining the picturesque objects around me; the craggy roof—the jutting walls—the water—the boatmen, and every thing around me, was lit with supernatural glow, and as I looked, my sensations were such, that pen cannot describe them. Looking towards the ceiling, to my surprise I saw a large bird seated upon a jutting rock springing from the wall. It was dead. Why had it come hither? Why had the free bird of the air sought refuge in the dark bowels of this mountain? Had the storm raged without, and forced him to take refuge here; or had the water suddenly arose and driven him into this cell? Perhaps old age had come upon him, and he stole hither, that he might die in peace as an old hermit, weary of life and liberty. Who can tell? None. With great difficulty I succeeded in dislodging the body of the falcon from its resting place, and preserved the wings to take home with me. I again returned to the boat, and ordered the men to push out into the Lake. The moon shone clearly upon the blue waters—for now that evening had fairly set in, nature assumed its ordinary garb. The flames of my fire arose in the cavern, the sparks rising in the darkness; and when far from it on the water, its appearance was enchanting and mysterious. We continued our sail towards the north, passing the mouth of several caverns; but none

of them were so remarkable as the Redfork."

Thus far Mr. Kemner and his wife had perused the letter in silence, for before he commenced he had promised not to interrupt himself by remarks. Suddenly his promises and good intentions lost their power. With a crafty "What nonsense!" Mr. Kemner at length gave vent to the impatience which for a long time had boiled within him.

"Well, what is the matter now?" inquired his wife, who foresaw the coming storm.

"What is the matter? I don't know, but I know this much, that a man must be a fool who would fill two whole sheets with nothing but "enchanted sky," purple sea, and charming mountain scenery. I almost think that the boy is possessed with the devil. Did he not commence sensibly and modestly? And when he explained the difference between a fresh water sailor and the seafaring man, my heart leaped with joy. But now he is carried into the stream, which is wilder than the mill race at our foundry, and now you see how his mill is driven. It's all nonsense, nothing but fantasy, romantic sentimentalities of dead falcons, which would do for a lovesick girl, but do not become the heir of an iron foundry and—"

"Your landed property," added his wife.

"Yes, indeed, my landed property. Shall my wheat-fields be cultivated with falcon wings and purple waters? Give me my pipe and the newspaper."

"Then I will read the rest myself."

"You might as well leave it until to-morrow. I am certain there is nothing in it that will repay you for the trouble."

But whether the newspaper was not interesting, or whether Mr. Kemner, despite his pretended anger, was really anxious to read the letter, we cannot say; but he soon cast aside the paper with "Let us hear the rest of the nonsense."

Agneta filled a tumbler with foaming beer, and presenting it to Mr. Kemner, said,

"And now what does he say more?"

"Ah!" replied the old man, drawing a sigh of satisfaction as he wiped the beer-foam from his lips. "You brew an excellent beer, dear Agneta. I do not believe there is another glass of beer like it in Lindafors. But now we will proceed with the letter."

——"I remained at Hoestholm all that night, and arose the next morning quite early, to see as much of the mountain as possible. The country around about is highly favored by nature. The road winds along through large fields of waving rye, green meadows, lonely valleys, and forests of beech. But the ruins of the monastery of Alvastra attracted my attention most of all."——

"God save us now!" said the old man; "if he begins to talk about old monasteries, then farewell to all common sense."

"My dear John," said his wife, "it would be better if you would go on, for your criticisms are very much in the way, and not sensible either. As for monasteries, it can be said, at least, thank God, that there are no more, and that is something sensible, at any rate."

"Well, then, be silent and listen."

——"I entered the ruins, which were supported by huge wooden arches which have bade defiance to centuries. The wind whistled through the hollow walls, from which, in olden times, many a prayer ascended, and so holy did it seem that I felt as though I could pray myself, and repented of many a thought, and many an act, and many hours spent in idleness. But afterwards I became so elated that I felt as though I could join in the chorus with the birds of the air, who were chanting loudly from their resting places amid the branches of the trees."——

"Ahem," said the old gentleman; "I hope these sentiments have taken root. But let us go on."

——"I contemplated the ruins of the cells, and sighed for those who once lived there, longing for the joy and endearments of life. I saw also the ruins of the apartment which I am sure was the one in which the young novice was received after she had exchanged her worldly garb for the costume of the order, and had consecrated herself to

the church. But I will write no more of this, for the sake of my dear father."——

"Good, my brave boy, that is the most sensible remark you have made. In the mean time, dear Agneta, I am glad he visited the monastery, for his thoughts were quite good while among the ruins."

——"I had half completed my journey to the summit of the mountain, from whence I hoped to have a grand view of the surrounding country; but I found before I arrived there that I would have to engage a guide. I advanced to the gate of a large park, at the end of which stood a red cottage, which looked comfortable and pleasant as the rays of the sun shone upon it through the green branches of the trees. I, however, did not enter, for a peasant boy happened to pass by, and offered his services as guide. He informed me that the house was the residence of the Chief Forester. I went on my way regretting that I had not had an opportunity of entering the house, for I never before was so much attracted to a particular spot."——

"Has he become insane?" said Mr. Kemner, turning to his wife.

Mistress Agneta contented herself with a "How can you talk so!" but from the expression of her countenance the old man saw that she, too, was dissatisfied.

——"I will not detain you with long descriptions, but will merely say that, after a long and fatiguing journey, I arrived safely at the top of the mountain, and was rewarded for my trouble far beyond my most sanguine expectations. My eye could roam from East Gothland to West Gothland, from Smaland to Nerike. I could see six villages, nearly sixty churches, and, far off in the western horizon, I could see the peak of the Kinnekulle. Like an immense carpet the lake lay spread out at my feet, jewelled by the rays of the sun. On one side stood Visingsoe, and on the other side the Virgin. In fact, all nature appeared like one immense panorama. I must confess, however, that neither my soul nor heart has yet found a resting-place.

"The morning had nearly passed before I commenced my descent. Before doing so, however, I stopped to read the many names which were inscribed on the stone which is said to mark the grave of the mystic queen Omma. This species of fame I did not court, so my name will not appear against me as guilty of sacrilege.

"As I descended the winding path several ideas presented themselves to my mind; but I now remember that father dislikes such sentiments, and I will, therefore, not insert them. Before I left the mountain I made a visit to the eleven beech trees, and here, at length, I met with an adventure. But what do I see? It is nearly ten o'clock, and at that hour the mail closes. I shall, therefore postpone the narration of my adventure until my next letter, and wishing my parents all joy,

"I am their,

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

Although Mrs. Kemner, as we have already said, was determined never to complain at disappointments, her elongated countenance, however, spoke more plainly than words. The old man, on the contrary, although quite vexed that Charles Augustus had deferred his adventure until the close of the letter, could not refrain from saying:

"Well, good wife, what do we know? We have just reached a point where something was to happen; when, as quick as thought, the clock strikes ten, and the mail is ready to close."

CHAPTER VI.

Throughout the whole night Mrs. Kemner was restless, and wakeful, thinking of the adventure that Charles Augustus had hinted at in his letter. Although always composed in the presence of her husband, as well as in her domestic duties, still, when alone, she frequently gave way to the most singular whims. Nay! she would have been a downright enthusiast, if her connection with Mr. Kemner, who was a purely worldly-minded man, had not forced her to control her imagination.

After the old man had gone to the foundry the next morning, she called her old servant Eliza, and bade her go immediately to Soedratörp, and order an old woman who bore the title of Old Cart, to come to the mansion as soon as possible. Eliza immediately understood why the old woman was sent for, and knew that if she went immediately she would profit by it. She therefore paid but little attention to Mrs. Kemner's exhortations that the old woman must be brought through the back door; but hastened on her errand.

Before we introduce the old woman to our readers, it will be well to give an explanation of who she was, and why she bore her uncouth name. She had lived, from youth in the house of Mrs. Kemner's parents, where her time was employed in attending to the wants of Agneta. After Agneta was married, Margaret accompanied her to Lindafors. As Mrs. Kemner was an exceedingly sensitive woman, she frequently had unhappy moments, and at such times, she would pour her grievances into the willing ear of her faithful servitor. But Margareta was not one who would assent to everything her mistress said. She was possessed of a certain refinement, and as she was more sensible than her mistress, she would tell her how wrong it was to complain of things which had no existence. Nay, it was through Margareta's influence that Mrs. Kemner, instead of a sentimental sighing woman, was a lively and thrifty housekeeper. Some time after the marriage of her mistress, Margareta married also, and from this circumstance she gained her uncouth nick-name. Although her husband had applied for permission to change his name, Cart, because his wife was called Old Cart; and it was accordingly changed to Easy, it was still worse, for then their witty neighbors would call her Easy Cart.

Margareta was now a widow and lived in a small cabin near the mansion. She was now, as ever, an indispensable counsellor for her former mistress. During the latter years she had taken up the business of fortune-telling, and was considered throughout the country as a true oracle. All maidens without suitors, and all trembling lovers, visited old Easy Cart. Nay, even those of the higher classes would visit her lowly cabin. And, at this time, Mistress Agneta, as she ever had done, determined to call Margareta in counsel, concerning the matter which so sorely troubled her.

Mrs. Kemner walked the room uneasily. She well knew that her husband, although generally very mild, would be highly displeased did he suppose that his wife had stooped to the folly of employing a common fortune-teller to assist her in unravelling the secret of her son. But what difference would it make? Easy Cart would be there in a few moments, and all would be over in half-an-hour, and Mr. Kemner be none the wiser, for he never returned home from the foundry until nearly dinner-time.

"Welcome, Margareta," said Mrs. Kemner kindly, as her guest entered the room through the back-door of the dairy room, which had been chosen as the spot where Charles Augustus' future fate was to be exposed. "I hope that you have brought your pack of cards. I did not think to speak to Elizabeth about them."

Margareta made a deep bow to her old mistress, and having taken off the white handkerchief which she had tied over her bonnet to preserve it from the rays of the sun, she whispered,

"I have; I thought of them because I was told to come through the *back* door."

"Sit down, dear Margareta," and they both sat down upon a bench, on which was placed pans of fresh milk, and which was near a table covered with cream pots, skimmers and other dairy utensils.

"Will you not have some bread and fresh milk, while I tell you all about why I sent for you?"

The invitation was accepted, and Mrs. Kemner commenced: "You know, my dear Margareta, that Charles Augustus was never very fond of the girls; you also know that he is now upon a journey, and, although I had not the courage to tell him, yet I am and was sure that, during this journey, he will meet the one whom he will love. Yet until now—eat, Margareta, I know the bread and milk are good—until yesterday I never knew that he had met with one. In his last letter he speaks of an adventure, and does not tell what it was, for the mail was just starting. However, he said that he would speak of it in his next letter. But I am sure that no adventure will happen to my Charles Augustus without a woman having something to do with it, and if this should be the case, no one can tell how it will turn out. You now know what I mean; but we have

no time to lose, for my husband might return."

Margaretta did not reply; but removing cream-pots, skimmers, and pans from the table, took from her pocket a greasy pack of cards, and wetting her finger with her tongue, commenced shuffling and dealing the cards.

"Well, how does it come out?"

"Patience, madame; this art is not to be hurried."

"How? speak!"

"I wish to think before I speak," replied Easy Cart. "You must have patience, madame. I cannot solve it so soon." And her face assumed a still more important expression.

"I hope he is well. Tell me that, at least."

"Yes; he is well."

But whoever was acquainted with the real object of the old woman, would have readily seen that her evasive answers were thrown out only to increase the mystery of her art.

"Speak out. Does nothing of love appear?"

"No; nothing yet; but, I think, it is not far off. Mr. Charles Augustus seems to have been quarrelling with some one; but everything else is indistinct."

"Does the quarrel look dangerous?"

"O, no; I think not. At all events, it is over."

"O, I hope no accident has happened him. How I wish I never had thought of looking into these abominable cards!"

"Rest easy; the cloud vanishes as soon as it comes. I will read the cards again."

Mrs. Kemner awaited the next words of the oracle with the utmost impatience; but as the old woman had just laid the last card in its place, Mr. Kemner's heavy steps were heard in the hall. Mrs. Kemner turned pale, and would have swooned had not Margaretta, with that presence of mind which never deserted her, thrown the pack of cards into a large jar filled with milk, pressing them down into the milk until they were completely covered.

In the mean time Mrs. Kemner was in great fear, for she remembered she had taken the key out of the lock. She quietly unlocked the door, and was rejoiced that her husband did not seem to notice that she had been closeted with Easy Cart, whom he saluted in a friendly manner. She told him that she had come to advise with Mrs. Kemner in relation to the wedding of her daughter, which would soon take place. She did not know what to think about it, for the young man, Jerker, was a nice young man, but very poor.

"O, I hope they will get along," said the unsuspecting Mr. Kemner, as he seated himself on the bench. Mechanically, he took up a spoon, which laid on the table, and began probing and stirring the contents of the milk jars.

"I wish you would not do so," said Mrs. Kemner. "You will spoil the cream."

"Excuse me, I was not thinking;" and not wishing to place the spoon upon the cleanly-scoured table, he thrust it into the large milk jar that stood on the floor, the very one in which the cards had been concealed. Unfortunately, one of the cards had the impoliteness to arise to the surface of the milk. Mr. Kemner surmised what had been going on, and quickly stirred up the contents of the jar, disclosing many more of the dangerous papers. Mrs. Kemner trembled and turned pale, and even Easy Cart lost her presence of mind. Mr. Kemner, however, said nothing, but immediately left the room.

"O, how will all this turn out!" exclaimed Mrs. Kemner.

"Do not be alarmed," said Margaretta, consolingly. "Act as though nothing at all had happened. It was fortunate that he was so angry that he could not speak, for now his anger will cool, and you will have time to devise some plan of escape."

"Alas! I do not know what to do," said Mrs. Kemner.

"The truth is, that when he is angry it frightens me very much, although I conceal my feelings from him."

"O, this can easily be remedied. It was just so with me when my poor Easy and I quarrelled; but I was not to be trod upon, and carried my head all the higher. Do not be afraid, therefore, everything will turn out right."

But Mrs. Kemner could not be so easily consoled. Her anxiety concerning Charles Augustus, and her vexation at her own folly, troubled her so much, that she could hardly wait for her husband to speak about it first. He did not say anything, however, and she had almost forgotten that her husband had cause for anger, when she was reminded of it in a very painful manner. They were seated at the dinner-table when Charles Augustus' long expected letter came to hand. But as the book-keeper was present, it did not appear strange to the anxious mother that Mr. Kemner placed the letter in his coat pocket. But how different were her feelings when, after dinner, she asked her husband why he did not open the letter, she received the answer, "Because, I wish to wait until I am alone in my own room."

"O, no," entreated she. "Open the letter now."

"No! I say no, as true as my name is John Kemner. For eight days you shall not see it, to punish you for your foolishness in endeavoring to look into futurity by means of those silly cards."

For a moment Mrs. Kemner thought she would entreat him with tears, but she would not grant him that triumph. Her only consolation during the long eight days was in her husband's look of composure, from which she believed that the letter contained no bad news. But she vowed never again to endeavor to penetrate into futurity.

CHAPTER VII.

At length the eighth day arrived; and Mr. Kemner, faithful to his word, handed the long wished for letter to his wife early in the morning. "Forgive me, my dear Agneta," said he, "if your punishment has been too severe; I only carried it out, for the sake of the effect it would have upon you. Why did you not ask me to show you the letter?"

Woman has always been cunning, and Mrs. Kemner did not belie her sex. "I thought that I deserved this punishment," answered she.

By this, Mrs. Kemner regained the former esteem and love of her husband. She now eagerly grasped for the letter; the cause of disobedience, her punishment and repentance.

Mr. Kemner left the room, and with beating heart she read as follows:—

"DEAR PARENTS—

"At the conclusion of my last letter, I was about mentioning the visit I made at the *Eleven Beeches*; this name is derived from a very remarkable beech tree, that grows there. It is a very large tree; and from the trunk, about two feet from the ground, several large trees spring forth. In olden times there were twelve, and the tree was called the Apostle tree. A fanatic, however, thought it wrong that Judas should be in company with the other Apostles, he therefore lopped off one of the trees, and it is now simply called the Eleven Beeches. There are only nine of the eleven now remaining; and three of these will soon follow their comrades. The branches of the other six are so woven together that they form an uncouth room, which might contain six or eight persons; and are so free from decay, that they seem as though they would last for centuries. I went to this singular room, which no person would leave unvisited. I now repent saying in my last letter that I had met with an adventure; for it was nothing but an every-day occurrence."

"Ah, ha!" said Mrs. Kemner, drawing a deep breath. "There's his old modesty."

"No adventure happened me; but as I stepped forth from the thick underbrush, which surrounds the Eleven Beeches, and looked towards the tops of the trees, I beheld a young lady—and that was all. I did not speak to her; and in truth she did not see me. I could see her face distinctly, however, and I must confess that I never before beheld such a beautiful and kindly looking countenance. She was busily engaged in sewing; but frequently ceased her work to pat the head of a little fawn—which stood close by the trunk of the tree—fondling at her feet. Occasionally she would look up towards the branches of the trees in which her feathered friends were singing joyful songs. At length she commenced singing; and the tones of her voice, fell upon my ear like the soft murmurs of an Æolian harp. I could have listened to her for hours; but although I scanned her closely, I am not able to say whether her eyes were black, or blue; her hair dark, or light; or whether she was large, or small. I saw the whole, only; and this whole appeared like the image of modesty and beauty, shunning the contaminating touch of the earth, and finding refuge between heaven and earth. But suddenly, I was disturbed from my reverie, by a harsh voice:

"Alma, Alma; what are you doing? Do you think the clock has run down?"

"I cannot describe how much was my grief when I saw the girl shrink back at the sound of this voice, as though in the utmost fear. She hastened from the tree; but before she could disengage herself from the bushes, a man—with a countenance which I will ever remember—stepped out from among some underbrush toward her.

"He was an old man, but of remarkable agility. He was tall and slim; but his every motion evinced great strength. His sharp features betokened boldness and resolution. His glittering black eyes indicated a power of conception wonderful in one so old. He was clothed in a dark-colored dressing-gown. On his head he wore a green hunting-cap ornamented with a cockade. He held a pipe in one hand, and under his arm he carried a bamboo cane. In his other hand he held a watch which he extended towards the girl, angrily exclaiming—'Show me yours!'

"Ah! papa,' replied she, 'I cannot tell why I forgot myself so;' she bowed over and kissed his hand. The old gentleman snatched it away, as though he was fearful of being moved to compassion.

"You are a sentimental goose, Alma,' said he, (looking sternly upon the trembling girl.) 'Yes, confound it, you are an unbearable little goose, which is as little fit to be the daughter of a chief forester, as my poorest rifle. Answer; and do not look at the grass with your blue eyes, instead of your father.'

"Papa'—

"Papa, papa; yes, that is all you know. If your poor, dead mother was alive—for although she made me angry twenty times a day, still she was a good woman, a perfect pattern—she would be ashamed of you, to know that you had forgotten to prepare dinner, and stand there as silent as a statue.'

"But what shall I say, dear father?' said she, vainly striving to look into her father's face.

"Say—say what you please; but don't stand there like a cod-fish. O, my poor wife! when she was alive, I could eat twice as much as now. Anger created an appetite. Such a woman never before lived, or will live again. But go home now, and look sharp. I tell you when the clock strikes three, coffee must be ready and on the table.'

"The girl was about to hasten away, when her father called her back. And now I could have kissed the old fellow's hand; for with the same severity of tone, but with a different expression in his eyes, he said, 'Kiss me, girl.' His daughter flung her arms around his neck; and her cheeks crimsoned with joy, as he pressed another kiss upon her brow, and then she disappeared in the undergrowth as she descended the side of the mountain, followed by her pet fawn.

"And this was my adventure; I had seen the chief forester and his daughter.

"I returned to Hjo, in the evening, and intend remaining here a few days longer, to look over upon the beautiful Omberg, and to witness the Cossacks, as they roam in the evening, over the surface of the lake.

"And that is all," said Mrs. Kemner, as she refolded the letter. "I am afraid he will go away without seeing the girl again." But still the matter was of sufficient importance to warrant a consultation with old Margareta. And, although the cards were not studied this time; still, Easy Cart could give her some advice. For instance: "Mrs. Kemner should take good care not to interfere in the matter; for love was like young spinach, which is so tender that a single leaf cannot be dissevered, without destroying the entire plant."

"You always know what to say, my good Margareta," said Mrs. Kemner, "and I thank you for your good counsel. In the mean time I will cultivate the spinach, as much as possible, if it proves to be a plant at all."

But we will now leave Lindafors, and conduct our readers to Charles Augustus, in person.

CHAPTER VIII.

Charles Augustus was still at Hjo, ten days after his first visit at Omberg.

Every day he would say to himself, "Well, I must go to-morrow, surely;" but the morrow would come and find him sitting upon his favorite seat, a grassy knoll close to the waters of the lake. Whether the old proverb of that country, "Whoever has the dust of Hjo on his shoes, will find it difficult to leave," would have proved true with Charles Augustus, is hard to say, if he had not become acquainted with one of the villagers, who had for a long time wished an opportunity of speaking to the youthful stranger. He, therefore, accosted him one day, asking if he could not be of some service to him. The conversation in the first place related to the lake; next to Visingsoe, and at length, although Charles Augustus endeavored to evade it, to the Omberg and its singularities.

"Well," inquired the villager, "how did you like the old mountain, with its rocks and trees? Did you visit the Virgin?"

"The Virgin?" stammered the youth; and if he had not remembered the old gentleman, with his rough voice and bright eye, he would have thought the whole scene at the Eleven Beeches nothing but a dream. "What do you mean?" he inquired, after a moment's reflection. "Do you mean the island?"

"No; do you not know that the western shore of the lake is lined with large fantastically shaped rocks, which are named according to their forms; for instance, the Virgin, the Monk, the Pulpit, and various others. These are what I mean. The Virgin, however, is of a different color from the rest, being light yellow, while all the others are black. She is mounted on a huge black rock, and is an object of admiration to all who visit the Omberg."

"Then I must visit the Omberg again," exclaimed Charles Augustus, with a vivacity altogether uncommon with him. Rejoiced that he had a pretext to visit the Omberg, he heartily thanked the stranger for his communication, and hastened to his room to make preparations for his trip the next morning. The morning came, and it was warm and sultry. The lake was still and blue, and every object upon its bosom could be seen with the utmost distinctness. Sails were of no avail, and it was a long time before Charles Augustus arrived with his boat propelled by oars alone at Hoestholm.

But it is not without cause that Lake Welter is celebrated far and near for its fickleness. A slight breeze first arose, gently filling the sails of the vessel, which had been hoisted to take advantage of every breath of air. Then it suddenly increased, until a very hurricane swept across the lake, lashing the waters into fury. The boat was left at the mercy of the waves, and the men, although they worked manfully, could not control it. Occasionally Charles Augustus could see the Red Fork Cave, as the waves beat high up upon the rocky shore, rushing far above the mouth of the cavern, and then receding, leaving it visible, dark and reeking. It resembled the mouth of an enormous monster drinking huge waves of water, and then forcibly ejecting them. But it is not our intention to weary the reader with a description of the lake. After much exertion Charles Augustus safely reached the shore, and took up his old quarters at Hoestholm. The storm abated in the afternoon, and the sun shone forth clear and bright, and Charles Augustus determined upon another journey to the

Omberg.

The air was filled with perfume and the sun shone with mellow rays. A breeze would occasionally sweep the mountain, leaving a gentle coolness. The flowers and grass bathed themselves in the fresh pearls which the rain had left.

Charles Augustus was a true admirer of nature, and as he walked along under the shade of the beech and linden trees, he experienced a soothing sensation of joy, which, however, did not prevent him from meditating how he might be able to gain an entrance to the house of the Chief Forester. But he could think of no plan by which he could effect his object. The most simple one, to enter and ask for a glass of water, was not to be thought of; for the celebrated monastery well was close at hand, with its cup ready to refresh the thirsty traveller. He determined, however, to summon sufficient courage to enter the wicket gate of the park, at least, if he did not go farther. "The rest," thought he, "will come of its own accord."

While our hero was thus meditating, and conning over all the advantages with which nature had endowed him, the sky suddenly became overcast, and he thought that the shower would furnish his best excuse for entering the Chief Forester's house. But it was some distance to the house, and the hovering black clouds plainly betokened that the storm would come on before he could arrive there.

A vivid flash of lightning streamed athwart the sky, the thunder followed in deafening peals, and a wind arose which seemed as though it would shake the mountain from its very centre. The clouds became dark save when illumined by the frequent flashes of lightning. The dust and sand rose in great clouds, borne along by the whirling wind, and the rain commenced falling in torrents. Charles Augustus hurried on and was rejoiced when he found shelter in the ruins of the cloister of St. Alvastra.

For nearly half an hour he stood here listening to the resounding thunder, and watching the storm with mingled awe and admiration. Suddenly he thought he saw, as a flash of lightning streamed forth, the fluttering of a female dress, seeming to belong to one who had sought refuge from the storm in an old arched doorway. He could see nothing plain without looking out of the door of his cell, so he placed his head forth into the tempest, and with beating heart recognized the fair one who for the last few days had constantly occupied his thoughts.

Around her head she had placed a white handkerchief, displacing the bonnet which was lying at her feet. She was seated upon a stone, resting her head upon her hand.

"Is she afraid, or does she pray?" thought Charles Augustus. If either was the case, he thought it would not be advisable to show himself. She uplifted her head, her face was deathly pale, tears were in her eyes, and she clasped her hands closely together. In his anxiety to behold the damsel, Charles Augustus forgot to withdraw his head, and as she turned her head to look at the storm, Alma, with a slight cry, discovered him.

It was now impossible for him to remain longer where he was. Her extreme timidity emboldened him, so stepping forth from his place of refuge he advanced towards her. She trembled, which Charles Augustus perceived, and hastened to reassure her. "Pardon me, I have only taken refuge from the storm as well as yourself." As he said this, he bowed gracefully and politely, which salute Alma returned with timidity, mingled however, with pleasure at having a companion.

"If I can be so bold as to offer my services, I should be happy to go to the mansion yonder and procure a carriage for you. And if you would permit me——"

"O, no, do not," said she with much apparent agitation. "I live near by, and the rain will soon be over. I can then return."

"To the Chief Forester's house," exclaimed Charles Augustus, and immediately blushed at the thought that he had betrayed his secret.

"Yes, he is my father."

"I will no longer intrude," said Charles Augustus, after a few moments of silence. "I will go to yonder arch."

Alma gazed up into his face and her cheek glowed with a delicate blush as with open frankness she said, "I am afraid to be left alone."

Charles Augustus was happier than he had ever been before. *She* certainly did not know that he was the heir of a rich

father, and he advanced closer to his beautiful neighbor.

They again were silent, save only a few remarks concerning the storm. Sometimes they would both look out into the vacant space of the ruin, and when they withdrew their eyes their gaze would meet, and confused they would sink to the wooden floor. Suddenly a vivid flash of lightning more brilliant than any of its predecessors, illumined all objects until they seemed in flame, followed by such a tremendous crash of thunder that it seemed as though the earth's centre was shaken. For a few moments Charles Augustus was stupefied, but when he saw a huge column of smoke ascending from the centre of the ruin he recovered his presence of mind, and lifting Alma carefully in his arms, bore her through flame and stifling smoke into the road. He did not stop here, however, but hurried on with her as fast as he possibly could.

Alma remained senseless, her head reclining upon his bosom, when suddenly the horrible thought flashed upon him that she might have been struck by the lightning. He laid her upon the grass, and to his joy discovered that she had only fainted. He then attempted to resuscitate her, when a voice but too familiar to him, cried out roughly, "Let the girl alone. If she wants assistance I am at hand myself."

Quicker than if a deluge of Cologne had been poured upon her, Alma revived at the sound of her father's voice. It would have been a novel sight for an uninterested beholder to have witnessed the rapidity of the old man, as with cane in hand and pipe in mouth, he ran towards the youthful couple.

"Well, what is matter?" said he to the somewhat confused Charles Augustus. "What are you doing with the girl, and what do you mean, Alma, to faint away in the high road for the pleasure of wandering knights?"

"Papa," stammered Alma, looking tenderly upon her father, "the lightning struck the old ruins, and I would have been burned if——"

"Nonsense! burned! And pray sir, what was your business in the ruins. I do not admire such romance."

"Perhaps you would have been more pleased never to have seen your daughter again," replied Charles Augustus, somewhat irritated.

He had hardly uttered these words, when the old man made a spring into the air which would have been the envy of a much younger person. "Sir!" he exclaimed with an indescribable comical air, "Is that the way to speak to an old man like me? Thank God, *I* have no son, and your father would do so also should he be deprived of the pleasure of being called your papa."

Charles Augustus did not know whether to be angry or merry, but, at all hazards, he desired to gain the old man's good will, and therefore answered politely, "My father would not lose much if that was the case; but then I would have lost the opportunity of forming an acquaintance which I hope," here Charles Augustus took advantage of the moment, "will not cease where it has commenced."

"Ah! your very obedient servant; and why not," said the Chief Forester, who was evidently adverse to this short acquaintanceship. "Do you think that it is my duty to perform here, upon the high road, a little drama; that I should bless you, make a speech to you, because you have saved the life of my daughter? No, no; put those thoughts out of your head. I am not so old but that I can remember the time when I was young myself, and what do you think I would have given for such an adventure as this? To save such a beautiful girl as Alma from death, and that in the midst of thunder and lightning,—O, I could not have had more happiness. To be able to carry such a beautiful girl in my arms," here his eyes glistened with pride, "I would have dared death itself!"

"Papa, papa," whispered Alma, gently shaking her father's arm; "please do not talk thus."

"Aye! aye! my little lamb, be silent and thank God that you have a father who can take care of a girl only seventeen years old. But——" and here he turned towards Charles Augustus, "I must now take my daughter home. Again I congratulate you upon your romantic adventure. Your very obedient servant."

And before Charles Augustus could regain his composure, the old man was conducting his daughter towards his home. Charles Augustus remained standing upon the spot, gazing towards the departing girl. Alma turned her head and gave him a parting salute, and then he thoughtfully left the place.

CHAPTER IX.

At the time when the incidents of our story occurred, the residence of the Chief Forester of the Royal Park of Omberg was only one story high, and did not display by far so neat an appearance as the present one. But the old hunter's energy, his strict sense of order, and the vigor of youth, which he retained even in his old age, were everywhere to be seen. The neat garden, as well as his private rooms, presented a correct copy of his character. On the left of the hall was the kitchen, which played an important part in the business of the house. On the right was the parlor, and at extremity was the Chief Forester's private rooms, consisting of a small recess and a large apartment, which were his all in all. In the hall there hung a large black tablet which bore the inscription that, at a certain time, several members of the royal family had taken breakfast at this house during their visit to the mountain, after having condescended to shoot, with their own exalted hands, a dozen stags in the park. This tablet, during the reign of the predecessor of the present Chief Forester, had graced the parlor; but now it was ignominiously hung behind the hall door.

More conspicuously, however, were displayed the antlers of several stags, concerning each of which the old man could relate a story of his youthful exploits. It is a singular fact, that this man who, at first sight, appeared rude and harsh, was, at the bottom, a person of the warmest sentiments. He would often break off in the midst of a thrilling hunting story, and relate, with tearful eyes, how much it grieved him when the poor stag turned its imploring gaze towards him, as it was struggling in the agonies of death. "I can see this very moment," he would say, "how the poor creature implored for mercy; but I do not like to speak of such things. I never liked to kill a dumb animal, even if it was a poor magpie."

But we will return to the hall again.

The opposite side was hung with rifles, pistols, and shotguns, together with powder-flasks, game-bags, shot-pouches, and the feathers of birds, all arrayed in an artistic and attractive manner. In one corner stood a stuffed bear, erected upon his hinder extremities, a memento of youthful hunting excursions. The balance of the space was occupied with a few minor hunting utensils, volumes of romances, and other articles which the old man considered of little value. The furniture was clumsy and old-fashioned, consisting of high-backed chairs with leathern cushions, and a large table drawn up in front of the windows, and surmounted with a vase of beautiful flowers. We will now enter the old man's *sanctum*, a cheerful-looking apartment. Against the wall, between the stove and bedstead, were suspended three rifles of the choicest workmanship, and, mingled with them, their appurtenances,—powder-flask, game-bag, and shot-pouch, and also a telescope, two hunting caps, a knotty cane, a hunting horn, a brace of pistols, and several hunting whips. An uninitiated beholder might have thought these collections rather odd chamber companions; but one who was acquainted with the daily avocations of their owner, would have known how useful they were to him, and had been so to-day the same as yesterday, and yesterday the same as forty years before. Directly opposite, on the other side of the stove, were several other remarkable objects, besides the extensive collection of pipes. The writing-desk in one room, with its pigeon-holes neatly labelled, excelled that of many belonging to gentlemen of a higher rank. The table near the window was strewn with pamphlets and magazines, which were taken away at certain seasons and replaced by those of later dates. The old ones were placed among the romances in the hall, or, if worthy, neatly bound, and placed in the library in the parlor, which contained the books by the best writers in all branches of science and literature.

The Chief Forester was a man of extensive attainments, and kept pace with the times in which he lived, and would have been ashamed could he not have spoken of every writer of his own country, from the most celebrated to the most unimportant. On a little table placed before a luxurious sofa, for the old man loved his ease, were placed the newspapers of the day, assisted by which he wiled away an hour after dinner, until he had read himself to sleep.

A portrait hung immediately over the sofa. The old man prized this portrait above all other things. It was the picture of a beautiful woman, clothed in a graceful morning-gown, reclining upon a sofa. The Chief Forester had been an ardent admirer of the ladies when he was young, and in his old age he had not degenerated, for, as he informed his confidential friends, he saw but a few years before a beautiful lady, at a watering place, who so much attracted his admiration that he begged her to allow him to have her portrait taken. "The picture hung there, where it now is," the old man would say,

"when the husband of the fair one visited my house." "How much that resembles my wife!" exclaimed he, when he first saw the portrait. "Yes, that may be so," I answered. "I do not know whether my guest was pleased with my admiration of his wife or not." The old man would then complacently stroke his chin, and his eye would twinkle roguishly.

The Chief Forester was quite advanced in years when he married, and his choice had been so fortunate, that the death of his wife, which occurred two years before the date of our story, was a source of the utmost grief to him. She deserved his love, for none knew so well how to soothe him when angry, or please him when mournful; and the tact which she used in managing his unequal temper was exceedingly successful. He would never have been happy had he not had occasion to quarrel with his wife at least six times a day; for it was his belief that the happiness of marriage consisted in the inequality of character in husband and wife.

The following anecdote is related of the old man: As the twenty-fifth anniversary of his wedding-day approached, his wife was anxious to celebrate her silver wedding-day.^[3] But he answered: "O, no my dear wife, let us wait five years longer, and then we will celebrate the thirty years' war!" But the good woman was not allowed to celebrate either event, for before the silver wedding-day she died; and her husband was so much grieved that for the first year after, he wasted almost to a shadow. After the first year of his widowhood, and he had regained his strength, his only complaint was, that his house was not kept in such good order as when his wife was alive; and although he deeply deplored the loss of his Mary, still he never spoke much concerning her.

The Chief Forester, however, soon discovered that he must have some female hand to assist him in managing his house—not to take the place of his sainted Mary—for that none was able to do. But he must have one to take charge of the house, who possessed sufficient tact and knowledge to preside over the domestic affairs, where a man of his eccentricity ruled.

His little favorite Alma, was competent to do this; but he did not wish her to do so. He was not able to address the sensitive girl—as he called her—in a harsh manner; and if he did so occasionally (for instance when she committed the greatest crime that could be committed in his house, the want of punctuality; to guard against which there were clocks and watches in every room,) he repented immediately after.

"Water your flowers and bake your ginger-cake, my little pigeon," said he to Alma; "but I must have some one here who will not tremble, when I speak roughly." And the Chief Forester searched around the country after a housekeeper, at last finding an old maid who had presided for fifteen years over the household of another widower.

Miss Neta was known far and wide as a skillful and neat housekeeper. Nay, she was not fearful of doing the work of a man. She could saddle a horse, manfully split a log of wood, and swing the scythe bravely. And she would do all this for the purpose of giving the idle maid-servants a good example. But as she also knew how to esteem the usefulness of her qualities, she never would, as she used to say, allow herself to be snubbed. She well knew how to wear her dignity; and even the Chief Forester, when in his anger he would make his highest springs into the air, could not terrify her; for then Miss Neta would also spring into the air with equal agility. And the Chief Forester would either run away angry at being overcome; or else laugh loudly at his singular housekeeper, when she would immediately become calm. Such irruptions, however, were not frequent, and only occurred after extraordinary quarrels. And it was in this, that Miss Neta differed from the late wife of the Chief Forester; she would carry on a conversation with just enough spice to entertain her husband; but had sufficient tact to put an end to it before it had arrived at a boiling point. Miss Neta, however, quarrelled in good earnest, determined to have her own way.

But we will return to our story, and to the day on which Charles Augustus met with his adventure in the ruins of the old monastery.

The Chief Forester had come home from his afternoon excursion in the Park earlier than usual, on account of the storm, and found that Alma had not returned from her visit to the ruins.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, vexed that his favorite should be exposed to the storm. "Zounds! how unfortunate it is to have no wife! A mother would not have allowed her child to go out, when even an idiot might have known it was going to storm."

These words were addressed to Miss Neta, who was standing before the kitchen fire preparing some blackberry jelly. Miss Neta was somewhat piqued at this remark, and answered sharply: "That a girl like Alma, eighteen years old, ought to know what she was about; and that she, (Miss Neta,) was not weather-wise, and was not employed to do the duties of

a barometer!"

"And you are nothing else," cried the Chief Forester, (waving his pipe threateningly in the air.) "Nothing but an old barometer. Have you not got the gout, rheumatism, and a dozen other barometers about you?" "Yes, but I caught them here," screamed Miss Neta, throwing aside the spoon she had held in her hand, "yes, in this leaky old house. But some one should go in search of the poor child. Alma is certainly much frightened; she is too timid yet."

"True," muttered the old man; and placing an old umbrella under his arm, steered his course for the old monastery.

The position in which he found his child, and the sight of her youthful companion were the causes of his harshness to Charles Augustus. The old man had exerted all his ingenuity to prevent young men from visiting his house, for it was a favorite idea of his to marry Alma to a rich old major, in whose honest heart he hoped to find that happiness for his child, which was not to be found in all the protestations and vows of a young lover.

"Love," would he say to Miss Neta, who shared in his paternal hopes and cares, "Love is like a glass of champaign—it is all froth—but fidelity, friendship and respect, are the true juices of life, and a marriage which is founded upon these qualities will always thrive, provided"—and it was for this very reason that he took such pains to bar his door against all young suitors—"provided they do not drink of the sweet draught in advance."

"Well, what were you doing in the ruins?" said the Chief Forester to Alma, as they were riding homeward in a cart which he had hired at a neighboring farmer's. "I hope you were not with him in the ruins."

"Yes, but not very long; he had sought refuge from the storm there, also; and when he saw me, and perceived that I was frightened, he politely came to me. Immediately after, the lightning struck the old building, and what followed I know not."

"Neither is it necessary for you to know," replied the Chief Forester, reassured, "but he is a very pert fellow."

"O, no! he is not," said Alma, contradicting her father for the first time in her life.

"What do you say?" said the old man, full of anger.

But Alma had lost all courage to contradict further, so she chose another weapon. "I feel unwell; it is so cold," said she.

"Poor child!" said her father, throwing his unoccupied arm around Alma's waist. But now the rain descended with renewed violence, and our travellers were rejoiced at the sight of Miss Neta, who was seated in a little cart, driving towards them. When they arrived within sight, the Chief Forester signalled Miss Neta that all was right. Alma was transferred to Miss Neta's cart; and now arose a severe contest as to who should drive. Miss Neta, who had a passion for driving, and was as skillful in the art as a Lieutenant of Dragoons, claimed the right, at all hazards, of holding the reins. His great pride, however, prevented the old man from readily relinquishing his claim. He had no idea of being driven along more like a stick of wood than like the Chief Forester, Nils Bruse. As neither of them would give up, the Chief Forester settled the matter by exerting all his strength in lifting Miss Neta from the front seat into the rear part of the wagon, and, taking the reins himself, drove on. The old maid did not fancy this summary proceeding, and commenced scolding and grumbling; but Alma, mustering courage, spoke mildly to her, and at last smoothed her ruffled feelings.

To their great joy, the party arrived safely home, and Alma, after patting the head of her little fawn, who welcomed her with many demonstrations of joy, retired to her apartment. The old man changed his wet clothes, and Miss Neta busied herself in preparing a cup of warm tea. Alma, however, thought of nothing save the handsome youth, who had so bravely saved her life. She vainly endeavored not to think of the young man in any other light than her preserver; but she could not help regretting that her father had treated the stranger so rudely that he must have been shocked and angered. She heartily wished that she might see him *once* more and return her thanks for his generous behavior.

And then she reflected upon what place the young stranger resided. Had he come by land, and visited Omberg as he passed by? Or had he crossed the lake and taken a room at Haestholm? Perhaps he was there yet! How anxious was she to know all this. But she could find no means to satisfy her curiosity; and, as reality afforded her so little consolation, she pictured his whereabouts in her imagination.

"Dear Alma, who do you think has come here in the rain?" said the good Miss Neta as she entered Alma's room with a cup of hot tea. "Guess."

But Alma dared not guess. After what had happened it could not possibly be the stranger. But why did Miss Neta look so joyous?

"Ah! why do you not guess, you little rogue? But I see in your eyes you know who I mean."

"No, I do not; certainly not."

"Yes, I say. Only drink your tea now, and know that the Major himself has been here."

"The Major," reiterated Alma, not overjoyed, "the Major, indeed!"

"Do not try to make me think you are not glad to see him, the grand Major, almost as grand as the King himself."

"True, the Major is not a bad man; but is there anything remarkable in his being here? Was he not here only last week?"

"It is so much the more remarkable that he comes again so soon. He who comes into a house often must have some certain motive."

"I hope you do not mean that he comes to see me?"

"Are you crazy, girl? Who else should he come to see? If you are in doubt, let me assure you that he comes to see you only; and you, if you have any eyes, will soon see his intentions in his own."

Alma was about exclaiming, "God preserve me from that," but her suspicion of Neta's proneness to tattling closed her lips. Such an expression would be immediately taken to her father, and then he would prosecute the scheme with renewed zeal. She therefore called woman's cunning to her aid, and said that she never would have believed that such an insignificant girl as she would have attracted the attention of such a man as the Major. Rejoiced at an answer so becoming to a young lady, Neta returned to the kitchen; but Alma thought, "the Major—no, O no, not the Major!"

CHAPTER X.

In the mean time Charles Augustus thoughtfully walked back to Haestholm. Alma's face was no longer indistinct in his memory; but he could trace each lineament in his mind. The singular conduct of her father, or as Charles Augustus properly styled it his rudeness, disconcerted him on no other ground than he feared that it would render another interview with Alma more difficult, and he was much grieved that he had drawn the ill-will of the Chief Forester upon himself. But he had sufficient sense to see that a man like the Chief Forester could neither be abusive nor uncultivated,—but was only eccentric. He considered him a rash, hot-headed old man, who would wish to have the whole world bow to him.

Resolved to remain a few days longer at Haestholm, Charles Augustus made arrangements for a room, and having obtained one to his satisfaction, procured his writing materials, and was about to commence writing, when upon looking through the window, he saw a boy with a letter in his hand. He ran down to the court yard, in joyful anticipation, and found the boy inquiring for the stranger who lodged there.

"Yes, it is my letter," said Charles Augustus, as he read the superscription, "S. T. the wandering knight of the ruins."

"Wait a moment, my boy," said he, as he returned to his room, anxious to discover whether the letter contained an apology or further sarcastic congratulations.

He tore the seal open and read as follows:

"As I do not know to whom I have the honor of writing, you must be satisfied with the superscription "S. T." My reason for writing is to invite you, if you remain in the place longer than to-morrow, to honor my modest cottage with your presence. I dine at two o'clock, precisely, and after dinner, if the weather should prove favorable, will show you all that is worth seeing in the vicinity.

"NILS
BROUSE."

Although this could not be called an apology, still Charles Augustus congratulated himself upon his good fortune, and was of the opinion that such a letter from such a man might be considered a formal apology. At present, however, he was obliged to keep his joy within bounds, and answer the letter. This was a source of much trouble. How could it be done properly? Perhaps a verbal answer would do? No, he must write. For the first time in his life Charles Augustus was chagrined that he had no title. "Charles Augustus Kemner," thought he, "sounds too plain, for the Chief Forester cannot know that an iron foundry and twenty estates are attached to such a name." For the purpose therefore, of giving some weight to his name, he concluded to attach to it his father's title. Kemner, Iron Foundry Proprietor, certainly did not sound bad, and although Charles Augustus blushed at this search for a title, he nevertheless determined to use it. His answer was as follows:

"As it is my intention to remain an entire week in this neighborhood, I gratefully accept your kind invitation, and will therefore honor myself by meeting you at the appointed hour.

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS
KEMNER,

IRON
FOUNDRY
PROPRIETOR."

Charles Augustus gave the bearer of the notes two rix dollars, upon hearing which the Chief Forester plainly saw through his intentions. After the message had been sent, Charles Augustus endeavored to shorten the weary hours by building the most fanciful castles in the air. He could not write a letter home, and could find no rest in or out of doors. Never before had he experienced such excitement of mind. That night he could not sleep, and his mind was much troubled concerning the title he had assumed. He feared that the old man might question him upon the subject, and now he much regretted that he could not exchange a word with his father. His sleepless night, however, had one advantage at least, for falling asleep towards daylight, the forenoon was much shortened by a long nap. The balance of the time he spent in carefully arranging his toilet, and when the clock struck one, he ordered the landlord to prepare his best carriage, and was soon on his way to the Chief Forester's house.

When he arrived at the gate before the house, Charles Augustus dismounted from the carriage and with beating heart entered his long wished for Eden.

He hoped and feared that Alma might first present herself; but hopes and fears were equally fruitless. The Chief Forester, elegantly dressed, stood on the steps and received him warmly.

"Your servant, Mr. Kemner. Welcome to my frugal fare. I do not know what Miss Neta, my house dragon, I mean my housekeeper, has prepared for us; but I do know that she never strives to make things too good for us."

"The plainest fare," said Charles Augustus, shaking the proffered hand of the old man, "is most welcome to me. I am no epicure."

"Ah! then, you think more of other pleasures. O, I well know the tastes of our modern gentlemen. But please enter, some one is within who would like to return thanks for your noble conduct yesterday."

Charles Augustus felt the blood rushing through his veins. "O, how will the charming Alma look? Will she greet me kindly or with joy?" thought he, and as he followed his host he hardly dare lift his eyes. It was impossible for him to

distinguish any object. "Mr. Charles Augustus Kemner, Iron Foundry proprietor," said the old man, introducing him. And now Charles Augustus raised his eyes, and to his surprise and confusion, did not see Alma, but the large form of a good-natured looking man, who was extending his hand towards him, and the Chief Forester's words, as he said "Major Kling, my friend and neighbor," fell painfully distinct upon his ear.

"I am exceedingly rejoiced," said the Major, benevolently, "that I can say that I join in the gratitude which my friend has this day expressed to you."

"All right, all right," interrupted the Chief Forester. "Let that matter drop. I returned thanks to God last night, and now we will drink a glass of wine. I have told Miss Neta to bring us a bottle of prime old Madeira from the cellar."

"Our good host is rather eccentric," said the Major to Charles Augustus, in an under tone; "but if you knew him as well as I do—"

"Never mind, never mind," interrupted the old man. "Your host needs no defenders. Do you think, Major, he could not defend himself, if he thought it necessary? Now, Mr. Kemner, what do you manufacture at your foundry?"

"Iron utensils," replied Charles Augustus.

"That's all very well; but where is your foundry located?"

"In Sudermannland, where my parents reside. The foundries have been in the possession of our family for many generations, and I frequently hope the time when they shall fall entirely into my hands may be far distant."

"A reasonable desire. Are you the only child?"

"Yes; the only remaining one of four children."

"My daughter's case, precisely. My late wife, the most excellent of women, presented me with four girls, and this was a source of much grief to me, for I wished much to have a son. O, I wish they still lived; but the whooping-cough, scarlet fever, and other evils carried them off, leaving only Alma. And yesterday I almost lost her also; but, thank God, she was saved, who, to speak sincerely, I loved more than all the rest." Here the old man took out his watch. "It is three minutes to two, gentlemen; now we will see whether there is order and punctuality in my house."

The gentlemen entered the dining-room where Miss Neta, with a neat pink ribboned cap, and clad in a stately merino dress, stood bowing at the head of the table. But no one else was there; and Charles Augustus was disagreeably surprised to see that plates were set for only four persons.

"You miss something," said the old man, fixing his eyes, with a cunning expression, upon Charles Augustus. Completely overwhelmed, the young man grasped the water pitcher, and poured out a glass of water, that the action might conceal his confusion. The Chief Forester then began a speech complimenting the excellent qualities of the water of the Omberg, relating a tradition of the water-nymphs, who each morning bathed their beautiful feet in the spring from whence the water was brought.

"Have you ever been present at their toilet?" said the Major, as they seated themselves at the table.

"Certainly, I have often gone out to see them, and they were not afraid, for they knew I was seventy-three, and neither water nor other nymphs care for such an age. Still, I never lost heart; but consoled myself with my beautiful nymph, Miss Neta, here, at home; who, on her side, bestows upon me all the gratitude I deserve. You must be thankful, Miss Neta, that I here acknowledge the force of your charms, at a season when they are forgotten by every one else."

"Mr. Bruse is pleased to jest at proper and improper times," replied Miss Neta, with the utmost dignity; but her hand trembled so violently that she nearly upset the soup-tureen.

"I believe the soup is boiling over," remarked the old man. "There's a screw loose somewhere."

Miss Neta did not reply, fearing she would say too much.

Now, the Chief Forester turned the subject of conversation upon hunting, saying, that he had once made a journey to Stockholm, for the purpose of taking a load of stags thither which he had slain. Their antlers were longer than any to be

found in that city, even though they had the greatest deer park in Sweden. But soon the roast was placed upon the table, and after it the Madeira, which so cheered the old man's heart that he made a gay speech, the last words of which, however, were from the heart. Not a word was said concerning Alma's absence, and Charles Augustus waited the whole afternoon in the vain hope that this riddle would be solved. The Chief Forester became still more friendly, inviting the gentlemen to coffee and pipes in his private apartment, where he displayed all of the ornaments and pieces of rare workmanship which decked the room, and told a long story concerning each one. After a promenade in the park, until nearly evening, they returned to the house; but Alma had not yet made her appearance.

Charles Augustus could not summon sufficient courage to inquire after her, and at last was obliged to take leave without the hope of ever returning; for, although he frequently hinted that he intended spending a week in the country, the old man pretended not to hear him; and now, when he parted with his guest at the park gate, he wished him a pleasant journey, without asking him to repeat his visit. He said it had given him much joy to make this brief acquaintance, and entreated Charles Augustus, whenever he thought of this journey to the Omberg, not to forget the old hunter.

"No," added Charles Augustus, seriously, "I shall never forget my visit at Omberg, nor the adventure at Alvastra. I hope that no illness—"

"No, no, only the consequence of the fright, nothing more. But did you ever behold such a beautiful day. I have always said that such water and such a sky is to be found nowhere else. The Omberg is a paradise!"

"And the Chief Forester is the door-keeper," Charles Augustus ventured to remark.

The old man laughed. He took the idea, and stroking his chin, as was his wont when in good-humor, said jestingly: "The gatekeeper should not allow any one to jest with him; but return in a year and the gates of paradise shall be open to you."

"What do you mean?" cried Charles Augustus, with illy-concealed emotion.

"O," replied the Chief Forester, "by that time the bird of paradise will probably find another nest. But I detain you—thank you again for your pleasant company."

After a hearty shake of the hand the old man turned, and left Charles Augustus standing near the gate. The young man seemed unwilling to leave the spot which he had already learned to love. His pride, however, conquered his tardiness; the gate shut behind him, and Charles Augustus felt himself expelled from his Eden.

CHAPTER XI.

"How is my little darling this evening?" said the Chief Forester, as he entered Alma's apartment. "Do you feel like taking a short walk?"

"I am pretty well," answered Alma, "only I am tired of staying in bed so long. Why did you wish me to do so?"

"I never tell you to do anything unless prudence requires it. After one has been wet to the skin, and drank a couple of cups of hot tea, it will not do to leave the bed the next day. You should be careful of those rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes."

"But now, I hope, you will allow me to rise, dear Papa. I do wish to see Goldfoot so much,"—this was the name of Alma's little fawn,— "and I am sure he is also grieved that he has not seen me since yesterday."

"Ah, yes, and there is somebody else who wishes to see you—the good Major; and, I had almost forgotten to tell you, the young gentleman who saved your life yesterday, took dinner with us to-day."

"You jest, father?"

"No. I sent a message to him last night, inviting him to dine with me."

"Is he here still?"

"No, he has just gone. He is the owner of an iron foundry in Sudermannland."

"And pray, why did you not acquaint me of this, that I might have dressed and gone down to thank him?" said Alma, scarcely able to conceal her vexation. Her voice increased in loudness, and the natural color of her cheeks was heightened.

"What mean you, my child?" exclaimed the Chief Forester. "Do you blame your father for inviting a guest without your knowledge, or because that gentleman did not ask for your company at a time when it was not needed?"

"Not needed, father? You have often told me yourself, that you always felt as though something was missing when I was not at the dinner table."

"Certainly, my child; but the time has come when I must accustom myself to your absence. Girls are not always to stay at home, merely for the happiness of their parents; they are moveable merchandise, to be transferred from one hand to the other; that is to say, from the hand of the father to that of the husband. But rise now, my child; we are waiting for you."

He left the apartment, and, a short time after, Alma appeared in his room, where the Major was seated on a sofa reading a newspaper.

The Major was about fifty years of age; perhaps a little less. He had been renowned in his youth for three prominent qualities, which were, his skill at cards, his love of horses, and disinclination for home. But having attained the years of manhood, he discarded these follies, and never played cards, nor traded horses, and felt perfectly uneasy when away from his own house, which required nothing save a wife.

The Major did not agree with the Chief Forester in the idea that one should live up to the times. On the contrary, he always read second-hand newspapers, and the only books he studied were on agriculture. But although he did not study the sufferings of humanity in books, still his heart was open to all real affliction, and his mild and benevolent heart was ever ready to comfort the sorrowful. In this path, he so frequently met the Chief Forester, that they became indispensable to each other.

No distinct declaration had taken place between these gentleman in relation to their sentiments concerning Alma. But the Chief Forester knew full as well, that the Major had no higher desire than to call Alma his wife, as the Major knew that his friend closed his doors against every young suitor, that the wished-for union might have no stumbling blocks.

Satisfied with these convictions, the two friends had allowed the matter to rest. Alma, in spite of her eighteen years, was a mere child, and for this reason it was concluded that she should be left in peace and retirement for a short time longer. At all events, she would know it soon enough.

"I hope," the Forester would say to himself, "that no young buck will get fastened into the fence and spoil our plans."

As Alma entered the room the Major laid aside the newspaper, and, rising, met her on the threshold. He kissed her forehead, as had been his custom from her early girlhood. She bowed before him deeper than usual, and was confused to feel her face glow with a blush.

But why did she blush? For years the Major had saluted her in this manner, and she thought nothing of it. Nay, she had frequently offered her brow to him herself, when, at later periods, he had modestly sought to kiss her hand.

But *now* Alma knew that which she had not known before, that the Major's visits were influenced by certain intentions upon her own person. This frightened her, and she therefore blushed, and almost trembled, when the honest Major looked into her eyes with an uncommon expression of tenderness.

"Thank God," said he, earnestly, "that you were preserved from that horrible death! How fortunate it was that the young stranger arrived so opportunely."

"Ahem, ahem!" coughed the Chief Forester; and this "ahem!" signified, "Devilish fortunate that the stranger was a young man."

"Yes," answered Alma, "and it is for this reason I feel grieved that I could not speak a single word of gratitude to him."

"Your father has told him all that was necessary," said the Chief Forester, hastily. "He was quite satisfied, exceedingly satisfied—was he not Major?"

The Major smiled, and did not entertain the same opinion, but considered, with Alma, that it would have been better had she thanked him in person.

"Heigh ho!" exclaimed the Chief Forester, and such a peculiar glance shot from his eyes, that Alma did not know whether he was in earnest or only jesting, as he said: "You incite the girl against me, brother. She becomes as obstinate as the _____"

"As the turtle dove, which places its head beneath its wings at the slightest appearance of danger," amended the Major.

"The deuce take it, I abominate such whining sentimental doves, whether they wear feathers or petticoats. Lift your eyes, Alma. Show that you are the daughter of a man, who can look into any man's eyes; nay, does not fear the Prince of Darkness himself. Tell us plainly that you are no turtle dove. Why, you might just as well be a crow or a raven; in one word, I do not wish to have any doves in my house."

Alma laughed heartily, and ran into her father's arms. "I am no dove, father, but I lack courage. But that may come with years, and perhaps some fine day I shall prove that I can have my own way." These words were spoken in an unthinking and gay manner, and it was not until after she had spoken that she thought of the manner in which they might be construed, and feared that the time might come when her will would be contrary to the wishes of her father.

But Alma had not much time for thought, for the Chief Forester said, "You see, brother, the girl is making a woman of herself; but put on your hat, and we will go and see how the garden looks after the rain."

In the garden they found Neta, seated upon a bench with her knitting-work in hand and "Rinaldo Rinaldini" in her lap, the ribbons of her cap glistening in the rays of the evening sun, and her spectacles, which rested upon her pug nose continually slipping off, and the lady as continually adjusting them. Thus knitting, and reading, and rolling her eyes, for Miss Neta had strong romantic sentiments, she heard and saw nothing. And the Chief Forester beckoned his companions to remain silent as he slowly advanced behind the old lady, and suddenly clapped his hands over her eyes, or rather over her spectacles, and then, in a gruff, unnatural voice, shouted in her ears. The old lady, excited with the romance she was perusing, fancied that she was surrounded by a gang of robbers, and screamed at the top of her lungs, "Help, help! robbers! murderers!"

"What are you about, you villains?" cried the Chief Forester, in his natural voice, rushing before Miss Neta, in pretended pursuit of the robbers. Emboldened by his presence, Miss Neta grasped a stick which was lying at her feet, and bravely followed him.

"This way, this way," shouted the old man, in glee at the thought of the joke he was playing. Springing with youthful agility over a fence, he was followed by the old maid with streaming dress; and the wild chase lasted until the seventy years claimed their rights, and the Chief Forester giving up to them, sat down upon the grass and indulged in such a hearty fit of laughter, that the surprised Neta also stopped to inquire what it all meant.

"Nothing but that we have had April fool's day in the midst of summer, and that it was I who was the brave Rinaldo Rinaldini." At this explanation a greenish-yellow flush o'erspread Miss Neta's cheeks.

"I tell you," said she, in a tone of offended dignity, "I am too old to be made a fool of, and will not stand it, so I hereby notify you that I shall leave your house next Michaelmas day."

"Miss Neta, Miss Neta," replied the old man with a cunning look, "if you leave me I shall surely die. You know that the old dragon cannot live without his she dragon."

"I wish you would not talk so to me," shouted the old woman, her eyes flashing with rage. "I am too old a woman to be made an object of ridicule."

"That is true. You do not know how to take a joke; but, seriously now, let us make friends. You know we always lived like cats and dogs together."

"Yes, because you are such a fire-eater that you always seek a quarrel, and——"

"What do you say? Take care that you do not let your tongue run away with your reason," said the Chief Forester, bridling at her words. "Take back all you have said."

"Not a word, not a letter, not a quarter of a letter!" shouted Miss Neta, putting her elbows akimbo and looking impudently into the face of her enraged master.

"Then I shall give you notice to quit, remember that, you old shrew. I do not wish to have such an awkward, wild and saucy piece of a woman in my house. Do you understand, Miss Dragon, my dearest dragon, my charming dragon?"

"I am going, I am going," screamed Miss Neta, tearing the ribbons from her cap and rending them to fragments.

But now the major and Alma appeared. The Chief Forester, not deeming it advisable to allow his future son-in-law to be the witness of such a scene, turned about with a laugh and said; "Miss Neta and I have had a little confab, as you may have heard, brother."

Miss Neta despised such concealment, and, besides this, her disturbed toilet bore evidence against it. Therefore, as the quarrel could no longer be continued, she left the field of battle with long majestic strides.

The Chief Forester, who had not quite recovered from the effects of the late battle, turned in another direction, leaving the Major and Alma alone again.

"We should not have gone so far," said the Major; "I am afraid you will take cold, Alma."

"O no!" said she; "it is so beautiful a night that I love very much to be here in the open air."

"As much, perhaps, as you would love another place, were you attached to it by bonds more tender," said the major with a peculiar intonation of voice.

Alma looked around her, and answered slowly, "If that should prove to be so, then everything must be much altered."

CHAPTER XII.

On the same evening that the incidents described in the last chapter transpired, Charles Augustus stood upon the shores of the lake at Haestholm, and looked over upon the blue water.

He thought of the lost hopes of the day, and felt disinclined to continue to write to his parents. He thought of the probability of again seeing Alma, but it seemed an impossibility. In short he thought of all these little things which at last united and formed one distinct inclination, when suddenly his attention was called to a very remarkable object. As he looked he could scarcely credit his vision.

He beheld the large form of a giant, illumined by the rays of the setting sun, and trembled at the ghastly appearance of the phantom. The figure altered its position several times; seeming to move its arms, and beckon with its head. Gradually there arose behind it high walls and steeples, which, however, soon transformed themselves into lofty trees and thick shrubbery. The whole spectacle continued nearly a quarter of an hour before it disappeared. The giant remained visible the longest; but a light breeze springing up, the misty phantom was gradually wafted away until it had completely vanished. Charles Augustus stood for a long time in mute admiration of the scene, and was about leaving the spot, when

upon taking one more look, he involuntarily shrunk back; for there the giant stood again. He soon discovered, however, that this time he had to deal with flesh and blood—although the visitor was an uncommon one. Near Charles Augustus, stood a man of colossal frame, supporting his weight upon a knotty stick; his dark hair streamed in tangled locks over his grizzly eye-brows; his eyes were set deep in their sockets and were nearly concealed by his deep black eye-lashes; his complexion was between copper-red, and olive-yellow; a bushy beard covered his chin, and hung down over a much worn cravat; his clothing betrayed that he had been, or was a sailor.

"Good evening," said Charles Augustus, bowing, to the stranger, whose countenance bore an expression of stubborn doggedness.

"Evening," was the strange response of the man, in a cracked and harsh voice.

"Did you see the phantom yonder on the lake?" inquired Charles Augustus, pointing to the water.

"Yes," answered the man, "I have seen it very often; it comes frequently, and betokens stormy weather."

"What?"

"The Lady of the Lake," answered the man, "who often performs such scenes upon the lake, where every thing is subject to her."

Surprised to hear this man speak so childishly, Charles Augustus inquired, "Do you live in this neighborhood?"

"Yes, I was born near the lake; but when I became a man, I went on board a sea-bound ship as a carpenter; and since then have served through many a storm as a pilot. But when I became old, I longed for home; for my own Lake Welter has not its equal in the world."

"What is your name?" inquired Charles Augustus, becoming interested in the stranger.

"My Christian name is John; but," he added modestly, yet not without pride, "they have called me the great pilot. I now reside in this neighborhood, gaining my livelihood by making and repairing boats. My home is a lonely hut up there on the top of the mountain."

"Come, let us sit down," said Charles Augustus, seating himself upon a large stone, "tell me some of your adventures."

"My adventures are too insignificant to be entertaining to a fine gentleman," replied the pilot; "but if it will not displease you, I will tell you something about our lake—which, perhaps, you have come from a great distance to see."

"Thank you," replied Charles Augustus; "but first tell me whether you really believe in the Lady of the Lake, and her power."

"In truth, I do," replied the pilot, glancing over the lake. "Long ago, before I was born, there were those who heard her speak."

Charles Augustus curled his lip.

"Yes, you may laugh; it makes no difference. A long time ago some people wished to sound the depth of the lake; but not knowing the use of a sounding lead, they affixed hatchets, axes, and other heavy objects to their line. And then the Lady of the Lake displeased that the people should be so impudent as to attempt to measure the extent of her dominions, took off the axes and hatchets, and attached a large horse-bone to the line. But as the people were not yet satisfied, the Lady of the Lake called out in a loud voice, which re-echoed from shore to shore: "The depth of my dominion is equal to its length—measure it."

"That was a grand answer," observed Charles Augustus, involuntarily entering into the sentiments of the old man.

"Yes, and she has every reason to be grand; but still she is very good-natured, that's certain. When one sees such things as you saw just now, then the Lady of the Lake gives warning of a storm, and removes with all her palaces, castles and churches into another country. A lucky person—for instance one born on Sunday—can see her little silver feet as she treads the water, as though it was a firm road. But behind her the mist of the lake arises, so that none can see where she goes to."

Charles Augustus listened attentively to this story. There was so much poetry in the superstition that he much admired it, and almost felt as though he believed it.

"They say," said the pilot, "but of course no one can know anything about it, that there is an underground passage from this lake to a lake in Switzerland. If one can believe this, then they might easily think that the Lady of the Lake visits Switzerland, when the weather becomes stormy."

"That may all be; but have you ever seen this phantom before?"

"Certainly, and many more remarkable things that I will tell you. When I was a boy I once went out on the lake with two or three companions on a fishing excursion. We each of us had a boat to ourselves. The lake was calm, there was not wind enough to move a feather. As I was sitting in my boat and was about taking some fresh tobacco, I looked upward, and as true as I am a Christian, I saw one of my comrades sitting in his boat above my head at least sixty feet in the air. The whole boat, sails and all, and even Peter himself, glowed with all the bright colors of the rainbow. You will hardly believe it; but I saw every thing so clearly that I even saw Peter put a new bait upon his hook."

"That must have been a beautiful delusion," said Charles Augustus.

"Don't talk that way," said the old man, somewhat vexed. "Delusions! Am I such a blockhead that I should not be satisfied with that which God designed to reveal to me without immediately naming it, so that I could grasp it with my hands? No, young man, such delusions are as real as the phantom which appeared on the lake, although the foolish unbelievers call it nothing but clouds of mist. My belief was confirmed, because Peter, my comrade, was drowned the year after. That there is really a Lady of the Lake, and that the belief in her is approved by the priests, is proved by the fact, that the priest who presided here at the time when the lake was measured, gave to the persons thus engaged a letter to her for a safeguard against danger."

"Yes," replied Charles Augustus, "but it might have been a cunning trick to overcome the terror of the people."

But now the Pilot arose, and pushing back the hair from his forehead, exclaimed, in his deep voice, "What obstinacy! I well know that such things are printed in books, but books lie in this respect, as well as in many others. Good-night, sir; whoever visits this lake must bring faith with him, and not be troubled with compunctions of conscience, or he might as well stay at home, for it is faith which makes us happy in this world." He bowed, and replacing his hat upon his head, left the spot.

But Charles Augustus hastened after him, and tapping him upon the shoulder, said, "Wait a moment, my friend, do not be rash; but tell me before we separate, whether you really believe that faith brings us that happiness we seek?"

"Yes; and as a Christian, you know that as well as I do myself," replied the old man, smiling kindly upon Charles Augustus. "Faith is the best gift of God. What I firmly believe, and wish to believe, I can surely carry into effect, for the will goes hand in hand with faith, providing neither have sinful inclinations."

"Have you ever experienced the power of faith when you wished to carry out a good design?"

"Often, very often; and once to a certainty, I believed that a beautiful girl whom I——. It's all the same now, love is equal with high or low. I would have given my life for her. I believed that I could move her heart towards me merely by my looks. One cannot think of more self-pride than that. She was rich and beautiful; I, on the contrary, was poor and ill-looking. She visited the lake shore every morning, and I fixed my eyes upon her so earnestly that I soon attracted her attention. After I had succeeded in this the rest soon followed, and I pursued her so steadfastly that she soon said yes. For a time I was happy, thinking of her alone. In later years I took a voyage upon the sea to gain money, and returned home with full pockets. I had saved every farthing that I might lay it at her feet, so she could see what I was able to do for my heart's beloved."

Here the old man paused in his narrative, affected by his recollection.

"When I returned home," he continued, "my betrothed was no longer to be found. Her father had endeavored to force her to become the wife of a wealthy suitor, but she did not wish to be unfaithful to me. One Sunday morning she disappeared, having been seen for the last time on the Starlych meadow, near the shores of the lake. The water of the lake is clear and tempting to the unhappy. She had the firm belief that we should meet again hereafter, knowing that I would never wed another, and she, therefore, went to become an inmate of the palace of the Lady of the Lake, until I should be ready to

follow her, and accompany her to a better world. Now, my dear sir, I thought a long time that I would follow her immediately, but faith regained its power over me. 'If you do so,' said a voice within me, 'you will never meet hereafter.' I therefore returned to my seafaring life, and at length became a pilot. I have saved many a ship from inevitable destruction, and have put my life in danger many a time. But after I had worked until my powers were exhausted, and I found that I was unfit for the service, I returned to the land, and built me a little hut, and now live in the firm belief that we shall soon meet again."

"Many thanks for your story," said Charles Augustus, much affected, "it has done my heart good."

"Yes, and it is because I saw that you really had a heart that I have told it to you. I never told it before, except to one. But see, here we are before the door of the old pilot's cabin. Do not despise entering."

Charles Augustus accepted the invitation. But if the exterior of the cabin was the type of poverty, the interior presented stronger evidences of it. The entire furniture consisted of a bundle of straw upon a low bench which served as a bed, a rough table, an old chair, and a few tools, which were hanging up against the wall.

"Do these suffice you?" said Charles Augustus, seating himself upon the bench.

"They more than suffice me," was the answer. "The lake furnishes me with fish and water, for food and drink for the summer; and by my trade as ship-carpenter I earn sufficient bread for the winter."

"But your clothing?"

"Clothing," said the Pilot, placing his hand upon his well-patched jacket; "this is my summer coat, and there," pointing towards a frieze coat, hanging against the wall, "is my winter friend. They will last as long as I live, for my neighbors are good-natured. Their wives give me patches, which I sew together, and thus provide myself with warm clothing."

"But did you not say that you gained considerable money in your youth on your journeys? What have you done with it all?"

"Every one has his secret, and so have I," answered the old man, gloomily. "Let us not talk of the money any more."

"You excite my curiosity, and would please me much if you would tell me how you applied it. From your manner of speaking, I think there is something strange connected with it."

"It is for that very reason I dislike to speak of it. Many things may be plain to one, while they are incomprehensible to another. Let us, therefore, change the subject."

But Charles Augustus urged the old man so strongly that he finally said:

"Well, so be it, then. Ever since I was a child I entertained the belief, and one which must be sinful, for it has caused me much misery, that a suicide could never reach heaven. After I had long thought how horrible it would be if my loved one and myself should be eternally separated, I remembered of having heard and seen in Catholic countries, that they said mass for the eternal happiness of the dead. Although I did not believe in the effect of these masses, still I thought, God knows why they do it. He looks at the motive only. It can be done by a Protestant as well as a Catholic. In this conviction, I again went to sea, and in the first Catholic country I visited I besought the priest to say masses to the whole amount of my treasure for the benefit of my betrothed. He promised to do so, and said the money was sufficient to purchase the salvation of one who had been guilty of the darkest crimes. Highly elated, I returned, for I was convinced that there was a Being above me, who saw that I had made myself poor to save her soul."

Without answering, Charles Augustus pressed the hands of the Pilot, and looked into his face with an expression which satisfied the old man that his story had been truly appreciated.

They both reascended the hill which faced the little hut. There stood an old oak. The Pilot pointed to the top. "There," said he, "resides the only companions I have had for many a year."

Charles Augustus looked up into the branches of the tree and saw an unusually large birds' nest.

"It is the nest of two sea eagles," said the old man, "which have taken up their abode here. Other people are afraid of them, but I love them. Whenever any of my dinner is left, I give it to them."

In parting, Charles Augustus slipped a few dollars into the old man's pockets, but he took the money out and returned it, saying, "What shall I do with this? I do not desire to have my condition bettered, for I live in the firm belief that the more I humble myself the better hope I have of meeting my loved one above, which is the last dwelling-place for us all. But now, good-night, young gentleman. Thanks for your pleasant company; the old man has not for a long time enjoyed such pleasant conversation as he has this evening."

With a light heart Charles Augustus returned to Haestholm. He felt as though the conversation with the old pilot had heightened his courage and assurance; and he determined not to leave the Omberg until he had an opportunity of seeing and conversing with Alma, even if he should be obliged to remain here for years.

CHAPTER XIII.

After the lapse of a week Charles Augustus changed his determination, and for the purpose of lulling to sleep the suspicion of the Chief Forester, he thought he would take a short excursion into the surrounding country.

He had long hoped for an opportunity of again seeing Alma; but the Lady of the Lake had not removed her palaces and castles for nothing—a severe rain storm came on and lasted for a whole week. Under such circumstances it would be impossible for him to see his beloved. On the morning of the day before he was to leave upon his excursion, Charles Augustus visited the old pilot, who had not made his appearance at his bench in the ship-yard for the past two days. The storm had ceased, but the sky was still dark, and uncouth clouds flitted over the tops of the tall trees of Omberg. High above the mist, however, a distinct object was to be seen. It was a descending sea-eagle, who, in wide circling flight, was in search of his prey.

Charles Augustus watched the motions of the bird, and saw him suddenly shoot from his high elevation into the thicket. Immediately a loud noise was heard, and then a stag rushed forth from the forest, with the eagle fixed fast upon his head. The eagle screamed fiercely, and flapped his strong wings upon the head of the unfortunate animal; and while one of his talons made gory marks upon the neck of his victim, he held the other aloft, and finally grasped with it the trunk of a small tree, and thus endeavored to stay the further progress of the stag. But for this boldness he met with a horrible fate. The swiftness of the stag was such that the eagle was rent in twain, one-half hanging quivering to the tree, and the other portion borne along upon the head of the stag.

Charles Augustus was so intent upon this singular battle, that he did not perceive the approach of the old pilot, who greeted him with, "Good-morning, young sir."

"I come to take leave of you. Why were you not at the ship-yard, yesterday? Were you ill?"

"No; but I had an engagement somewhere else. The Chief Forester had a little job, which he thought I might do as well as anybody else."

"What was it?" inquired Charles Augustus, who was interested in the most insignificant circumstance relating to the father of Alma.

"O, nothing, only Miss Alma desired to have a little cabin built upon the top of the mountain, where she loves to sit and look down upon the lake; and, as we are good friends, she wished me to assist her."

"Indeed," replied Charles Augustus, with assumed indifference, "then you are on friendly terms with the Chief Forester's daughter."

"Yes, to speak without boasting, she thinks much of me. She is not afraid to be seen in company with the old pilot.

Yesterday she came to my cabin with a whole basketful of good things, and sat nearly two hours with me."

"Two hours! and yesterday—only yesterday!" and Charles Augustus' vexation knew no bounds that he had not visited the old pilot the day before.

Although Charles Augustus had endeavored to give firmness to his voice, still it trembled, so that the old man now knew why it was that one who had seen all that was to be seen at the Omberg, remained there so long.

"When do you think of crossing the Lake?" inquired the old man.

"I intended to visit Visingsoe to-day, but it looks as though it would not be clear enough."

The pilot smiled. "The fog will soon be gone," said he; "it will all be clear before noon. But, if your old friend does not miscalculate, your business here has not come to an end."

"Business!" reiterated Charles Augustus, blushing. "My only business is to view the country."

"As you please, that cannot be wrong. Still I believe that you wish to see something more, which cannot be very well accomplished without the guidance of a pilot who is familiar with the channel; but I cannot stay with you longer. If you wish to see our pretty bower, then you must turn to the right when you reach the top of the mountain, and, if the fog is no thicker than it is now, you may have a fine view this afternoon."

Surprised that his secret had already become known, Charles Augustus did not endeavor to retain the old man. It was not until the old patched jacket had disappeared beneath him, as the old man rapidly descended the steep sides of the mountain, that Charles Augustus started on the path which had been pointed out to him.

He had reached about the midway of the mountain when he stopped and leaned his back against an old oak. Here he meditated, striving to analyze the sentiments that drove him onward in this journey. Could he really love a girl whom he had seen but twice and conversed with only once? His heart answered, and the answer was such that it hurried him on his way still faster. He soon arrived at the place on the mountain where the forest became less dense, and shortly after he saw the little cabin built of twigs and bark.

He could see into the interior. Around the walls on the inside of the bower was placed a low bench of green moss, from which one could have a fine view of the lake through the capacious doorway. Several sail boats were skimming over the surface of the water, lending additional beauty to the scene.

Charles Augustus seated himself upon the bench, the same bench which the lovely Alma was to occupy a few hours later. Suddenly he was struck with the idea of ornamenting Alma's little bower with fresh flowers, and to carpet the floor with green moss. No sooner thought than commenced; but he had not yet concluded his labors when a low exclamation greeted his ears.

He looked up quickly and saw Alma, her face beaming with joyful surprise. She held a little cord in her hand, by which she conducted her little favorite Goldfoot, who snorted and hung back, fearing the stranger.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Charles Augustus. "I came here accidentally. Excuse my boldness—I did not know——"

"Why do you call it boldness?" said Alma, who had recovered from her surprise at again beholding the youthful stranger, whom she thought had gone long before.

"Because I was aware," replied Charles Augustus, as he bashfully patted the fawn's back, "that the little bower belonged to one who might misinterpret this liberty of a stranger."

"Why do you say *stranger*?" inquired Alma in a low tone. "You cannot be a stranger to one that——but it hardly needs my assurance to convince you that I have not forgotten the storm at Alvastra."

Alma, at other times so modest, would not have spoken thus had she not remembered the treatment the stranger had received from her father, and had she not thought it was her duty to make amends. She had hardly finished the sentence, however, before the blood rushed to her temples.

Charles Augustus eagerly drank in every word she uttered. "And those ruins," said he, "which I have visited nearly every

day, have gained an almost holy significance; they remind me of those things which shall never be wiped from my memory. I there met with that which will have an influence upon my whole life."

Alma could not answer him. She did not even know that she was disarranging with her tiny foot the moss carpet which Charles Augustus had laid down so nicely. She withdrew her foot. "Look," said she, "the moss is being upturned, even before it has taken root; that is not to be envied," and without thought she stooped down and began to place it in a proper position.

In these words Charles Augustus thought he discovered the first confession of an innocent love, and his heart burned with a joyful flame. But he did not desire to increase Alma's confusion, and therefore endeavored to compose himself. He told her of the battle he had witnessed between the eagle and stag.

During this story, which Charles Augustus greatly ornamented by additions from his poetic imagination, Alma seated herself upon the bench near the entrance of the bower, and our hero placed himself near her side.

One story followed another, until nearly an hour had passed by; and Alma, looking at her watch, declared that this was her father's breakfast hour, and she should not be missing.

Charles Augustus arose, and prepared to leave her. "Will you allow me to tell the old pilot," he said, "that the bower is admired by its owner?"

"O, yes, certainly. You know our old pilot then, there up on the hill; I love to hear him talk of his adventures and his beloved one."

"I have also been acquainted with his grief and pious superstition; but such love must be strong in faith, and faithful to death."

A slight blush was Alma's only answer. And taking the string which was fastened to Goldfoot's collar, from Charles Augustus' arm, she sprang from the seat and they both descended the hill together, until they arrived at a path where they halted, mutually thinking that here they must separate.

"Can I wish you a happy journey in case we should not——." She finished her sentence with a slight bow.

"That was not my intention," said Charles Augustus, gazing with a peculiar expression into the young lady's face; "but if these words should contain a *wish* that I should leave the Omberg, it shall be done this very day."

Alma had not the courage to reply to this. "How should I think of such a thing?" she stammered. "I——I have nothing to think."

Charles Augustus bowed silently, and Alma left him; but fearing that her words had offended him, turned to look again at him. With a lovely smile she answered his parting salute, and with her mind at ease she hurried on her way home, followed by the frolicking and gamboling Goldfoot.

"What a charming creature! what child-like innocence!" thought Charles Augustus. During the whole day he revelled in the hope that he had finally found his Eden; and that evening he wrote home as follows:

"I entreat you, my dear parents, not to be troubled if you should not hear from me again for some time to come. I am healthier and happier than I have ever been before. For not writing, I know my father will be grateful; and my mother—the dearest of mothers—will pardon me. For it is impossible for me to call my attention from the beauties of the surrounding scenery to the material thought, "To-day I must write home." I am sure you understand your

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

"P. S.—After my return, my father will find that I am no inactive dreamer. Now, I really live."

This letter Charles Augustus carried that same night to Hjo, where he did not stay any longer, however, than was necessary to settle his affairs and pack up his baggage. The next morning he removed to Haestholm, and engaged a room by the month; for he had determined to remain longer in the country, for the purpose of "botanizing."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Your father has inquired three times for you already," screamed Neta to Alma, whom she had gone in search of.

"Inquired for me?" said Alma. "It is not after the breakfast hour."

"No, it is ten minutes to ten; but where have you been so early this morning?"

"It was not early, Neta. I went to see the pretty bower which the great pilot built for me."

"Well, you might have looked at it some other time; but see, there is your father beckoning and nodding his old head, as though a life was at stake. I cannot think what he wants of you."

"Nor I," said Alma, much fearing that her father had already heard of her interview with the young stranger. She hastened her steps, and arrived almost out of breath at the foot of the steps.

"O, you need not run so fast that you will catch the galloping consumption. You have yet five minutes left." And then the Chief Forester returned to his sanctum, and after the five minutes had passed, Alma followed him.

"Now, my child," commenced the old man, as he walked hurriedly around the room, rubbing his hands. His face, however, beamed with a joyful expression, and proved that nothing unpleasant was to come. "You look like a frightened snipe. What are you afraid of? Do you fear a little examination?"

"Examination!" said Alma, turning pale.

"O, you need not look so timid. I think every thing will turn out well; but should I begin with the question, why have you become so pale? you would answer with (and here the old man changed his voice to falsetto,) 'Dear papa, I do not know why I am pale.'"

"No, father, I should not say that; for I really felt the blood leaving my cheeks."

"And why so?"

"Because I was frightened. I did not know why you were going to question me."

"You shall know immediately; but you look as though you were the daughter of a rabbit, rather than a Chief Forester. Go into your room and recover your courage, until I have done breakfast—then you can return."

"Yes," said Alma, rejoiced at the respite. And when she returned to her room, she commenced bothering her little head with such vain conjectures, that at length she considered it would be a relief if she could discover what her father meant, even though he told her. And at the close of half an hour the poor child summoned her courage, and again entered her father's apartment.

"Well, have we recovered now?" said he, placing himself upon a sofa, and pointing to a chair opposite him, in which Alma seated herself.

"Yes, dear father."

"Have we endeavored to guess something?"

"I could guess nothing, father."

"Pay attention to what I say. I did not ask whether you had guessed anything, but whether you had endeavored to do so."

"Yes; I tried to do so."

"Well," said he, "on what subjects have you exercised your ingenuity?"

"O, father!"

"Come here, and do not let us play blind-man's-buff; but let us rather play hide the ring. Do you not like rings, you little rogue, you?"

"No," said Alma, blushing; "I care nothing for rings."

"What do you say? I almost fear you are telling me a fib—you must not do that. Girls are girls, and I am sure that my Alma also likes rings."

"She does not, father. Alma thinks nothing of them," said Alma, using the childish custom of speaking of herself in the third person, to please her father, and looking up so entreatingly in his face, that, to gain time, he stretched forth his pipe to have her refill it.

"Well, so be it; but what have you to say against them?"

"That I know not; it is something which I cannot explain."

"If that is the case, we will no longer talk about it; so instantly take off the rings you have on your fingers and give them to me." The last words were spoken very decidedly.

Alma stretched forth her little fingers and allowed her father to take off the rings with which she loved to decorate them, and the tears almost started to her eyes at the thought of losing them. He placed the rings in a little box, which he afterwards locked up in his private drawer.

"At length these stumbling blocks are removed, and we can now talk of something else. What would you say to a pretty white pony, graceful, and as gentle as a lamb, and a handsome English side-saddle, with a riding-dress which would fit you nicely?"

"O, a pony, a saddle, and a riding-dress, that would be nice," and her eyes sparkled with joy.

"I do not doubt that; but would you be willing to give something as a recompense for it?"

"What can I give *you*?"

"Give me—what are you thinking of? Do you think that I should be so foolish as to throw away so much money upon you? O, no, that I leave to those who are anxious to obtain the favor of a beautiful girl."

Alma was silent, the roses of joy vanished from her cheeks, and she turned her eyes to the floor in confusion.

"Well, you need not hang down your head; on the contrary, you have reason to hold it proudly erect. Know, then, that you have a suitor who has determined to give pony, saddle, and dress, as his bridal-present."

"Oh, father, but—"

But Alma could not finish the sentence. She was cowed by the glance which her father shot forth from his gleaming eyes.

"No *but*, I never liked that word; but I will allow you to finish what you intended to."

"I do not wish to wed," sobbed the girl, laying her head upon her father's knee.

The Chief Forester's countenance here assumed a peculiar expression. He did not storm as usual, when angry, but his voice could have been heard from afar, when he thundered, "How long is it since you have had a will of your own?"

Alma was silent; but after the question was repeated, she answered in a low voice, "I did not know, myself, before, that I had one."

"Nor did I," replied the Chief Forester; "but as the idea is so new, I hope you will rid yourself of it without difficulty. Do

you not think so?"

"O, father, speak openly, speak kindly to me. You make me fear you when you speak in that tone."

"With pleasure. Listen: I wish you to be married. Next year we shall have a wedding, and I hope that all the guests who attend the wedding will speak of the beautiful and happy bride of Omberg."

"And the bridegroom?" stammered Alma. "He is the best man who ever bore a Swedish name, who ever swung a Swedish steel, or who ever plowed Swedish soil. The king's most faithful vassal, major and knight, the high-born Sir Savante Kling, owner of the large estate of Svarvik, and several tons of clanging gold, which, however, is not worth as much as a single drop of blood of his noble heart; the most honest, the bravest, and truest which was ever laid at the feet of a maid."

"Alas! he is so old, so very old," sobbed Alma.

"O, never mind; he is not very old; he has a youthful heart, and is as sprightly as a squirrel. You should be ashamed; he is only forty years old."

"I say he is more than fifty, and it is impossible for me to marry the old Major." And Alma lowered her eyes, so that she might not see the result of her boldness.

But the Chief Forester merely answered, "We shall see about that." And then he arose, with the remark that it was nearly time for his walk in the park.

Alma breathed freely again. She was now left to her own meditations; but she was not much to be envied, for she became the prey of the most conflicting thoughts.

To marry the Major, whom she was accustomed to reverence as much as her own father, seemed to her to be as impossible as a serious resistance against her father's commands. True, her first resistance had turned out more favorably than she had expected herself, but it did not follow that the next time she would prove so fortunate. Ah, no! Alma knew but too well, that her father was not to be moved by such a novel method as the will of his daughter, who, until now, had been subject to his guidance even in the most trifling matters.

Although the subject which occupied Alma's mind was so important, still she also occasionally thought of the scene in the bower; and as often as she thought of the moment when she surprised Charles Augustus, as he was engaged in strewing the floor with moss, her cheeks would glow, and upon her lips would play a smile, in spite of all her unhappiness, which plainly displayed the workings of joy and pain within her innocent heart.

In the mean time the Chief Forester, with lips firmly compressed, walked through the park. Arriving at a certain spot, where he was accustomed to rest when alone,—for it was his weakness to appear youthful, although he felt the pressure of years,—he withdrew from his breast-pocket a letter, and for the second time perused the welcome and long-expected contents:

"DEAR BROTHER:

"I suppose you have long seen how I am situated."—

"Certainly, certainly," muttered the Chief Forester; "and it was for this reason we should have made use of the time, for delay spoils the best plan; but, by heaven! it shall not mar this."—

"And I hope that you will have no objection to the sentiments, which, however, I can hardly approve of myself, as I fear it might displease the one who is the object of them.

"I am not able in words to put my ideas in a shape which would please the young girl; and therefore dare not propose this, my desire, to your daughter myself. I beseech you to ask your Alma, kindly, not with fear of compulsion—for that is not my desire—whether she thinks that she can be happy with a man, who, if such proves the case, would then become young again. Perhaps she will say no; if such is the answer, I entreat you not to force her. What would be the happiness of a few years to me, if Alma would have to suffer by it?

"I do not set any particular time for the answer. I shall remain at home for a few weeks awaiting your reply. If I do

not receive a favorable one, I shall at any rate, visit you as an old friend.

"With respect and friendship,

yours
faithfully

"Sv.
KLIN

"You old, good-natured jackass, if you had said only so six months ago, she would now have been your wife," thought the Forester. "Her own will—Aye! what is the world coming to? Such a little girl wants to have her own will. But I know what my will is; and I also know what would be the wisest for her to do. I wonder if the worthy knight of the ruins, has yet left Hoestholm? I must go and make inquiries immediately. If poachers are around, one must keep wide awake."

On that very evening the Chief Forester went down to the lake on a fishing excursion—an amusement which at other times he abominated. He stopped at Hoestholm to visit the ship-yard where the old pilot worked. The inn-keeper lifting his cap, bowed low to the Chief Forester.

The old man returned his salute and inquired: "Well, have you many guests now?"

"I cannot boast of many; but I had a gentleman here who has remained a whole week."

"Is he to stay here longer?"

"No; he has just gone; you can see his boat on the lake now. He has gone to Hjo, from whence he came."

With a lightened heart the Chief Forester returned home. As he believed himself now perfectly secure, he resolved to take a journey to Svarvik, and tell the Major to write to Alma, himself; as he might count upon his paternal assistance.

CHAPTER XV.

A few weeks elapsed.

The Chief Forester had made his journey; but had missed his object, namely: to cause the Major to write to Alma.

"No, brother," answered the honest man. "Alma knows me too well to need a display of my merits to her. If she desires to make me happy with her heart and hand, she can do it without a letter."

The Chief Forester grumbled a little about the ignorance of females; and then after entreating the Major to visit him within two weeks, he returned home.

During all this time, Alma heard nothing concerning the Major's suit; and began almost to believe that her father had sacrificed his own inclination to the happiness of his daughter. The roses of joy therefore began to bloom anew upon her cheeks, for Alma had other reasons for happiness—reasons which she carefully kept concealed within her own bosom. She had met the young stranger several times—of course, merely by accident; and perceived by his actions, for he did not speak decidedly, that he remained in the country for her sake alone. Still, she experienced a certain kind of pain she had never felt before; and her conscience sometimes smote her that she kept the secret from her father. It was true that her meetings with Charles Augustus were never preconcerted; still, it was true that she never attempted to escape them, which would not have been very difficult if she had but confined her walks to the park and the neighborhood of her

father's house. For two long days she did not wander far from the house; but the third day she lost all power over her little feet, which felt an irresistible desire to visit the bower—the Eleven Beeches—the Stockleyck meadow, and various other places,—where, as accident would have it, she invariably met Charles Augustus.

"If my father should——." Alma dared not finish the sentence as she intended, ("surprise me,") but changed to "find out that I should meet some one else, (although without intending to do so) when I take a walk, I wonder if he would be angry?" And as often as she put this question to herself, her heavy beating heart would answer a decided "Yes."

"Did you hear the magpies chatter on the roof to-day?" inquired Miss Neta, one morning as she entered Alma's room.

"No; what do you mean?" replied Alma, looking at her watch, and then commencing to dress herself for breakfast.

"What do I mean?" said Miss Neta, taking such a huge pinch of snuff from her box, that one half of it fell and besprinkled her snow white apron. "Either we have guests to-day, or else we shall have news. When the magpies chatter for a single morning, then we have guests; but when they chatter on the roof for three mornings in succession—as they have done for the last three—then we shall have some very important news."

"What can it be, dear Neta?"

"I am certainly not a soothsayer; but yet I can divine something, if I can only get a clue."

"And is that the case now?"

"As one may take it. Have you heard that next week we are to have a festival—a real festival, with music and dancing?"

"With music and dancing?" inquired Alma, becoming pale.

"Why; what is the reason you look so frightened? Do you not know that there is a little girl in this house, who will be presented on that day with a beautiful wreath?"

"I know well enough that my birthday comes next week; but it never was celebrated in such a manner before."

"The first time must come. Perhaps it is your father's wish that the festival should have a double meaning."

Alma dared not reply to this hint; her brain became dizzy, and her pulse beat feverishly. Her birthday fell upon Sunday, (she heard the news on Thursday) and on Sundays she was accustomed to extend her walks. These walks occurred so regularly every third or fourth day, that if she should change the order and go sooner to the bower, she would probably not find *somebody* there.

And why did the dim hope of meeting before that very Sunday, the one she called *somebody*, occupy her mind? Because—but this was not clear to her, only a surmise—somebody would be obliged to say something which would require an answer, or a half declaration; and this must be sufficient to guard her against anything that might happen her on the ensuing Sunday. For if she did not meet somebody, she would not have the courage to resist the desire of her father.

Alma hastened down stairs, kissed her father's hand, and poured out a cup of coffee for him; but she did not perform this service with her usual grace and skill.

"Why do you tremble?" inquired the Chief Forester, taking his pipe from his mouth, and looking at the girl seriously.

"I do not tremble," stammered Alma; but now she trembled so violently, that the contents of the coffee-urn were spilt upon the white table cloth. "I beg your pardon, papa."

The Chief Forester coughed, and, taking the pipe from his mouth, blew one long cloud of smoke into the room.

Alma was silent, and poured a few drops of coffee into her cup, into which she had before placed a few crumbs of cake; but the cake soaked up the coffee, and she put only the empty cup to her lips.

"That is a singular method of drinking coffee," said the Chief Forester, after a long pause.

Alma had no answer, but, confused, looked first into her cup, and then up to her father's face.

"Did you not sleep well, last night?"

"O, yes."

"You may have heard an owl screeching, this morning. Has the old dragon, Neta, been in your room already?"

"Neta? yes, she visited me this morning."

"I thought so; and has she given you such a bitter draught, that you must tremble at the first dose?"

"I think, dear father, that she has not guessed rightly."

"Is that the reason why you are so sad. Well, no matter, we may make her prophecy come true."

"That is just the very reason which—"

"Which gives you joy. I understand—it is quite natural."

"No, dear father, it is the very thing which grieves me."

"How, you self-willed, ungrateful girl, you are not glad when your father gives a party for you! Are you not ashamed?"

"Oh, I would be as glad as any body, so glad that you never saw such a happy girl before, if only—"

"Ah! I wish you would rid yourself of that stupid habit of breaking off in the middle of a sentence! We are not in a theatre, here, where a prompter whispers the cue into an actor's ear, when he loses the thread of his conversation. Speak openly, and right from your heart. What did you mean, when you said, 'If only?'"

"You would ask no more of me," stammered Alma.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the Chief Forester, springing from his chair with his usual vivacity. "Is your little head filled with such things? I only wish to tell you, in all confidence, that such thoughts should not turn a little girl's head, every time the wind blew. If I once say that to-morrow shall be the betrothal, it shall be so, and you will give me no other answer than yes."

The Chief Forester then left the room, and shortly afterwards Alma heard his voice up in the garret, where Miss Neta was busily engaged in spreading out mint upon the floor; and, although Alma stepped into the hall to listen, she could not understand a word, for the whole conversation consisted of exclamations, which crossed each other so rapidly, that they sounded like the roaring of a river.

Alma took a walk into the garden; but how contracted everything appeared to her, for in a few moments, she had walked through every path. The poor child had so much on her heart, that she required more space to walk in. After she had crossed the garden to and fro several times, she reached a little back gate, which led into the large deer park. But, as if she feared something wrong, she stepped back and endeavored to shut the gate, but the gate did not desire to be shut. Alma experienced an irresistible inclination to step through into the park, and now, trees and flowers appeared so enticing to her, that she could not withstand the temptation.

It was singular, however, that the further she advanced, she found the more distant trees and flowers still more beautiful and charming, and these trees and flowers which she passed one after the other, conducted her so far, that it would have been exceedingly foolish not to visit the beautiful bower upon the top of the mountain, and enjoy the fine view of the lake, which must be very charming on such a day as this; and Alma thought she could do so, innocently, for she did not expect anybody there to-day.

She therefore went to the bower.

But, whether it was accidental, or whether it happened so every day, the little bower was ornamented with beautiful flowers, which were strewn over the moss that formed the floor. No one was to be seen, however. Alma seated herself; she could not explain all the hopes, all the thousand little fears which arose within her heart.

With a half sigh, she said, "I must go,"—but still she remained. It seemed as though a charm was spread over the little bower.

But suddenly she sprang from her seat. Familiar steps were heard approaching the bower. She would have hid herself.

Her heart beat quickly with fright. It would be horrible if she was found here at a time when she never visited the bower, and she fervently hoped that *somebody* would not see her. But when this hope seemed about to be fulfilled, for the steps began to retreat, Alma looked through a small window that had been formed in the bower.

She saw Charles Augustus standing upon the path, looking out upon the lake. "If I should go before he comes in," thought she, "will it not give him pleasure to repose upon the little bench?" No, evidently he did not care for it. Alma forgot her former wish to remain unobserved. It caused her pain that she had not betrayed her presence by some noise or motion.

She overcame the strong temptation, with much difficulty; but at every step that Charles Augustus took, which led him from the spot, a tear fell upon the flower-strewn floor, and at length, when he had entirely disappeared, the unrestrained tears gushed forth so rapidly that Alma was astonished herself.

"Why should I weep for the ungrateful man? If he had thought of the bower, often, very often, he would certainly have entered. But I should like to know who ornamented the floor with flowers? Perhaps it was the old pilot." The latter thought was extremely painful to her, and seemed the more probable, as all hope vanished of seeing somebody return.

"I do not care the least, O, not the least where he goes; he may go and come wherever he pleases," and tear after tear flowed down Alma's cheeks. "I wish I had never seen him. O, if he had not preserved me from the ruins! But listen, there comes some one else. O, I hope he will not come in now." Alma placed her handkerchief over her face and hastily entered the bower.

It was really Charles Augustus who returned, and this time Alma had no time for hopes and fears, for he suddenly stood before her in the little bower. The poor girl still held her handkerchief before her weeping eyes, and, between fright and joy, hardly knew what to do.

"Alma!" exclaimed Charles Augustus, who in his surprise forgot all restraint.

This single name, which she had never before heard uttered by his lips, sounded extremely beautiful. It had never appeared so pretty a name before. "O," thought she, "if he would only speak it again!" and this hope was soon fulfilled.

"Alma, Alma," said Charles Augustus, as the girl still concealed her face, "do you weep?"

"My head aches," replied Alma, endeavoring to look unconcernedly upon the lake. "I did not intend to come here, but the morning air was so fresh and beautiful."

"I am convinced," replied Charles Augustus, emboldened by the knowledge that none would hear him, except one who was still more timid than himself; "I am convinced that it is not the headache that causes you to weep. Have you no grief upon your heart?"

"No. I am so childish,"—and she endeavored to appear more cheerful.

"I dare not be presumptuous," said Charles Augustus, taking her hand, which, in her confusion, she allowed him to retain, "but you have wept, and a single tear of yours makes me unhappy. There are sentiments which cannot be explained. A certain sympathy told me that you would come to the bower to-day, and therefore I decorated it for you."

"I also thought so," replied Alma, frankly; "but you did not enter when you first came." She suddenly ceased and violently withdrew her hand. She could not pardon herself that she had displayed so much weakness.

But at the same time Charles Augustus wound his arm around her waist, and the holiest entreaties could be read in his love-filled eyes.

"Alma!" whispered he, "my life, my happiness is in your hands. I cannot live unless you love me and will become my own."

Alma's heart was too full for words.

"A word, a single word!" entreated Charles Augustus.

"I cannot," replied Alma, nestling her head in his bosom. "I am so much afraid."

"Afraid only, and no more? dear Alma, I beseech you to have confidence in one who will never grant his faith, love or

heart to any other. Are you only afraid?"

"No, I am also happy," whispered Alma; and at this moment the bond was sealed. "But O, what will my father say?"

"Be not afraid. Why should we fear when we are in a perfect heaven? We will go immediately in search of him?"

"To enjoy that pleasure you need not go far," exclaimed the Chief Forester, who at this moment with glittering eyes entered this little heaven. "Yes, sir, here is her father already. Yes, sir, here he is to prove that you have acted like a scoundrel. Don't become pale, like a gallows rogue, and like a coward, as you are; for have you not enticed the girl to have secret meetings with you without the knowledge of her father, that you might gain possession of her heart? Are you not ashamed of yourself? It is a great wonder that I do nothing more than to entreat you to take yourself off."

During this outbreak of the Chief Forester Alma had retreated to the further corner of the bower, and gathered the little presence of mind left her, that she might see how her lover would behave to her father. She was anxious to know whether Charles Augustus would answer her father, and although she considered it would be better not to answer at all, nevertheless she was pleased when she saw in Charles Augustus' pale features an expression which was nearly as severe as that of her father's. His eyes flashed and his lips quivered as he spoke in a voice far different from that which he had ever used towards her.

"Take care, take care, Mr. Bruse; remember that no father has the right to call the man a scoundrel who courts his daughter's love. You may thank the presence of your daughter that I answer your insult in a manner different than I would have used had we been alone. But now I entreat you to hear my prayer, to clothe which I now lack fitting words, and which prayer I would have addressed to you in a more pleasing manner, had not this interference taken place."

"Yes, upon my soul, you complain of the want of fitting words," replied the Chief Forester, putting a restraint upon himself, although he could not help approving of the calm, as well as the bold answer of the youth. "Indeed these words are not fitting for a lover, of whom one knows nothing except what he has seen fit to communicate himself. In the mean time it makes no difference, for you can never marry my daughter. I have already betrothed her to a suitor who has a wiser head than you, and knows how to take hold of the matter at the right end."

"What, sir! have you already betrothed your daughter, without her knowledge?"

"No, sir, not without her knowledge. Come here, my angel, and say for yourself whether you know that your father has destined you for another suitor. Well, let us hear. Speak openly and frankly, that your knight here may understand you. To speak the truth, it is rather a superfluous kindness on my part; but I shall grant it nevertheless."

"This demand," said Charles Augustus, "is made in such a manner that Miss Alma must be frightened. She may, therefore, answer as she chooses. I shall hold her to her former assurances." Then he turned to Alma and spoke in a soft voice. "Speak, dear Alma, was it with your knowledge that your father promised your hand?"

"Dear Alma!" mimicked the Chief Forester, making a wry face. "Sir, love whomsoever you choose, but I must entreat you to speak less familiarly with my daughter. Well, can't you speak, girl?"

Alma looked first upon her father, then to her lover, and answered: "I certainly knew papa's desire; but I also declared that I would not marry the Major."

"A declaration," added the Chief Forester, "which means just nothing. Come along home with me; for I now consider the matter all settled."

"No, my dear Mr. Bruse, not at all," said Charles Augustus, who saw the necessity of composure. "Let us not separate in such a manner. I am sure that if Miss Alma should go in advance of us, and you would permit me to tell you my circumstances, you would be perfectly satisfied with them; for if I was not able to support a wife I would never have entertained a desire to wed."

"This is all spoken to the wind; although I believe you are an honest man, and would be able to support the girl if you married her; yet you must have seen that such an occurrence can never take place. My whole conduct towards you, even from the first, was rebuking enough."

"It was this very circumstance that forced me to seek Miss Alma here, because her father's house was closed against me."

But may I ask you from whence came this strong feeling against me, a total stranger? You evinced your dislike to me when we first met at the ruins."

"This," said the Chief Forester, taking his daughter's hand, "arose from the fact, that I saw in your behavior that you had already fallen in love with the girl. Now, as it is impossible for me to have two sons-in-law, I shall choose the one with whom I am best acquainted, and who has long been my friend."

"But I am in possession of Alma's consent and love, and these are claims which I am not willing to relinquish; on the contrary, I shall do all in my power to maintain them."

Thus speaking, Charles Augustus looked upon Alma with tender love beaming in every lineament of his countenance, and without waiting for a reply, went on his way down the winding foot-path.

"Very well, very well; I will look out for you," muttered the Chief Forester, and departed with his daughter.

Alma endeavored to cast an imploring look up into her Father's face, but could not. She momentarily expected a violent outbreak of passion from him, but he said in an unusually quiet tone, "I do not comprehend how such a stupid goose as you could dare contradict the will of your father, and commence a love affair under his very nose. At all events, it seems that you are not so very stupid."

Nothing more was spoken this evening; but that which was not said was thought, and Alma felt that every day brought its own sorrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Major arrived late on Saturday evening. Alma remained in her room, which she had not left since the interview between her father and lover, except when expressly bade to do so. Suddenly she heard the footsteps of her father. But when he opened the door she shrank back—never before had she observed such a serious expression upon his countenance.

"I have told you, Alma," said the Chief Forester, taking her hand within his, "I have told you that I would give you sufficient time to spell the word, yes; and now I give you half an hour to do so. You have long known my determination, and you also know that it is not my custom to change it."

"But father," replied Alma, striving to regain her courage, "I can never give my consent to two."

"You did not give it to that impudent boy. The few words you may have spoken to him are dissolved by the will of your father. To-night you will give your consent to the Major; to-morrow we will celebrate the betrothal—and that's all."

"Father, father, I shall die, if you compel me."

"Don't anger me, girl;" thus speaking, the Chief Forester uplifted his hand threateningly, and glanced so sharply at the poor girl, that she turned her head in fear. "That devilish love," muttered the old man, and returned to his sanctum.

"I am fearful that you have not told me the plain truth, brother," said the Major, with an inquiring look. "Alma has certainly a dislike to me, which you strive to conquer, and conceal from me."

"Dislike, dislike!" exclaimed the Chief Forester, with a flushed face. "I hope there is no use in speaking when I command."

"But," replied Major Kling, "I cannot be satisfied with your commands. Alma's preference is necessary."

"The deuce take the witch," exclaimed the Chief Forester, losing his temper. "I really believe you intend to take back your word. If you wish to have my daughter stand, and bow down before you, exclaiming in a voice sufficiently loud for all to hear, 'I wish to be the wife of the honest and honorable Major Kling,' then I am willing that the matter should cease; for so much I can tell you, the girl will not come of her own accord and say, 'here I am, take me!'"

"Do not be so passionate," replied the Major; "but you must excuse me, if nothing will satisfy me except an answer from Alma's own lips. If she says no, then my suit will cease."

"Take yourself off with your foolishness! Is it possible that a modest girl can say yes, at the first breath? My late wife, my lamented Mary, said no, ten times; but I did not lose my courage. It spurred me on to still greater exertion, and believe it or not, I beat four rivals out of the field in one month. You, however, will not contend with a single no, nor a single rival."

"What do you mean?" said the Major, in consternation. "Have I really a rival?"

"Ah! what do you think, brother?" replied the Chief Forester, erecting himself proudly. "Do you think my daughter has but one lover? Alma is beautiful, and although I say it myself, is rich enough to have as many lovers as her dear mother had, and this would certainly have happened at all events, and perhaps twice as many suitors would have been here, had I not shut my doors against all young gentlemen."

"And pray, from whence did this *one* come?"

"I almost think that he came down on a flash of lightning, when Alma so narrowly escaped in the ruins of Alvastra. It is the young Iron Proprietor, who, in revenge for the trick I played him at the dinner table, has secretly wooed the girl."

"And her answer?"

"Is of no importance. I hope you will believe me that I would not give her to you for a wife, did I not think that it would bring her happiness. Alma is exceedingly good, but very sentimental, and needs a husband who will assist her in her weakness, in a friendly but energetic manner. You are such a man. You will treat her kindly, and will never behave to her in a weak manner, still less with harshness. It would be a great misfortune to her if she should marry one of those young scapegoats, who love their wives for a short time, and then let them sink down, step by step, until they become almost nothing, having no ambition but to take care of their children, and attend to their domestic duties. I do not wish that my child should meet with such a fate. She is a gem, and whoever wears her must know how to value her."

While this conversation took place in the Chief Forester's room, during which the old man frequently looked at his watch, Alma sat in her own room, with her watch in hand, counting the minutes which she could yet call her own. Her soul abhorred the thought of transferring the promise she had given to Charles Augustus to the Major. But when could she find the courage to declare this to her father in the Major's presence?

As she sat there, thus wrapped in her meditations, a rap was heard upon the window-pane, and she saw a bushy, black head peering into the room. It was the old pilot, who, with a friendly nod, inquired whether she liked the bower? Alma advanced to the window, but she had scarcely lifted the sash, ere she received a little note, and the pilot immediately departed. She bolted the door—broke the seal—and read for the first time the writing of her beloved.

"MY ALMA:

"I trust in you, as I do in the word of God. Stand battle for our love, and appeal to the Major's honor. But if their words are beyond your power, if you cannot avoid obeying the command of your father to-morrow, and must accept a connection, which you know is a forced one, do so; but remain faithful, for sure as I am that your heart will never belong to another than me, so sure am I also that you, even if you should be ten times betrothed to the Major, would never become the wife of any save your Charles Augustus. In your father's present disposition, a new proposal from me, nay, even our prayers, would injure our cause. We have, therefore, to await our time. God have you in his keeping, my own dear one, is the prayer of,

"Your,

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

"P. S.—Later this evening the pilot will pass your window again. Prepare a letter for him. O, how I long for it."

Alma placed the note in her little table drawer; and, looking at her watch, was frightened when she saw the hand pointing at the decisive moment. She knew that hesitation would irritate her father still more; and, without a fixed plan, but with a firm determination to leave all to God, and to confess everything to the Major, she entered her father's room.

"See, here comes the bride," said the Chief Forester taking her hand. "Give the other to the Major, my child. You could not find a better bridegroom among the whole male population of Sweden."

"Father!"

Alma looked up into her father's face; but received a look which immediately sealed her lips.

"Will you allow me to speak alone with Alma?" said the Major, in a tone which forbade refusal.

"As you please—but do not be foolish. Take my advice; if you should take it into your head to play the romantic, and succumb to the girl's sentimentality, I shall once for all declare, that this would not be able to further Alma's other wishes. As long as I have a head upon my shoulders, she shall not wed the one who has marred my most favorite plan. Now do as you please, brother," he added, and left the room.

"Good as gold; but as hot-headed as gunpowder," said the Major, conducting Alma to a sofa.

"O, yes," replied Alma, somewhat composed by the Major's hearty and frank tone. "He is good, but sometimes harsh; and then I fear him."

"But I hope you will not fear me, for I mean nothing but to add to your happiness."

"I believe so—but suppose you could not render me happy?"

"In making you my wife, you mean?"

"Yes," replied Alma, in a low tone, "suppose I should say that I do not wish to be your wife, would you be angry at me?"

"Indeed, Alma, it would cause me much grief; for you cannot imagine how much I have hoped for you; but, Alma, I could not be angry with you, for you do not wish to injure me intentionally."

"Ah, so it is," replied Alma, gaining courage, "it cannot be helped when one loves a certain person, and is entirely indifferent to another."

"Indifferent! That word is a little too hard. Am I then so indifferent to you?"

"A short time ago I liked you very much; as much as one can like one whom she does not—"

"Love," added the Major with a blush. "And now?" he continued.

"Afterwards I was told you wished me for your wife, and then I felt an indifference towards you."

"Consider a short time, Alma; did you feel nothing but indifference?"

"O yes, something more; but it was so wicked that I dare not tell you."

"Tell me, notwithstanding. What did you feel?"

"I could not think of you except with horror. I would rather have died than become your wife."

"I understand," interrupted the Major, "but what do you think of me now?"

"Now," replied Alma, "you are so kind to me that I cannot thank you sufficiently. Still, I am filled with the utmost pain and fear. I will be sincere with you. I love another, and will belong to none but him."

"Thanks for your confidence, dear Alma. I know whom you mean. But now let me enter a little upon my own defence; you shall find that I love you too much to see you unhappy. The first question is, whether you would be unhappy with me or not. I have long since relinquished vanity, but still some self-pride is left me; and I have my doubts whether my rival

can render you happier than I could."

"Ah," replied Alma, frankly, "we are not fit for each other. He is young; but you, Mr. Kling—"

"I am not yet so old, Alma, but that the winter of the young man can come on as soon as mine. He stands a youth. I am a man. But years have nothing to do with a life of love. As long as the latter remains fresh, one year after another passes by, and we never become old."

"I am so very young," interrupted Alma.

"Woman's grace and beauty—you have said so yourself very often—fades after a few years. In such a case, a young husband may become indifferent towards his wife; such examples are of frequent occurrence. An older man, however, does not feel the loss of beauty so much—the woman is still young enough for him, for he is linked to her by the closest bonds of soul and heart. He was delighted when he saw the rose in full bloom; but when it becomes withered, he draws it nigher his heart to shelter it from every blasting wind that might injure it."

Alma knew not how to reply. Why had the quiet and sedate Major said all this to her? His words made a deep but not unpleasant impression upon her heart. How horrible it would be to become old before her time, to grow thin and wan, and for these reasons be neglected by her loved one! Then, O then—but why should *she* meet with such an unhappy fate?

"What have you to say?" said the kind Major, taking Alma's hand.

"I am moved," said she, "but I cannot consent to be your wife. Dear Mr. Kling, save me from my father. If I am forced to say yes, I assure you, my lips will speak only."

"Perhaps you may be right, Alma, but you shall not escape me without a trial. Many girls have neglected men with whom they could have been far happier than with those for whom they passionately sacrificed themselves. Alma! you must become my betrothed, not so much for my sake as for your own. If you now refuse me, or if I am forced to resign your hand, you well know what you must expect from your father, who anxiously desires our union. But if you do not oppose me, I will promise you, that after the lapse of one year, you shall be free again if your inclinations are unchanged."

"Alas!" replied Alma, half grieved and half rejoiced, "that is a hard condition; still, it gives me hope, and if I should accept your proposal, will you promise me that I can communicate the conditions, as well as the reward, to the one whom—"

"Who, from this day, is no longer your lover. Yes, I promise that, but I demand that he must not write to you or visit you openly or secretly. After the year has passed, however, he shall have the right to appear again. If you are then convinced, Alma, that you can be happy with him, you may then become his bride."

"And my father?" inquired Alma, anxiously.

"I will tell him that you have consented to my proposal, but desire no public celebration; and that nothing shall be said of the wedding until a year has passed. Leave the rest to me."

CHAPTER XVII.

"How long before the council will end?" inquired the Chief Forester, knocking impatiently upon the door with his cane.

"Now—and completely agreeable to our wishes," replied the major, opening the door, and inviting the old gentleman to walk in, with a smile, which, to a close observer, would appear forced.

Alma stood blushing in the centre of the room. She did not contradict the major's words, even with a look.

"Is it possible!" cried the Chief Forester, and, overjoyed, performed one of his grandest leaps into the air. "By the universe! you are the pet child of fortune, brother, or you would not have been able to persuade the most intriguing little imp that ever walked in the sunshine, to dance to your music. Hurrah! children, let us have a frolic! we now have a bride on the Omberg. Come, girl, and kiss your father!"

Alma threw herself into her father's arms, and the old man dashed his pipe and cane to the floor, that he might embrace her without incumbrance, and also leave a place on his shoulder for the honest old major. The indescribable expression of glee and happiness that gleamed in every lineament of his countenance, stung Alma to the heart. She felt that it would have been far different if her father only knew the truth, and the half-reproachful look which she cast upon the major, plainly told him that he had wronged the tender sentiments of her heart, by placing her in a position which he vainly hoped might in time become more natural.

"All right! all right!" said the Chief Forester, after he had heartily embraced them both. "Let us now be reasonable," he continued, as he wiped away a joyful tear which had nestled among his silver gray whiskers. "I will dance at the ball so lightly, that all the girls will fall in love with me; and I tell you in advance, Alma, as soon as you leave the house, I intend to marry again. Many a man, much older than I, has tried the same experiment. What will the little Mrs. Major say, when she has a step-mother as young and beautiful as herself?"

Alma suffered intensely. "If you marry, father," said she, endeavoring to jest, "I shall be jealous."

"And you, my dear, would not be the first one who was jealous of me. When I was young, I made a great deal of noise among the ladies—so much, that I am answerable, in their opinion, for a great many sins; but sit down here and prattle, while I go and embrace my dear dragon. I feel great need of becoming reconciled to her; she has grumbled the entire day. And you, my little sweet!"—here the old man drew Alma to his heart—"believe me, I know the value of the sacrifice you have made, as you call it, although I do not say much; but I assure you, this will form a source of the greatest happiness to you. No, no, my little dove, no tears; but yes, tears belong to the ceremony, therefore you had better go to your room for a few moments."

In the solitude of her little room, Alma knelt down and prayed fervently that this year would not drag heavily for her, and that she might soon have an opportunity of communicating to her father the friendly compromise she had made with the major. In the mean time, the minutes passed rapidly by. The note should have been written before.

Alma took the pen, but she could not arrange her ideas. She had never before written to any man save her father, and now, to write to one she loved, how difficult that was, especially when she was considered the betrothed of another. But write she must, and, to study the form of a love-letter, she opened the one she had received from Charles Augustus, and read and re-read the address, "My Alma."

The word "My," before her name, appeared too confidential. She experimented, and wrote, "*My* Charles Augustus;" but then her heart beat so strongly, that she could scarcely write six words, and she concluded to omit the address altogether. But even the commencement of the letter was difficult; and after many attempts, spoiling many sheets of paper, at length the following was produced:

"I have commenced ten letters, without knowing exactly what or how to write; although I have read your dear letter time and again. But after to-morrow, I shall not be allowed to do so; for from that day I shall be considered the betrothed of Major Kling. But I know it all by heart; and shall recite its contents to myself every day. After a year has passed I shall be free again. The Major has promised me as a man of honor, that if, after the lapse of one year, I shall continue to insist that it is impossible for me to be happy with him, of which there is no doubt, I may be at liberty again. But alas! during all this time we are not to be allowed the privilege of seeing or communicating with each other. This is too cruel. But believe me, Charles Augustus, that I remain eternally

"Your
ALMA."

"P. S.—If this letter should not be as it should be, then excuse your own Alma; it is but lately that she has loved, and she cannot express herself as her heart bids her to do. But believe me, under all circumstances, I will remain your

As soon as the letter was sealed, Alma stepped to the window and anxiously awaited the appearance of the old pilot. But he remained away so long, that, fearing she might be called before he came, she went to the back gate of the garden to look for him.

The sun had set and twilight come on, and the beech trees cast such a shadow that she was unable to discern anything beyond them. She, therefore, listened intently, and soon heard the sound of approaching footsteps. The pilot arrived, and his sharp eyes, which were familiar with darkness, soon perceived Alma behind the hedge. But in spite of her impatient beckoning he pretended not to see her, and went on his way with his large fish-basket perched upon his shoulders.

Alma stepped through the gate to hurry after him, when suddenly she was seized by some unknown person, and the next moment she reposed in the arms of her lover.

"Alma, dear Alma, you see that God is on our side; for you have come at the very moment." He took the note from her hand and whispered, "These lines shall be my consolation—let me hear now all that has happened."

"I cannot remain long," sighed Alma, trembling with joy and fear.

"What! Alma, my dear Alma! Dare you not console, even for a few moments, the one who has suffered, and will suffer, so much for you? Did you speak to the Major?"

"The letter will tell you all—but I pray you, dear Charles Augustus, let me go—for a whole year I dare not belong to you—Read, read."

"A year!" exclaimed Charles Augustus. "Alas, Alma, what have you promised?" He tore open the letter, and by the fading light of the red glow which the sun had left in the horizon, Charles Augustus read his doom. He then entreated Alma to tell him all that had been said and arranged. She did so.

During the few moments that they had been thus engaged, a change had taken place in his countenance. It was not merely the passion of love that glowed on his cheek; it was desperation, madness at the thought that he was compelled to surrender the object of his adoration to another for an entire year. "No, no," he exclaimed hastily, "that shall not be done; some terrible plot is concealed beneath it. Your father, dear Alma, must know all. I will go to him and tell him all myself, at all hazards."

"O, no; do not if you love me. You would repent it a thousand times. My father has already declared, that I, even if the Major should renounce his claims, shall never——But I entreat you to confide in me; believe me I shall never become Major Kling's wife. Did you not tell me yourself, that we must gain time?"

"At that time I did not think that so long a separation was before us; but——" Charles Augustus endeavored to restrain his passion, "for *your* sake, I will leave you for a whole year; but as soon as that has expired I shall return and demand your hand. And now, Alma, I will not ask you to swear to be faithful to me; for if I should demand further assurances than your lips now give me, I should be infinitely unhappy. Your kiss is more sacred than an oath. But one thing I entreat you upon my knees—grant him no favors. Do not allow him to kiss you, except in the presence of your father."

"Fear nothing," said Alma, smiling through her tears. "I will be careful of that; and now farewell, farewell."

"Farewell, my own Alma—forget me not."

Alma released herself from the arms of her lover, but he drew her to his bosom once more; and the seconds perhaps might have extended themselves into minutes, had not the Chief Forester's voice been heard calling Alma. Another farewell and Charles Augustus left her, and Alma was received into the embrace of her father as she sprang through the gate.

"You know too well," said he, in a far different tone of voice than he had used before, "that your father is too old a hunter to be deceived easily. Who is that running through the trees?"

"Charles Augustus, dear father. The Major himself has allowed me to notify him of what has happened."

"Indeed," said the Chief Forester. "Do you say the *Major himself* so soon; but do you know, my little rosebud, that you must look out, or your father himself will take your honor into his keeping. If I discover that secret meetings or love-letters take place, then—but I need say no more. I perceive we understand each other."

The following day was celebrated as Alma's birthday. It was only by the most urgent entreaties of the Major that the Chief Forester was persuaded not to hurt Alma's feelings by a public betrothal. At length the old man came to the conclusion that the Major was right in this respect. The important subject should remain a family secret until Alma's heart and sentiments, which the old gentleman thought were easily moulded, had forgotten their old impressions, and had received new ones, which could not fail from being very forcible.

A few weeks afterwards, the Chief Forester and Alma made the Major a visit. All honor was given to the beautiful girl; but often she was obliged to hear from the Major that the time might come when she should seek for happiness in this house, where she would find nothing wanting which could add to her pleasures.

"But," said Alma one day, when the Major spoke of such a time, merely as a possibility, but still with warmth, "is not that contrary to our agreement? That time will never come. What is the use of speaking of it at all."

"Be not so cruel, Alma, and do not deprive me of all hope," replied the major, with a deepness of feeling which frightened the girl.

She esteemed the major too highly to think that he had caught her in a snare, having betrayed her into consenting to a fraudulent betrothal, which would turn out a true one; but still he displayed his sentiments but too openly, and therefore she replied seriously, "I cannot give you the slightest hope, even should the trial continue for ten years."

The major did not answer. He did all in his power to render her visit pleasant. Yes, the good major, in truth, rendered himself ridiculous in his attempts to appear younger than he really was. He dressed himself with more than usual care, and exhibited in conversation and gestures an unnatural liveliness. He displayed himself for the best, however, and even Alma was obliged to confess herself that he looked extremely well, when he was mounted on his horse, and caused the animal to make many lofty manœuvres. But when he dismounted and endeavored to attract the attention of Alma in any other way, her applause ceased, and if his gallantries overstepped in the least the bounds which had been laid down before the betrothal, Alma became backward and sad. She felt that she was caught in a snare, from which she saw no escape.

In the mean time she heard not a word from Charles Augustus. Often, as she walked in the park, she thought she saw the shadow of her lover, but she was always disappointed. His name was never mentioned to her, neither did she ever utter it herself, but the remembrance of him was deeply engraved on her memory.

"I should advise you to be married at Christmas," said the Chief Forester one day to his future son-in-law. "The girl begins to look moon-struck. If she is once married her foolish whims will be all driven away, in case there are any remaining with her, which I much doubt."

The major shook his head.

"I have given Alma one year," said he, "and this she shall have; although it much grieves me that, instead of approaching, her love seems to turn from me each day more and more."

"It is all your own fault, brother. The betrothed should be allowed to follow wherever her whims may lead her. A wife, on the contrary, who has been educated in the principles which my deceased wife implanted in my daughter's mind, will never dare to soar too high. I, who understand women better than you do, tell you that she will soon leave off her foolishness and make you a good wife. But if she is left too much to herself, she will, for the very want of occupation, spend her time in foolish love intrigues, so that in the end she will not know where her heart or head is."

"I cannot prevent that," replied the major; "but I will tell her that I am much grieved."

"Grieved! A plague upon grief! Let boys be grieved; and do not forget that it ill becomes a man of your age to play the fool with a girl eighteen years old. Do not be so confounded anxious to do everything which she desires, and to avoid all things that she does not desire. She may open her mouth and speak right out if she desires anything. Bestow—this is my principle—bestow upon your wife all liberty, love and tenderness, as long as she knows how to appreciate those gifts; but as soon as you discover that nothing will take, then use a different tone. At first she will be surprised, afterwards

offended, and at length she will begin to think over the matter seriously. Even if these thoughts should not turn out to your advantage, they will at least be of their originator. In dealing with women you must always keep their ungovernable whims under control. Once sure of that, you can lead her wherever you choose. This is the way I managed my late wife Mary."

CHAPTER XVIII.

At Lindafors everything wore a dreary aspect. Autumn had set in, and no news had been received from the beloved son. Mrs. Kemner had read and re-read the little letter which Charles Augustus had written from Hoestholm, as well quietly to herself as to her friend Margareta, so often that it was almost worn out, and much blurred with her tears. Still, as usual, she endeavored to conceal her sorrow from her husband; but it was an unsuccessful attempt. Mr. Kemner observed her anxiety, but as he was as anxious himself, for Charles Augustus' prolonged absence troubled him so much that he was not able to afford consolation, he frequently sent to Margareta himself, that his wife might find courage and hope in the wisdom of that wonderful woman.

"You see now," said Mrs. Kemner to Margareta, who surprised her one day as she was dusting out Charles Augustus' room, in which were the poor decoy birds that looked gloomy and deserted themselves, "you see now, Margareta, I believe that the boy has thrown himself into that confounded Lake Welter. Alas! how much pain he causes me; but if he ever returns you may be sure that——"

"You will forgive him from the bottom of your heart," exclaimed a voice from the door, and the good woman found herself encircled within the embrace of her long expected son. Margareta hurried from the room, that she might convey the joyful tidings to Mr. Kemner.

Charles Augustus was overwhelmed with questions from his father and mother; and at length was obliged to relate the full particulars of his unlucky love affair. He, however, said nothing of the hope which glowed within his bosom, of the happiness which awaited him in the future.

Mrs. Kemner could scarcely comprehend all this; first, that her Charles Augustus should receive a denial from any father in the world; second that he with his sanguine temperament, had not battled more earnestly for his love. "I hardly know you, my boy," said she.

"Why, wife," said Mr. Kemner, "you cannot expect that the boy should have acted like a fool in the matter. Be rejoiced that he has acted so reasonably. Charles Augustus always evinced a firm disposition; he inherited it from his grandfather."

Charles Augustus took his father's hand and assured him that he was determined to uphold the dignity of his grandfather's character. "From this day forward I am a changed man; and it is my intention to become a more industrious farmer than even my grand or great-grandfathers were."

"Let me embrace you, my son," exclaimed the delighted Ironfounder. "It is now that I am really proud of you. Blessed be the mitten! it was given you in a fortunate hour."

Charles Augustus kept his word so faithfully that Mr. Kemner said to his wife, "He is too rash, mother; he has too many plans, and might ruin himself were they not so insignificant."

Soon afterwards it was decided that Charles Augustus should take the long talked of trip to England. This he gladly assented to—partly to gratify the innate activity which existed within him—and partly to pass away the time, which had become tedious since his separation from Alma. Accordingly he made the journey; and after his return he threw aside his

insignificant plans, and projected gigantic ones, as the old gentleman used to style them. And now for the first time since his return from the Omberg, the father and son had frequent disputes. The old man was no friend of new inventions, which were expensive. Charles Augustus, however, who had extravagant notions in his head, rejected all the old methods of his father and grandfather as useless.—The consequence of all this was, the old man one day, when highly enraged, proposed a division of the property; and to Charles Augustus' great delight, he became the owner of the beautiful estate of Rosenbund, with the liberty of doing with it as he chose.

When the old gentleman heard of the new arrangements, not only in regard to agricultural implements; but concerning new machinery and spinning jennies, which were to be imported from England, he shook his head dubiously. But when he became acquainted with the fact that Charles Augustus was to construct a new mansion in which to reside with his Alma, Mr. Kemner elevated his eye-brows, and remarked to his wife: "that it would have been much better had Charles Augustus remained a dreamer, and spent his time with his decoy ducks, rather than to have hit upon such extravagances, which would only turn out bad in the end."

Afterwards, however, when Charles Augustus' schemes had turned out favorably, he would say, "My son, who without boasting is the most experienced farmer in the country, does so and so, uses this and that implement;" and held him up as an example worthy to be imitated by all farmers.

In the mean time, however, before this had come to pass, the old man would say, "Well, well, young people have their whims; and have to pay dear for their experience. I will not fetter his efforts; for thank God, he has sufficient means to try any experiment he chooses, and they will do him good—even if he gains nothing but the knowledge that the methods of his father and grandfather, are worth something also."

A short time after Christmas—when a remarkable heavy frost compelled Charles Augustus to abandon for a time his works at Rosenbund—he secretly determined to make a visit to the Omberg, to discover how matters stood there. Therefore, under the pretence of making a business journey to Gothenburg, he departed, with a thousand hints from Mrs. Kemner, that he should make a better trial this time. For the good lady had heard that there were many beautiful girls in Gothenburg.

Charles Augustus smiled. There was none whom he could love except one; and if he could see *her*, even at a distance, he would return to his labors with renewed hope; and thus endeavor to shorten the long year.

"Only favor me with not returning with any new-fangled notions," entreated his father; "for although I am fool enough through my great paternal love, to allow you to carry on your foolish plans; still, I shall be the first one to tell you of their uselessness."

Charles Augustus pressed his father's hand. "I am convinced, my dear father," said he, "that you will finally confess their merits, for you cannot but be just."

"All right, my son," answered his father, "show me their use; but the old mansion at Rosenbund was good enough for a bachelor; you bestow your money upon things of no use."

"That may be," said Charles Augustus, blushing, "that is, if you think I shall always remain a bachelor——"

Mrs. Kemner gestured to her husband. "I am no woman," said she, "if Charles Augustus does not entertain thoughts of marriage. All this activity in a young man of his character, must have certain reasons for displaying itself. Such miracles cannot be effected save by love, and successful love. He is certainly engaged. But it is not right that he should conceal it from his parents, who would willingly give their lives for him."

"I assure you, my dear mother, that it is not so. On the contrary, the one I love is the betrothed of another. But a secret voice tells me, that in spite of all, she will yet be my wife."

"My dear Charles Augustus," said his father, "when you were a child I could not understand you, and now I comprehend you less than ever. To build a house and make preparations in the hopes of gaining the hand of another's betrothed—that was not the fashion when I was young, and I would advise you to get such whims out of your head. The sooner you do so the better."

CHAPTER XIX.

As a child is soothed by Christmas presents, so did Neta endeavor to amuse Alma, during the long winter evenings, by displaying to her all the beautiful gifts which the Major had presented her. But Alma pushed them aside and said, "They do not give me joy, dear Neta."

"How can you say so, child? Only look at this magnificent necklace. Now, how much do you think it cost?"

"I know nothing about them; but I do know that I do not wish to wear those pearls."

"Certainly, not before the wedding; but O, how well they will become you then!"

Alma was silent.

Miss Neta carefully replaced the jewels in their case, and took from a drawer an old-fashioned ivory jewel case. "Look here, Alma," said she, "here is something which you will like to look at. It is a family heirloom, which has descended from one generation of the Klings to the other. Is there anything more beautiful than this exquisite chancing?"

"Then it would be better for it to remain in the family to which it belongs," said Alma, peevishly.

"Well, that was his opinion when he gave it to you, for you are to be one of the family."

"Dear Neta, do not trouble me any longer," entreated Alma; "lock the trinkets up in the drawer."

"Immediately, dear child, immediately. I only wished to amuse you; but, at least, look once at this ruby cross. The wife of the late Col. Kling received it from the own hands of Queen Louisa Ulrica, as a bridal gift. She was the lady in waiting of the Queen."

"What! Queen Ulrica's lady in waiting! She must have been a very old woman."

"Never mind," replied Neta, coolly, "if she was not Queen Ulrica's lady in waiting, she was that of some other Queen. But it was a royal gift at any rate, and," added the old lady, as she replaced the jewels in their case, "it is a great pity that the Major should lavish such gifts upon one who does not know how to value them. Well, well, I did not mean anything wrong; be a good girl and I will go out, and bake you a cake."

When Neta had departed, Alma rested her head upon her hand, and thought over her sorrows. The Major had not spoken of her lover since the day of the betrothal, and had not alluded to the conversation they had held on that occasion since. And now Alma shed tears, that she had not the courage to speak to the Major, as she constantly feared the question:

"Are you sure that he will return?"

She remembered but too well how she had compelled Charles Augustus to promise that he would not communicate with, nor present himself to her for one entire year. But was there no other means by which she could be assured that he was awaiting the conclusion of the year with as much impatience as herself?

As she sat there in the bright moonlight, she fancied she saw a form moving behind the garden hedge. She looked more earnestly, and was convinced she saw the image of the one whose features were ever before her eyes. Her heart beat with redoubled rapidity. Did he not beckon to her? O, yes! it was he, it must be him. But Alma was too much excited to be able to give the slightest sign that she had discovered him. Suddenly Miss Neta entered the room with a light to search for her keys. The form near the hedge vanished, and Alma sat back in her chair to compose herself. "He is gone—is gone," said she to herself, "but why should he have gone so soon? Perhaps it was not himself—suppose it was his apparition!" Alma was filled with horror at the thought that her lover was dead, and that she had been visited by his apparition. The gesture he had made was his last farewell.

As she thus meditated, Charles Augustus, who had accomplished his purpose without knowing what sorrow he had caused Alma, hastened towards the cabin of the old Pilot. He saw from a distance, through the window, the fire burning on the hearth, and before it sat the old man fashioning a spoon out of wood. Charles Augustus knocked at the door. "Who is it that comes at this late hour?" said the Pilot, in a gruff voice.

"An old friend," replied Charles Augustus, and the old man sprang to his feet, and opened the door.

"Welcome; are you tired of being out there, near the sea coast?"

"I longed to return here, but I do not wish to have it known. You will not betray me?"

"I never betray a friend," replied the old man, and handed Charles Augustus the only chair, which stood before the hearth; "but to speak sincerely, if my sweetheart should have been so cruel as to become the betrothed of another, I would not have walked three steps to see her."

"Of the affairs of others you cannot be so good a judge," said Charles Augustus, evasively. "I only wished to see her. That is not wrong, I am sure."

"But nothing good can come of it. The girl might wish to see you herself, and then you would hold a secret interview."

"You are too severe, old friend; but what news have you from the Chief Forester's house?"

"O, everything is all right there," replied the old man, although he well knew that the people talked altogether in a different manner; but he was fearful of raising Charles Augustus' passion, for he thought that a secret interview between the lovers would turn out badly for their cause.

Charles Augustus observed the hesitation of the old man, and allowed the conversation to slacken. But now the question arose as to how the guest could be accommodated for the night? Charles Augustus left the arrangements to the old man, as he was not particular how they were settled.

He remained concealed in the old man's cabin until the next evening, when he went out and carefully approached the spot which caused his heart to beat warmly. There were lights to be seen in several windows of the Chief Forester's mansion. The Chief Forester and the major were seated near the window of the old man's apartment, each smoking vigorously. The curtains were drawn up, and Charles Augustus could see into the interior of the room.

Alma's window was also illuminated, and Charles Augustus stole carefully towards it in the shadow of the hedge. Suddenly Charles Augustus' attention was turned from Alma's window by hearing the Chief Forester speaking so loudly that he could overhear every word.

"Tell me, brother," said the old man, "what do you think of somnambulism?"

"In truth," replied the major, "I have given the subject but little thought. Why do you ask me?"

"Because I fear that Alma is slightly tinged with that infirmity."

Charles Augustus, who was just about departing, could not do so when he heard Alma's name mentioned, and therefore advanced nearer the window, that he might listen to the conversation better.

"Listen!" continued the old man. "When I returned last evening I went into her room to kiss her good night. Everybody has his weakness, and mine is that I cannot sleep well if I do not see the girl before I go to bed. Very well, I opened the door quietly, for I thought she might be asleep; but what did I see? Alma was sitting close to the window, talking to herself; but words which, I am convinced, she would never have thought of, much less spoken, had she been awake. I heard her speak of her lover as dead, and she thought she was conversing with his spirit."

"And do you really believe that she was asleep?" inquired the major, with illy concealed mistrust.

"Certainly. She was as I have described her, and I carried her to the bed without her speaking to me."

The major's face assumed a serious cast. "Excuse me, brother," said he, "but I believe she was really awake, and it was no ghost she saw."

"What!" replied the Chief Forester; "do you mean to say that she really saw something?"

"Why, could she not have seen his shadow? In the moonshine, you know, everything looks mysterious."

"Zounds! you do not think that he is in the neighborhood, do you? But, if she had seen him, why did she not answer?"

"Perhaps fright sealed her lips; perhaps stratagem to prevent an explanation."

Now the Chief Forester sprang from his chair, and kicking his favorite dog, which was reposing in the corner, swore that he would commence a search around the house that very evening.

"What for?" said the major, soothingly. "I hope you do not intend to doubt the honor of your own daughter?"

Charles Augustus thought it inadvisable to remain where he was any longer. Filled with despair at the evil which his necessary *incognito* created, he fled, with the determination to leave the country as soon as he had an opportunity of explaining to Alma the unfortunate mistake.

The Chief Forester remained standing in the centre of the room. His face was flushed with anger. In one hand he flourished his pipe, and with the other brandished his cane with such violence that the furniture was in danger.

"That was an infamous idea you just advanced," said he at length. "How could you speak so? A lover beneath Alma's window! Impossible! My Alma is as pure and innocent as the holiest can be; and that she should feign to be in a faint to her loving father, whom she has good cause to love in return! Do explain yourself, if you can."

"The matter is very plain," replied the major. "All girls have singular ideas."

"Yes, yes; you have fine notions. I tell you that Alma has no such ideas, and never had, neither will she ever have them. But I am determined to be satisfied in this matter. If ghosts were walking last evening they will probably return to-night. If you please, we will take a little walk around the park."

The major consented, and if Charles Augustus had not been warned by their previous conversation he would have been discovered; but now he took the precaution of going to the old pilot's cabin by a roundabout road. The Chief Forester and the major bent their steps towards the garden, where they soon found traces, which the major with a certain triumph, and the Chief Forester with increased anger, declared did not belong to any of the family. The footsteps, however, crossed and re-crossed so intricately that the two gentlemen, who did not think fit to make any noise, did not deem it best to lavish their time, where so little hope of success might be expected. To have a pretext to place watchers in the garden, and thus prevent the possibility of another visit, the Chief Forester took several pieces of linen from the clothes-line, which Neta had hung there to dry, and having concealed them, the Chief Forester shouted, "Thieves! thieves!" at the top of his lungs. Nothing more was needed. Miss Neta, at the head of her kitchen scullions, hurried to the spot, and having discovered that several pieces of linen were missing and that the balance were frozen stiff, demanded that the Chief Forester should have a watch placed in the garden for the rest of the night.

"There you see," whispered the Chief Forester to the major, "this is just as good as a wolf-snare. What a disturbance a love affair does make!"

"Have you seen nothing else?" inquired the major, with a certain timidity.

"No. What else could I see?"

"Nothing particular; but why was it that Alma extinguished the light in her room?"

The Chief Forester was astounded at the Major's impertinence.

"Was there a light when we first came into the garden?" he inquired with a trembling voice. "I thought she was unwell."

"She had a light in her room even at four o'clock, when I took a little walk into the garden."

"Probably she intends to sleep," replied the Chief Forester, composedly. "I shall look into the matter."

They entered the house, and the Chief Forester taking a light, proceeded to Alma's room, and opening the door peered into the room. The Major stretched his head over the old man's shoulder that he might see also. But the Chief Forester

turned to the Major, and said, pressing his hand,

"As true as I am an honest man, something is going on here. There, look for yourself."

The Major advanced, and turned pale as he saw Alma kneeling before the open window. Her head was placed upon the window-sill, and with one hand she grasped the window-shutter. "Now you can see whether it is somnambulism," whispered the Major, half in anger and half in pain.

"Alma, my child," said the Chief Forester, who did not like to relinquish his poetical belief, "what are you doing here?"

But Alma did not reply. She had swooned.

With indescribable anguish the old man bore his child to the sofa, and now the house was filled with as much confusion as had pervaded the garden a short time before. Alma recovered from her fainting, but was seized with a violent fever, which was attended by delirium. The Chief Forester rushed to and fro, at one time quarrelling with Miss Neta, and at the next blessing her that he had some one to find fault with, for he could not endure this silence, this stepping upon tiptoe, and this suppressed whispering.

* * * * *

The Pilot reported to the anxious Charles Augustus, who had remained concealed in the cabin, all that had transpired in the house of the Chief Forester. Our hero repented that he had not possessed sufficient courage to advance to Alma's window and exchange a word with her. But had he not promised upon his honor that he would hold no secret interviews with her? And now that his foolishness had met with an unexpected punishment, he would readily have broken his vows, and written a few lines, at least, had he known how he could send them to her. The thought, that, in spite of all his anxiety, he would be forced to leave the Omberg, without learning what course her illness had taken and without being able to communicate with her.

In this manner a week passed away, when one day the old Pilot returned from his work and brought the joyful tidings, that Alma had nearly recovered. "And now, my dear friend," said he, "it is time for you to move. Her people have observed that I have visited the mansion more than usual, and I must confess that I was somewhat conscience-smitten, when the Major said to me, the other evening, 'You must have good wages, John, that you carry home more provisions than usual. You never seemed so fond of good living before.' And then he looked as one would when he caught a man committing a crime, but at the same time seemed to mean, finish the matter at once, or else I will place the Chief Forester upon your track."

"He will not do that," said Charles Augustus.

"I think not," replied the old man, "for the Major is an honorable man; but conscience, my friend, cannot be tampered with. I must tell you, plainly, that if there is an investigation to be made, I shall confess everything. I have this cabin from the Chief Forester, who, in truth, is an honest old fellow."

"You are right," said Charles Augustus, thoughtfully. "I must leave you this very evening."

"It pains me," replied the old man, as he kindled the fire upon the hearth, "but right is right; and if she was not the betrothed of another, I would willingly assist you in eloping with her, even if it was from the church."

"But you must promise me one thing."

"Willingly, if it is not a secret message."

"No, only a little pebble, which I found on the beach; if you will place it in the hands of my Alma, all will be right."

"Ahem!" coughed the old man. "I do not know what good that pebble will do her; but I do not think it will harm her at any rate."

"It must not fall into other hands than hers, however. The one who gives it to her must be alone with her and say that it came from me."

The next morning, after Charles Augustus had left the Pilot's humble dwelling, the old man wended his way towards the

Chief Forester's house. He beckoned to a servant girl, and told her that he brought a message from her lover.

The young girl, who frequently employed the old man in such service, hastened to him, and received from his hand, instead of the expected letter, a little shining pebble, with the direction that she should give it to Miss Alma, when she should happen to find her alone.

"With pleasure," said Sophia; but unfortunately she forgot the most important part of the message, which was, that Alma should be alone. The girl had no idea of a love affair, and therefore laid the little stone upon Alma's bed, in the presence of the Chief Forester, saying that it was an exceedingly rare stone which the Pilot had found and sent to her.

At the mention of the Pilot, a blush mantled Alma's cheeks; and before she was able to grasp the stone, her father had already seized it. He held it close to the window, and when he discovered the three letters "C. A. K." scratched upon it, with an effort he repressed his anger and exclaimed: "What foolishness! It is one of those stones which the ignorant consider as protections against sickness; but which on the contrary are so cold and damp that they are quite dangerous."

"O, dear father, give it to me," entreated Alma.

"Excuse me. I shall not do so," replied the Chief Forester, "it is a very dangerous stone;" and with these words the Chief Forester placed the unfortunate pebble in his pocket.

Alma looked at her father beseechingly; and her supposition became a certainty.

"Let me see it at least," said she, "that can do no harm."

But now she received a look which plainly said: "Beware how you trifle with me!" And the Chief Forester left the room without speaking.

But Alma, the poor Alma, who had feared that Charles Augustus would forget her; and then that his apparition had appeared to her, was convinced that her fears had been groundless. She now understood the traces of the linen thieves, and the fact that her father would not allow her to look at the little pebble confirmed her hopes. Surely something was inscribed on it, which might be considered a message. Alma clasped her hands in quiet happiness. That kind Being who had allowed this consolation to be given her, would certainly, after the hard year of trial had passed, give Charles Augustus the means whereby he could bend the proud spirit of her father.

And now Alma rapidly recovered: and the cause of her sudden illness, was never afterwards mentioned.

CHAPTER XX.

Again had the Spring sun shone with golden rays upon the rich parks of Omberg. The lake had long before broken its fetters, and was again free. The Lady of the Lake had returned from her long journey, with her castles in the air, and the inhabitants of earth, water and air felt the regenerating influence of Spring.

It was on one of these beautiful days that the Major invited Alma to walk with him upon the green borders of the lake; and from thence take a row out on the water around the mountain.

Alma took her bonnet, rejoiced at anything to vary the monotony of her life.

"Good," said the Chief Forester, "the betrothed ones should always enjoy the bounties that God gives us, together."

"But I hope they will not ride out alone, together;" observed Miss Neta, who had already the breach of decorum before her eyes.

"Why not?" said the Chief Forester. "They will soon celebrate their marriage."

"Has the betrothal been publicly announced?" inquired Miss Neta, triumphantly. "Who knows that they are to be married?"

"That shall soon be discovered. The wedding will be all the more piquant. But now go, my children," and with a gleeful smile the Chief Forester looked after the Major and Alma, convinced that his friend on this walk—which was the first one he ever proposed to his future bride—would undoubtedly pray that the wedding-day should be fixed.

Alma breathed with more calmness, as each day shortened the year of trial. She had already received the certainty from the old pilot, of the question which her heart had often asked. And she did not doubt but that Charles Augustus would return upon the very day that her liberty was pronounced by the Major, and demand her hand.

The present day was the first of the last month of the year. Alma had paid but slight attention to the hints of her father; and had given herself up entirely to bright anticipations. In the mean time she said nothing to the Major concerning her hopes. He had become more and more suspicious after the affair in the garden. She intended to wait until he should open the conversation upon that subject, himself.

During the walk through the park, they were accompanied by Goldfoot, who sauntered by their side, detained by a ribbon with which Alma led him. But when they arrived at the margin of the lake, the Major, who had been extremely pleased at the gambols of the little favorite, said:

"You must now separate from your pretty companion; we will tie him to this tree."

"O, no; let him go along with us," replied Alma, who felt as though Goldfoot would protect her from the advances of the Major. "He will enjoy it much, for he never was on the lake before."

"He will be in the way."

"Not in mine," replied Alma, stooping down to the little creature, who placed his head confidingly under her arm. "You want to go with us, don't you Goldfoot? I see you do."

"As you please, Alma," said the Major, visibly chagrined. Alma, however, observed the emotion of the Major, and joyfully drew Goldfoot into the boat after her. But Goldfoot seemed to be adverse to this; and decidedly manifested that he did not wish for a pleasure excursion upon the water.

"O, lift him in," entreated Alma; but the latter declared that such a move was against his principles. "Just now," said he, "I gave up to your wishes, and allowed Goldfoot to go with us, but now——"

"It is my turn," interrupted Alma. "And I must give up to Goldfoot; I only do it to show how well I can profit by a good example."

Goldfoot was fastened to a tree; and his young mistress entered the boat, not without a slight palpitation of her heart. "Alas! alas!" thought she, "how glad I will be when we have returned to the shore."

Alma imagined that the Major would immediately commence upon the awkwardness of their position, and the difficulty of breaking the subject to the Chief Forester; but he was silent, seeming to be lost in the contemplation of the beautiful scenery with which they were surrounded.

In the mean time the boat glided over the surface of the water, until it had arrived in the neighborhood of the wonderful cave. And the Major was delighted with the proposal from Alma, that the boat should be run into the mouth of one of the caverns.

It gladdened his heart that Alma, who at first was timid and backward, now gave herself up to the pleasure of his company, although they were alone. But alas! how much was the honest Major mistaken! Never before had Alma been less alone with him than at this moment. She forgot that the Major was with her. Her every thought and feeling were placed upon the object she adored, her lover. His image was brought before her by every object she beheld. She walked with him upon the banks of the lake; she sat with him upon the mossy seat in the bower on the mountain; she was now with him in the grotto; for had not *he* described it to her for the first time? In short, the illusion was so great that she even expected to see the dead falcon in the cleft of the rock, as Charles Augustus had seen it. She enjoyed the scene to its

fullest extent; closing her eyes that she might better hear the dashing of the water upon the rocks. She dropped her head upon her bosom. She did not bestow a thought upon the Major; but soon she was reminded of him.

"What are you thinking of, dear Alma," said the Major.

"*Dear Alma!*" O, how that word offended her ear! The Major had not used it so expressively before; and Alma thought he did so now, as a prelude to what she might think an accidental allusion to their wedding-day.

"I must begin," said she to herself, and when she lifted her eyes and saw the Major looking at her with an expression of uneasiness, she regained her courage. It appeared to her as though the spirit of Charles Augustus was near her in the grotto, and she was glad that the painful declaration would be made upon this spot, for a secret voice told her that the Major would not now have such control over her opinions.

"I think of the time," said she, "which is fast approaching."

"What do you mean?" inquired the Major, with palpitating heart, at the thought that she referred to their wedding-day.

"My meaning is plain; there is but one month remaining of the year of trial which has been set down for me."

"Therefore," replied the Major, with a faltering tone, "you still consider it a year of trial, and not a year of betrothal?"

"I never considered it otherwise even for a moment, and always held fast to the promise you made me, when you said—'if, after the lapse of a year, you still—'"

The Major gestured with his hand. "Enough, enough. Alma you need not repeat those words. I remember them but too well, and will not take them back now, although *you* have not been faithful exactly to your word."

"How have I broken it?"

"You have seen him since that time. He has influenced you. That was against our agreement."

"That meeting, if it can be called one, was an involuntary one," she replied, in a low voice.

"Never mind; it has wrought a work which would never have been done had it not occurred; at least, that is my opinion."

"O, yes, yes."

"It pains me much that the uninterrupted tenderness which I have bestowed upon you for a whole year, and my exertions to gain even a small place within your heart, have been fruitless. And I will not deny that, without being selfish or dishonorable, I have zealously prayed that your sentiments would turn from the stranger youth."

The Major spoke so seriously that Alma was overcome with a painful uneasiness; but at his last words, all the pity she felt for him changed into anger, and with a blush she answered: "I do not understand the difference which exists in love, but one thing I know certainly, and that is, I love but *one* only; and I have to blame myself that I was so weak as to reject the one I loved so well for a whole year, that I might evade the anger of my father."

At this decided language, the Major turned deathly pale. But he retained his presence of mind, and answered by a mute gesture which was expressive enough to tell Alma that she had deeply offended him.

Now, she turned pale also. What had she done? Where had her rashness led her? Was it not enough to have her father against her, that she must now offend the Major, from whom she hoped to obtain the surest protection? What would become of her?

They were both silent for a moment. Nothing was heard but the dashing of the waves, and the monotonous patter of the water as it dropped from the ceiling of the cave.

Alma's soft heart would not allow her to bear the certainty that she had offended the man who had treated her with so much generosity. "Pardon me," said she, "I was ungrateful, reckless; do not be angry with me," and these entreating words were too much for the soft nature of the Major.

"You were unjust," said he, mildly but earnestly. "Do not think that I hold my happiness for a moment above yours. But I

am a man; and it wounded me to the heart when I saw my pain treated with indifference, and my endeavors to reach the goal of future happiness treated with contempt. But now enough of me. Our fate is still united. Fear nothing. This play, which I fondly hoped would prove a reality, must come to an end."

Alma bowed her head. Her eyes spoke more than her lips. The Major seized the oars, and soon the grotto was left far behind them. Goldfoot was waiting for their return at the tree, pawing the ground, and impatiently pulling at his ribbon. Alma hastened up to him and caressed him, while the Major was untying the knot. When Alma accidentally touched the collar around the fawn's neck, she felt something like a folded paper, and tremblingly discovered that it was a letter.

Her cheeks turned red and pale by turns. She saw that the Major was so much engaged with the knot that he did not observe her. She played with the little animal, and, throwing her shawl over his head, succeeded in taking the dangerous paper from its hiding place, and concealed it in her glove.

CHAPTER XXI.

A few days before the incidents described in the foregoing chapter had occurred, Mrs. Kemner said to her husband, "Aye, aye, you always had such singular ideas."

"What do you say? I tell you I have always followed in the path of my father and grandfather."

"That's it; just because you have always travelled upon old paths, you have not kept pace with the times."

"Ah! does the wind blow that way; but that is something you do not understand. I do not despise keeping up with the times, when it is reasonable. But it is altogether unreasonable to consent to all the wild notions that originate in the head of my son. I cannot approve of them. I will say nothing about the manufactories; for, as extravagant as they appear, they may amount to something; but the bird's cage he has built up there—is that a house for a reasonable man? Why, he will make himself a laughing stock."

"But do you know, husband, that you are making yourself ridiculous by condemning something which you have not even seen yet?"

"I have seen the same thing, the plan of it, and should I see the house itself, it would drive me mad."

"But," replied Mrs. Kemner, "is it right that you should be so obstinate? Can you retain Charles Augustus' love and esteem, if you laugh at all his plans as though they were fit for nothing? Although he is so much engaged, he rides over here twice a week, and asks you to go and see his operations. But you scarcely listen to him, and answer neither yes nor no."

"He ought not to have gone away from us," answered the old gentleman, with softened accent. "I was much happier when he was here at home with us, although he did nothing but roam all day in the forest. Then, I saw him at least three times a day; but now, only twice a week, and then only for a short time."

"Well, husband," said Mrs. Kemner, feelingly, "if you would like to see him oftener, ride over and visit him yourself."

"And if I should dare to interfere, or give him some advice, you will see how welcome I am."

"Try it once. Charles Augustus will certainly listen to you with respect and attention. Suppose we go and surprise him. O, I will order the carriage; and even though you will not confess it, still, I think, you would much like to see him."

"That is just what makes me angry. He should have remained at Lindafors, and there have carried on as he pleased."

"Yes, yes; is it his fault that he left us? Who was it that proposed a division, and—"

"O don't bother me, that cannot be altered. But as the day is pleasant, and weakness will have its vent at any rate, let us ride over to Rosenbund, and give the boy a joyful surprise."

For this resolution Mr. Kemner was rewarded by a tender embrace and a flood of warmest endearments.

"God bless you, my dear wife," said the old man, much moved. "I am convinced that no woman has been a happier wife than you are."

Although Mrs. Kemner had some slight doubts on this question, she did not betray her opinion to her husband; but left him in the happy opinion that he had never denied her anything she ever wished for.

About two miles from Lindafors was situated the beautiful estate of Rosenbund, bounded on one side by a heavy forest of oak, and on the other by a beautiful lake, dotted with little green islands, which Charles Augustus had decorated with little pleasure-houses and bowers.

In gay humor the old gentleman had seated himself in the carriage to take a trip to Charles Augustus' little paradise, as he used to call it; but hardly had the road taken a turn and given him a view of the estate, till he somewhat changed his sentiments.

"What the devil, Agneta," said he, pointing towards one of the little islands, "is that chest of drawers with a staircase in it good for? I hope he has not added to his eccentricities the folly of taking observations of the stars."

"Not at all," replied his wife, who had been much interested in all the new arrangements of her son. "That is a new kind of a pleasure-house. Only think, one has a fine view of Lindafors from its top."

"Zounds! is it that?" exclaimed the old man, much moved at the thought that Charles Augustus had raised the observatory merely that he might have a spot from which he could see the loved home of his childhood. "If that is the case, I have nothing to say against it."

But when the worthy couple had driven a little further, they saw another island, on which was constructed a little temple composed of stone and moss. Mr. Kemner viewed this structure in silence. He could see no entrance to it, and wondered what was its use.

"Confound me," said Mr. Kemner, "at least, he cannot see a single tree of Lindafors from that building. Now, mother, how much do you think all that stone cost? Is it not enough that he should erect manufactories, without building such card-boxes also? I tell you it gives me much sorrow to see him so extravagant."

"You have had your hobbies also. What do you think of your water-works, and all your gods and goddesses, which are yet standing, like phantoms, in our garden?"

"That was refined—but this stuff here!"

Here they arrived at a spot from whence they obtained a full view of Rosenbund, with all its natural and artificial adornments.

Charles Augustus' new house, which was situated in the centre of the park, formed an octagon. It was surmounted by a small cupola, with glass windows. Beneath the cupola was a circular hall, which was pierced with doors leading into little rooms, to which Charles Augustus had given divers names, referring partly to the beautiful views which could be seen around Rosenbund, and partly to the day when the little angel should be admitted to rule the pretty mansion with the sceptre of love.

"There is the birdcage!" exclaimed the old man, as they drove up to the gate of the mansion we have described. "It is not so bad a thing after all; but it is strange that he does not come out to meet us."

"Do not blame him for that; he is probably much engaged, and does not dream of the surprise that is awaiting him."

One of the laboring men offered to go and inform his master of their arrival; but Mr. Kemner decided that it would be better to announce themselves.

"Go first, wife, you know the way," said he.

"There is only one room furnished, and I can find him there." With these words, Mrs. Kemner hastily ascended the staircase. Much confusion was to be heard coming from the room mentioned by Mistress Agneta; and when Mr. and Mrs. Kemner entered, they found Charles Augustus busily engaged in opening and shutting drawers, and packing a half-filled valise.

But as soon as the door opened Charles Augustus cast aside a new black coat, which he was just placing in the valise, and extending both his hands, gave his parents a hearty welcome, dancing around them, and crying, "Hurrah! here you are at last."

"I have thought of this long ago," said the old man, mournfully.

"What do you mean, husband?" said his wife, wishing in her heart to join with her son in his frolics.

"I say I knew so long ago," answered the old man, with an expressive look.

But now Mrs. Kemner laughed, long and loud. "Be quiet, Charles Augustus," said she; "I see that your father considers you mad."

"O, dearest father!" exclaimed Charles Augustus, "perhaps I am—but it is only with joy. Listen: I have contended for the last few days with a longing for a journey, the time for which has not yet come. I cannot restrain myself, however, any longer, and had determined to go to Lindafors this afternoon, and proceed on my journey to-morrow morning. I was in doubt whether to go or not, and so was packing my valise, in a state of uncertainty, when I suddenly saw you. My father, who has never before visited me, comes this very day above all others. Is not that a good omen? Is it not the right day for my journey? Does it not seem that you have come here for the purpose of saying, 'Go, God be with you; take our blessing and be happy?'"

"Ahem! ahem!" coughed the old gentleman, half-timidly and half-vexed. "I have made a very awkward mistake, but you must pardon an old man, who does not understand this new-fashioned way of expressing joy. But if your intentions are, what I think they are, honest, go, and God be with you. I have come here that my blessing may not be wanting in your house."

"Never has a more grateful son received such tender parents in his house before," said Charles Augustus, much moved. "In the old house," he continued, as the recollection of past times brought a blush to his face, "I was often obstinate; but here in this new home, which my father has given me, when reason and holier sentiments have caused me to look into my former imperfections, which I am slowly discarding, there can be no greater joy to me than to take the advice of my father in all things."

Mrs. Kemner's cheeks were bedewed with tears of joy; but the old man forced back the dew which moistened his own, and said,

"I now understand you perfectly, my dear son. God bless you for those words. This is the happiest moment of my life. If you should remain long absent, I shall be happy to come here and superintend your affairs. But now we will take a look at your summer house, for it is a summer house," said he, smiling.

"And I shall not call it anything else," said Charles Augustus, as he conducted his happy parents through the house.

"When everything is arranged here, I intend to make Lindafors my winter residence under all circumstances."

It needed nothing more to complete the happiness of the parents, for Charles Augustus had laid particular stress upon the three words, "under all circumstances."

The next morning after this family reunion, which had so greatly softened Mr. Kemner, that he found fault with nothing, although he could not refrain from making a few playful remarks, Charles Augustus departed on his journey, and arrived at Hoestholm the same day that the Major and Alma made their excursion upon the lake. He had sauntered through the park, and accidentally saw them as they walked to the lake. Unobserved he followed, and discovering that Goldfoot had been left behind, he took advantage of the occasion and sent his Alma a message, by placing a note under the collar of the fawn. He concealed himself in the thicket and awaited their return. His cheeks burned and heart throbbed when he saw Alma manage to gain possession of the letter.

With a long drawn breath, he left the spot, the fear of being discovered causing him to renounce the happiness of contemplating the object of his affections for a longer time.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Chief Forester met the Major and Alma some distance from the garden-gate; but his eyes could not find an expression of joy and contentment upon the Major's countenance, and for this deficiency Alma had to account.

"You seem to have been a very gay companion," said he, throwing a piercing glance at the girl "I do not wonder that the Major does not demand that the wedding-day should be fixed. But I tell you the longer you delay the worse the affair will become. If you are satisfied, Major, the banns shall be proclaimed next Friday, and the wedding shall take place on Alma's twentieth birthday."

At this decided declaration, the tone of which proved that hesitancy on the part of the Major would be considered an unpardonable offence, Alma trembled violently. Where now was her courage? Where the joyful anticipation with which she had regarded the close of this month? She only wished that the single month could be extended to three.

"I am grateful for these words," replied the Major. "They evince that your opinion has not changed; but I——"

"What is the matter now?" exclaimed the Chief Forester, forgetting, in his anger, all propriety. "What do you mean by saying that my opinion is not changed? I hope that a new head has not grown upon your shoulders. I shall say nothing more; perhaps you have spoken unguardedly."

"I am sorry," replied the Major, evasively, "that you have received us in such ill-humor. I merely wished to say that Alma might complain if I did not keep my promise. You remember that she was to have a whole year, counting from her last birthday——"

"Before she should be made a bride. Yes, I remember it very well; and this agreement will be carried into effect, if she is not *married* before that day."

"Not altogether. I have to fulfill my promise."

The Major perceived that the utmost caution was needed here, and he fervently wished that he had never entertained the false hope that one year would eradicate the impression that the stranger had made upon Alma's heart. Yes, he wished, from the bottom of his heart, that he had at that moment the courage to renounce all claims to Alma's hand, as, at all events, he had nothing to hope from her heart.

Alma feared to breathe. With the little note firmly held in her hand, she awaited the result, discreetly determining not to engage in the controversy until it was absolutely necessary. The Chief Forester meditated for a few moments, and then said, knitting his brows so that Alma turned her head, "As you please, Major. One month from to-day we will converse upon the subject again; but then I shall expect you in the morning. It will be Friday, and therefore suitable for the business, which I intended to commence to-morrow. I hope you have no objection to that?"

"I will be with you early in the morning," replied the Major, who thought that a gradual preparation would be better than a sudden announcement.

"As you will; and now nothing more about it until the day arrives."

Thus saying, the Chief Forester adjusted his cap and vanished among the trees.

"Trust to me, my child," said the Major, assuming a tone of paternal tenderness. "I will give you this consolation, that, if

it costs me my heart-strings, I will set you at liberty."

They entered the house, and Alma hastened to her room to read the little note which was burning beneath her fingers. She tore open the paper and read.

"The anxiety of my heart has forced me to come here a month too early; but fear nothing; I will remain at Hjo, and visit this place only occasionally, that I may be for a few hours near you. O, my loved Alma! I count the hours and days with the utmost impatience. Whatever your father may do or say, at all events, you may now be free from the restraint which has divided us for an entire year. I dare not say more; but one favor you must grant me. Come to the ruins of Alvastra, either this or to-morrow evening. I will await you there. If you refuse me I do not know what may happen to me. I cannot live without seeing you.

"Your

"CHARLES
AUGUSTUS."

Alma's cheeks glowed warmly. She shrunk back from the bold proposition of a secret meeting, supposing her father should discover them; but, on the other hand, if she denied his request, what rashness Charles Augustus might be driven to. Perhaps he would come immediately to the house, and cause a declaration from her father, which, if once made, he would never retract. To seek the Pilot and ask him to carry a letter to Charles Augustus, her modesty would not permit. The Pilot considered her the affianced of the Major. What would he think of her? Perhaps he would refuse her request entirely. Here Alma's thoughts became a chaos; but at length she determined to meet Charles Augustus for a few moments, only to persuade him to leave the Omberg as soon as possible.

The Chief Forester returned shortly after, in better humor than when he departed; and Miss Neta, who was fond of playing cards, proposed a game to the two gentlemen. They both accepted the proposal with pleasure, for they needed something to soothe their ill-humor.

Alma sat for a short time by the window with her knitting work, but when she found that no one spoke to her, she thought she would not be much missed that evening. Accordingly, without speaking, she went to her room, and held a brief consultation with herself. At length love conquered, and Alma thought reason also; for, if she did not go to him, Charles Augustus might be tempted to visit her window, as he had done on a former occasion.

She threw a shawl over her shoulders and catching up her bonnet, in a moment she left the house behind her. She sped down the hill with more rapidity than even Goldfoot could have done.

In the mysterious shadows of the arches of the monastery ruins Alma and Charles Augustus again met; but where were all the important counsellings they were mutually to give each other? The words had died before passing their lips.

Suddenly they heard a loud clapping of hands together. Charles Augustus arose hastily, and Alma shrunk back.

A bushy head was thrust through one of the decayed windows, and the Pilot said in a gruff voice,

"Squalls ahead, Captain!"

"Honest old man, have you come hither of your own accord to keep watch for us? Thanks, a thousand thanks for your kindness," answered Charles Augustus, and clasping Alma to his bosom, he whispered, "I will leave you, my dear one, so rapidly that none will observe me. Some one is approaching, or else the old man would not have warned us."

"Quick, quick!" said Alma, frightened; "and I beseech you do not return before the close of a month. Until that time nothing will be done which requires your presence."

"All clear now, captain; but make haste, or we will be boarded," said the Pilot.

"Courage, my dear one, courage!" said Charles Augustus; "after the storm the calm sets in."

Quick as thought Charles Augustus' slender form disappeared behind the ruins. In a few moments afterwards the Pilot again thrust in his head, and beckoned to Alma, who approached him immediately.

"The old man," said he, "has done his duty as a pilot, and will go on his way. Your father is already to be seen coming through the trees; he will soon be here. But my dear Miss Alma, think of the Major, and do not come here again. There is not always a good friend close at hand."

Before Alma could answer the Pilot walked away as unconcernedly as though nothing had happened.

Alma's anxiety increased every moment. Her father's eyes were remarkably sharp; and that he even followed her, betokened suspicion. What if he had really seen Charles Augustus! She sat down under a tree near a broken arch, and pretended that she did not hear the footsteps of her father, as he gradually approached her; but suddenly he quickened his steps, and nearing her, said,

"What are you doing here, girl, at this hour?" at the same time casting a penetrating look round about him.

"I was sitting here giving way to my own thoughts," replied Alma.

"Confound such thoughts! I also had such thoughts when I accidentally stepped into the porch, and saw you hurrying to your dear ruins. But beware! such thoughts may become dear to you; for the future, you shall make these walks only in the company of your father, or with your future husband."

"You did not forbid my doing so before," stammered Alma.

"Then, I forbid it now; and you know that I require obedience. Go home, now, immediately."

Rejoiced that she had escaped so easily, Alma hastened on in advance, followed by her father, who closely compressed his lips, knitted his brows, and whipped the air with his pipe-stem, muttering between his teeth, "Confound that boy! it was he, and no one else, whom I saw loitering around the park this noon. But wait, wait! all your cunning plans will avail you nothing."

After that evening Alma was so strictly watched that she feared to leave the house, lest she might meet Charles Augustus, and be discovered with him. But he had long before taken his quarters in Hjo, and every evening visited the shores of the lake, partly to gaze at the Omberg, which contained the being in whom his future happiness was centred, and partly to contemplate the foot-prints which St. Brigetta had left, as the sun sunk beneath the horizon. Sometimes his fancy would cause him to believe that he saw the Cossacks, as they spurred their horses over the surface of the water; and thus occupied he spent his time until the decisive day approached.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A cloudy sky, announcing rain and storm, ushered in Alma's twentieth birthday.

No guest had been invited this time. No noise was to be heard in the kitchen, not even Miss Neta's shrill voice. Every thing was silent, as though the day was not a significant one.

Alma was dismayed. She wept, and prayed fervently. "O, that the evening had come," she often sighed.

"Good morning, my poor child," said Neta, at the door, as she entered with a small wreath of flowers in her hand and advanced to the bedside. "There," said she, depositing her gift upon the quilt, "take this wreath, as you do not wish a better one. You should have worn a wreath and a crown to-day, then it would have sounded altogether different in the house."

"Have you seen my father, this morning?"

"Yes, of course. He rung the bell so violently that I thought the rope would break. I sent Lizzie in, but she came back and said that the Chief Forester wished to speak with me only."

"And how did he look when you entered the room?"

"Just like the weather to-day, as cloudy and gloomy as you ever saw him."

"I should like to know," said Alma, in a trembling voice, "why he awoke in such rage. I should think that nothing had happened so early to make him angry."

"So I thought; but I found out that he had been aroused. Guess, once, how?"

"Ah! I cannot guess. Perhaps the servants neglected something last night."

"O, it is something still worse. When I entered he sat up in his bed—and—should I live to say it—just think, he himself had forgotten to wind his watch! He has not neglected for forty years to wind every clock in the house, and now he forgot to wind his own watch! He cursed himself! No, he could not have been so careless; but the watch had run down at any rate; and at length, from this remarkable fact, he concluded that this would prove the most remarkable day he had witnessed for forty years."

Alma drew the quilt up to her chin. "Dear Neta," said she, "would you think it a great sin if I—should feign—to be ill to-day?"

"What do you mean, Alma?" inquired Neta, with a piercing glance.

"Alas! I am so afraid, I cannot bear my father's anger to-day. Should I not arise, if I should say——"

"Be silent, and do not let me hear again that you are such a little coward! No, my little girl, as you bake so you must brew. With my consent, no such trick shall be performed."

"You are severe to-day, Neta." With these words, Alma hastily sprang from the bed and commenced dressing. "If I could only see the Major before breakfast," she continued.

"You can neither speak with the Major nor any one else until you are called for, and this will not be at breakfast, for your father wishes to be alone. Then he will wait upon the Major and afterwards call for you. I think that will be soon enough."

"And in the mean time," said Alma, "I shall become sick with anxiety. I am forbidden to speak with any one, to take counsel with any one. Alas! that my poor mother is not here. She would not have thrust back her Alma with harshness."

"Am I not doing even more than I should with a clear conscience," said Neta, somewhat softened by Alma's words, "when I concealed all I knew about your matters?"

"I do not understand you," said Alma, in a low tone.

"Indeed, you do not understand that the old ruins have ears as well as yourself! Now, don't faint; if I can remain silent for a whole month I can do so to-day."

"Neta, Neta!" Alma trembled so violently that she was unable to utter another word.

"Well, compose yourself, it was no one but Sophia, who had a meeting with her lover by the side of the opposite wall. But I gave her a pair of old shoes if she would close her lips."

Now Alma's cheeks burned with shame. "I assure you, Neta," said she, as a feeling of pride gave her almost superhuman power. "I assure you, Neta, that I shall tell my father every particular to-day. All shall see, you as well as he, that shall become acquainted with the facts, that none can reproach me for this meeting."

"The Lord preserve me!" said Miss Neta, clasping her hands in surprise; "how bold you have become all at once, my child! I hope you will be so when you stand face to face with your father."

The Chief Forester was seated at the breakfast table. He had placed the napkin upon his lap three times, and three times he had removed it. Miss Neta, who waited upon him, took the cover from the dish which contained the cutlet, and three times had replaced it, for she saw that the proper time had not yet arrived.

"Give me the plate, if you please," said the Chief Forester, at length, in such a polite manner that Miss Neta, who was not accustomed to this treatment, feared for his health.

"Do you wish some salad with your cutlets?"

"No, I thank you."

"Or red beets?"

"No, I thank you."

"Some pickles?"

"Go to the——." Here, however, he stopped, and without tasting a single dish, removed the napkin from his lap, and said: "Remove the table."

Without waiting for a new command, Miss Neta hastily cleared the table, glad to escape so easily.

She had hardly placed her dishes in the cupboard, however, before the bell summoned her again.

"Has the Major been to breakfast?"

"He is now eating it."

"Good; you may go."

"I am anxious to learn," thought our spinster, who possessed the combined patience of a lamb and an angel this day, "whether I shall get a bite before the gravy is cold?" But she had hardly had time to convince herself that the cutlets had been cooled remarkably well, when she was again disturbed in her pleasant occupation, by the impatient bell.

She now made a brief prayer, (which we will suppress on account of our tenderness for Miss Neta's reputation as a good Christian) and hurried in.

"Is the Major ready?"

"I heard him walking in his room just now."

"Bring me a bottle of wine, and then tell the Major to honor me by taking a glass of wine with me."

Miss Neta was about going.

"Wait a moment. Have you seen Alma this morning?"

"Of course."

"Well?"

Miss Neta did not know what answer would be suitable for the Major, at the present moment, and merely said: "What is your pleasure?"

"Never mind; do as I bade you."

Left alone with his thoughts, the Chief Forester paced the room with rapid strides. One could see that strong emotions of varied character were contending within his soul for the mastery. Sometimes he battled with his pipe in the air, as though he wished to drive away something; probably there were milder feelings which he feared would gain advantage over him.

A few moments afterwards, Miss Neta appeared with the wine. She was followed by the Major, who was as composed as usual; but his countenance was deadly pale.

"Leave us," said the Chief Forester to Neta.

The gentlemen sat down to the table. With systematic precision the Chief Forester slowly drew the cork from the bottle, and after carefully wiping off the pieces of wax from the mouth, filled the glasses and replaced the bottle upon the table.

"Well, dear brother, we have a festal day, which probably is not altogether indifferent to you."

"Certainly not—it is Alma's birthday."

"Of course; and the anniversary of your betrothal with the——. Let us drink to the health of your bride."

"Alma's good health!" stammered the Major.

"Why mention her name without the title?—Heigho Major! I drink to the health of your *bride*; and you refuse to do the same."

"Listen to me, brother!"

"I will listen," said the Chief Forester, placing his hand upon the table. "I am all attention; but reflect well upon what you are about to say."

"I have reflected. It cannot—it must not be. I have pledged my honor—my word. Alma is free from this day."

"Ah! Your very obedient servant. This is interesting indeed!" replied the Chief Forester with a sneer; his face turning almost purple with passion. "Do you believe that the Chief Forester Bruse, is a man who will allow another to jest with him? O, no; he has not come to that yet. One does not crave a daughter's hand from her father; and then push it away. No sir; I say that is not the way, without finding out that he is disappointed in the man whom he has so greatly offended."

"Brother, brother," said the Major in a tone which somewhat allayed the passion which raged in the Chief Forester's breast. "This is going too far. Do not make my sacrifice more than it is already. Be calm, for the sake of our long friendship."

"On that account I will be calm."

"The matter could not be avoided. Still I bear the only blame. I cannot forgive myself that I did not tell you all at the time; but my weakness—my weakness. I persuaded myself that Alma would soon forget an impression which I considered only a slight one. I entreated a private interview with her, and persuaded her to consider herself as my betrothed for one year only; and I pledged her my word of honor, that after the lapse of that time, should she still be of the same inclination, to give her her liberty. At that time I thought I was acting wisely, because," he added slowly, "because I was a fool. For none but a fool could believe that the affection of an old man could heal the wound that love, beauty and youth had once inflicted."

"You have merely played upon me," said the Chief Forester, bitterly. "And my daughter, whom I thought as pure as snow, has deceived her doting father for a year—a whole year." The tears started to his eyes; and his brow was bent with an expression of intense pain.

"For God's sake, brother," entreated the Major, "do not let your anger fall upon her; it was I—I that induced her to act so. I have seen her dislike to deceive you. And let me confess to you, brother; but pardon me if my frankness adds to your pain. It was fear—fear alone, and of you, which compelled Alma to purchase at any price, safety from the anger of her father."

"Weakness! it was miserable, contemptible weakness!" exclaimed the Chief Forester. But his voice was no longer filled with rage; it was hollow, like a reed which has been broken.

"I persuaded her, brother. Mine is the blame."

"It is so, indeed," replied the Chief Forester, slowly regaining his usual composure; "but now you are in duty bound to heal the wound you have given."

"That is my fervent desire."

"Then act as a man. We will change the play into reality. She *must* become your wife."

"Leave off this deception; it is an impossibility. Her heart is irrecoverably given to another; you cannot—you dare not desire her to be miserable for life."

"I know better what is good for her, as you well know. Leave me now, Major. I wish to arrange my thoughts. I will visit the girl, and see whether she can look me in the face."

"Brother, brother."

"Brother, brother; the devil is your brother, if you raise such silly stories. But if I do not become honorably your father-in-law, our friendship, as well as my esteem for you is gone. Go now, go, that I may compose myself."

The Chief Forester drank a couple of glasses of wine, rubbed his forehead, and threw himself upon the sofa; but arose again to await the coming of his daughter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The door opened slowly, and Alma stepped over the threshold and entered the room.

Her cheeks were pale and transparent as lilies. Her eyes were downcast, and expressed fear, but at the same time entreaty.

"Come here, my child," said the Chief Forester, in a sorrowful tone.

Alma uplifted her eyes; they were filled with tears, which fell upon her father's hand, as she fervently pressed her lips upon it.

"I wish to speak to you, daughter; but I pray you do not answer like a whipped child every time, but speak openly, as a daughter should to her only and best friend."

"You are too kind to me," said Alma, surprised at her father's mildness. "I have not deserved it."

"I think so," replied the Chief Forester; "but you can amend it all. To the repentant daughter the father will always be forgiving; but to the disobedient—but you do not mean to belong to the latter class—let me believe so, my Alma."

"Ah! father, I——"

"Did I not tell you a little time ago not to indulge in Ahs or O's? Come, speak plainly."

"That is my desire."

"Very well, then, let us commence. When you entered into the arrangement with the Major, and allowed your father to consider you his betrothed—as I still do—did you think yourself anything else?"

"I thought I was forced to play the part of his betrothed for one year; but I soon discovered that he hoped that this force would be changed into desire. But it was not——"

"You now answer more than I ask you. Did you not think that you had duties to perform towards the Major, as due to the man with whom you had formed such an important connection?"

"Yes; I also gave my promise to the Major."

"And you have broken it."

The Chief Forester went to his bureau, and taking out a little pebble, held it before Alma's eyes. He had, undoubtedly promised himself much from this strategem, supposing that Alma would, full of anguish and repentance, pray for pardon; but this did not occur. Alma took the pebble in her hand, and gazing tearfully at the three loved letters, said quietly, but with much feeling, "This was sent to me without my knowledge. I will confess, however, that I saw Charles Augustus two or three times from my window; but he has never approached me, he has never spoken to me."

"But you," replied the Chief Forester, in a cold and sneering tone, "you have talked all the more with him. Do you remember that night when I came to you, and found you in a feigned faint? I can hardly believe it!"

"Yes; but the horrible anguish and fright caused me to be so."

"It is becoming richer and richer," said the Chief Forester, biting his lips, and with great difficulty suppressing his rage. "Well, have you seen your Adonis since that time?"

"Yes; but only once," replied Alma, who had made up her mind to tell all.

The Chief Forester made a wry face.

"Yes," said he, "you have kept your promise right well; you have even overstepped the bounds of modesty."

"Never! I could not do otherwise than I did without fearing something worse."

Alma now related everything; how she found the note under Goldfoot's collar, and how she determined to meet Charles Augustus in the ruins.

"At which meeting I probably disturbed you."

"Yes, and before we had spoken one word to each other. But I am convinced that Charles Augustus asked for this meeting with no other desire than to warn me and entreat me, that I might not again be so weak as I had been before. And now, dear father, I assure you by all I hold sacred, that this is the only time I met him since I gave my promise to the Major."

"Very well, that may be so; in the mean time I hope that you will not think that this will change in the least the plan I have formed for your future happiness."

"True, I hope so from the bottom of my heart, and with good grounds, for the Major released me from my promise to-day."

"Released you!" replied the Chief Forester. "He has, indeed, made earnest endeavors to do so; but you will not be surprised when I tell you that I am not the man who will allow others to jest with his honor. He has asked for you as his wife; you have consented, and I shall not allow the best plan which I ever concocted to be destroyed by romantic whims."

"Father!" exclaimed Alma, with painful surprise, "it cannot be so. Does not the Major withdraw his suit?"

"No wonder if he does, when he sees himself rewarded in such a manner. But, Alma, if you had seen the honest man as he gave up all his hopes of happiness, and seemed pressed down with grief, as though he was at variance with the whole world; if you had seen this, and heard how warmly he prayed for you, and generously excused you, I scarcely believe that your heart is sufficiently hardened to have remained unmoved. The deep grief of a man is far different from the passing pang of a headstrong boy."

Alma was much moved by her father's words. The Chief Forester was possessed of a peculiar art of imparting to his voice a touch of pathos which none could hear unmoved. His control over Alma was at this moment greater than ever. He saw his power, and said, "Alma, you have caused me the most bitter agony that I ever before experienced. You will dig the grave of your father if you do not comply with his wishes."

"O, father, father! I would rather die than do so;" and she broke forth in such a violent fit of weeping that the Chief Forester shrank back at the aspect of despair so visible in her countenance. "We will sleep together in the grave."

Forgive, forgive your poor Alma; she can neither live nor die."

"Weep not so much, my dear Alma. Your father is not a tyrant," said the Chief Forester, and embraced his daughter long and fervently. "But now listen to the reasons which have prompted me, for at this moment let us have complete confidence in each other. Listen, now, quietly."

"I will, father," said Alma, seating herself by his side.

"A soft-hearted, weak woman, Alma, needs a more serious associate; one who, because he is not young, is satisfied enough if his young bride will only smile upon him. You, my Alma, are a soft-hearted, weak woman, even though you have evinced great courage upon some extraordinary occasions. You are—I have said we would speak frankly—not richly endowed. True you have much beauty, but lack reason. I am sorry that I am obliged to tell you so, and I see that you do not like to hear it; but that which is true must so remain. Now, I have not the slightest fear that you will miss this advantage, should you become united with the Major; but should you marry another who is more perceptive, more imaginative, he might cause you to feel that you are wanting in some respects."

The Chief Forester paused, and then, smoothing Alma's forehead tenderly with his hand, he continued:

"When the first charm of love has passed, the young, hot-headed man will search for other treasures than beauty and childish prattle. He wishes for some one with whom he can converse rationally, and gain instruction and entertainment from her conversation, to soothe the fatigue of his day's labor. But if he discovers that she is not capable of doing so, she will find that he has cooled towards her, and how will it be then? She will be seized with the deepest grief; she finds that she is no longer the sole treasure of her husband, and, knowing her imperfections, she is reserved, nay, she does not even know how to make use of the few advantages which nature has bestowed upon her. Grief is a worm which gnaws at the blossom of life. She loses her beauty, and with it one of her most powerful weapons. In despair she cares for nothing, and her gracefulness departs, and the once beautiful young girl is transformed into an ugly, peevish old woman, who gives happiness neither to her husband nor herself."

"Father, father!" exclaimed Alma, raising her face. "Does this example apply to me? Am I really such a stupid being?"

"By no means. You are somewhat better, and if you had allowed me to conclude, I would have proved to you that the capacities you possess would have added to your happiness, should you marry the Major, who is an honest man, and will do everything to please you. He will never ask anything of you that is not necessary, and you may become one of those few happy women, who, in the exercise of their duties as a wife and mother, and surrounded by the highest honors, respect, love, and comfort, do not experience that humiliation which is the tomb into which many have buried their life's happiness. And now, my dear Alma, I have told you all. Consider that your father, who has watched you from childhood, must know you better than you do yourself; and understand that his only desire is your happiness."

Alma could not answer immediately. Her cheeks had been flushed with crimson, and her eyes had glistened with painful excitement. At length she arose, and quietly placing her hand in her father's, said in a calm and decided tone:

"Pardon me; but I—I dare think that you are somewhat mistaken."

"What do you say, Alma?" said the surprised father. "A mistake?"

"Yes, father. I never before felt as I now do; but an inner voice tells me that your words do not apply to me. If you will permit me to do so, I will explain to you why a connection with the Major must have been disagreeable to me even had I not become acquainted with Charles Augustus. Imagine a young girl, slightly endowed by nature; but who has been accustomed to servile obedience all her life, which did not even allow her to think for herself. Gradually this girl arrives at a period when she thinks that she is also of some importance; and that she has the right to think and act for herself. Her first wish, then, is to follow a man who will not only provide for her, but will endeavor to please her, should she be so unfortunate as to be obliged to separate from her father. But above all, she wishes to go with the one of her choice, whom she could love and esteem."

"What mean you, girl?" said the Chief Forester, moving uneasily in his chair. "Where did you find all this?"

"In my own heart, dear father; but how could you have known that your Alma understood more than mere childish whims and words, had I not spoken thus? I never dared to speak openly to you before to-day, when you yourself opened the path. But, dear father, give me the right to speak, and then you will see that I am not the one who lacks reason, power, or

love. But if I should be forced, by your power or persuasion, to enter into an unwilling connection, then you would have to reproach yourself for making me a peevish old woman, who would perform her duties with a heavy heart, and render herself unhappy by her blind obedience."

The Chief Forester's countenance, during Alma's words, had evinced much excitement, but when Alma ceased, he said, in a soft voice:

"Come to my heart, my dear Alma, you should have done this long ago. I am contented with you. God knows, that I only wished for your happiness."

"And now—" stammered Alma, placing her glowing cheeks upon her father's face.

"Now, we must consider, my child. I shall say nothing certain. But one does not like to give up his favorite plan, especially at my age. I will try and find some expedient by which the matter may be compromised. But now leave me. You have convinced me that you are not the one I fancied you, and I rejoice that I have discovered my nineteen years' mistake. I give you freedom of speech upon every subject."

"I will not abuse this permission," replied Alma, kissing her father's hand, and bedewing it with her tears. "I never before felt so much the want of repaying your tenderness and love by perfect obedience, than at this moment."

"Right, my child. I knew that something extraordinary would happen to-day."

The Chief Forester at this moment thought of his watch, which he had neglected winding for the first time in many years.

But how great a revolution had taken place in his realm! The Major retracts from his proposal; Alma entirely alters her character; and the Chief Forester discovers the great mistake he had labored under for nineteen years.

The same afternoon, after the Chief Forester had shut himself up alone in his room for a long season, the Major and the old man held an earnest conversation together—concerning what, no one knew. But when they joined the family, reconciliation and peace beamed in their countenances. And besides this, there was a certain twinkle in the Chief Forester's eyes, which proved that he was in good-humor.

"Are you now satisfied, Alma?" said the Major, earnestly, when they parted for the night.

Alma knew not how to answer; but she pressed his hand in a manner which convinced him as to the state of her feelings. She did not see the tear that glittered in his eye.

CHAPTER XXV.

The following day after these occurrences at the Chief Forester's mansion, Charles Augustus arrived at the Omberg from Hjo. He walked through the park, and meditated upon visiting the father of his beloved Alma, and how he could best carry out his plans, when unexpectedly he met the old gentleman face to face.

"Your very obedient servant, Mr. Kemner. Have we the honor of another visit?"

"My visit, this time," said Charles Augustus, with a deep bow, "is pursuant to your invitation."

"What do you mean?" said the Chief Forester, snatching his pipe from his mouth. "I should much like to know when you were invited hither?"

"A year ago, on the same day that I had the honor of dining with you. When we separated at the gate, you said, 'Come

here in one year, and the gates of paradise shall be open unto you."

"Yes; upon my faith, I remember it. And as I accidentally tendered the invitation, it is no more than right that I should welcome you. Although if we should settle more closely, your intrusion into paradise would have been punished by eternal banishment. But jesting aside, I will ask you not to take this willingness on my part as an evidence that I receive you with open arms, and entreat you to wed my daughter, although I am informed by the Major that you belong to an honorable and wealthy family. In short, I have a plan by which it might be a possibility, mark! a *possibility*, that you may become my son-in-law."

"This oversteps my highest dreaming," exclaimed Charles Augustus. "How can I thank you!"

"I have no doubt about that; but fate may yet prevent it. A girl like my Alma, sir; one who is endowed with beauty, goodness of heart, and mind; yes, sir, mind; such a girl is not to be found in the streets every day. She must be combatted for before the eyes of your rival! You must deserve her, sir!"

Charles Augustus was much frightened; but held firmly to one point "*Rival*, rival!" he repeated. "I dared to think I had none since yesterday."

"I am sorry," said the Chief Forester, maliciously, "that I must undeceive you; that is not the case, not at all. The Major, who is a man of honor, has given up his former claim upon Alma's hand; but this has not prevented him from beginning his suit anew. You two gentlemen are both suitors, and skill and fate can alone decide which of you shall have the glory of winning the Bride of Omberg."

"Thank God!" replied Charles Augustus, who was uncertain whether to take the matter in earnest or in jest, "that skill has equal share with fate in the combat. I do not appeal to fate, for it has thus far favored me; but I shall exert my skill to the utmost. When will you give me further particulars?"

"Is not this news a good plaster for your impatience? But take dinner with me that we may become better acquainted." Here the Chief Forester tipped his cap, and led the way towards the house.

Charles Augustus stood as in a dream, lost in a labyrinth of surmises and conjectures. But as he was unable to extricate himself, he concluded to await until he could see the old Pilot, and relate to him his good fortune.

Alma was not able to divine how her fate was to be decided. Her father looked so joyous, so mysterious, so cunning, and the Major had not returned home, as she expected, but remained—seemingly renewing his old hopes.

"I do not understand all this," said Alma, "but something is going on."

"I wish you would dress up a little," said the Chief Forester, "We have a guest to dinner."

Now Alma began to see clearly.

The looking-glass was consulted; the wardrobe overturned; drawers flew open and shut; and, in half an hour, Alma appeared before her father, neatly dressed, and blushing with happiness.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the Chief Forester, turning her around. "You look charming to-day. A bevy of Cupids must have assisted at your toilet." He kissed her tenderly, and added with a twinkle of his eye: "You look almost too happy."

"Should I not do so?" said Alma, with a lovely look of innocence. "A short time ago, I was not permitted to think without fearing—you know who. And now, I dare think and feel happy under your very eyes."

"That is right; your highest happiness lies in the consciousness of your father's approval. But you need not think the matter entirely settled. We will try the young gentleman. Do not think he can obtain you so easily. You have not yet heard the condition."

Before Alma was able to answer, the door opened, and, upon the threshold, stood Charles Augustus, blushing as much as she did herself.

"Do not be bashful, children; manna has fallen before." The Chief Forester extended his hand to Charles Augustus.

Charles Augustus advanced to Alma. His utterance failed him; but his eyes spoke volumes, for Alma appeared satisfied.

"I call that a deaf and dumb conversation," said the Chief Forester; but, as he looked out of the window in search of the Major, Charles Augustus pressed a burning kiss upon Alma's hand, and whispered: "Is this reality, or am I in a dream? Ah! Alma, I hope it will not turn out a horrible delusion!"

"Fear nothing. Yesterday was an important day. My father is conquered. If you knew how hard it was for him to give up his dearest wish, you would know how much he loved me. But how or when our joy is to come, I know not; but here comes the Major. Speak friendly to him; he will not—"

At this moment the Chief Forester withdrew his head from the window; and, shortly after, Charles Augustus and the Major had stiffly saluted each other. Miss Neta's tri-colored cap ribbon was to be seen glimmering through the door. This was the signal for dinner. Although it was difficult for the two rivals to feel comfortable in each other's presence, the Chief Forester endeavored to establish harmony, and succeeded; for they responded heartily and joyfully to his many witty remarks. At the close of the dinner, the old man called for a bottle of his 'old genuine.'

The glasses were filled, and all the guests were silent. The Chief Forester arose, and, giving his head a preparatory stretch, made the following peroration:—

"Yesterday was my daughter's birthday; and, according to my calculations, it would have received another honor, had not—but the deuce, do not look so hard at me! Do you think I will vanish before your eyes?" These passing words were addressed to Charles Augustus, who turned aside, somewhat confused. "Yes, that day would have received another honor had not yonder girl exhibited some qualities which particularly attracted my attention. But, as a family connection with Major Kling has always been my favorite thought; and as, aside from that, he has my word, from which even he, himself, cannot release me—for, gentlemen, I never retract a promise once made, even though one should voluntarily release me from it—I have resolved, with my friend, the Major's consent, to save my honor in a manner which will accord with my promise to Alma, not to use force. There was once a time, gentlemen, a time of chivalry; when it was considered a great honor to battle in tournament for the hand of a maiden. As I am somewhat endowed with a chivalrous spirit, I have always chosen to settle my disputes in such a manner. But, as we cannot now have a tournament which would compare with those of olden times, we must be content to settle the matter in a different manner, but evince the same spirit." Here the Chief Forester paused, and looked from Charles Augustus to Alma, with an expression of satisfaction. They both sat almost immovable; and Miss Neta, who was in the act of slicing a melon, dropped the knife, and looked at the Chief Forester, with a stare of surprise.

"Six weeks from to-day," continued the Chief Forester, "the fifteenth day of August, I shall not only invite my friends and neighbors, but also the peasantry, to take part in the great shooting match which it is my intention to give on that day. The sport shall commence with target shooting, for which I shall provide lesser prizes; but after that, gentlemen, the play shall be turned into earnest. Then shall come the two rivals. The one of you who shall hit the mark set by me, shall win the highest prize—the hand of my daughter!"

Charles Augustus now felt as though he should speak. "What mean you, Mr. Bruse—to set your daughter up as a prize to be won at common target shooting? It is impossible! You must be jesting!"

"Sir!" shouted the Chief Forester, elevating his wine-glass, "I thought we should have been able to drink to my scheme without interference; but certainly I was not prepared for your objections. To end the matter, Mr. Kemner, I request you to speak at once in favor or against my proposal. I give no time for hesitation when it concerns my daughter. He who shuns any means to obtain her does not deserve her. Look out you little witch! Do not tear my coat sleeve; that will not help you! He who shuns any means to obtain her does not deserve her. These are my last words."

"But consider, there is danger of losing."

"Yes, if you do not win," replied the Chief Forester, sarcastically. "What have you to say, Major, do you remain by your former declaration?"

"Yes," replied the Major, "as your sensitive sentiment of honor cannot be satisfied in any other manner, I cannot hesitate."

"And you, Alma?"

"I say that I accept your proposal in the anticipation of a happy issue. The Major is an expert shot; but I do not doubt Mr. Kemner's skill; I rely upon it, she added, casting a look upon Charles Augustus, which caused his heart to swell with pride and joy.

"Very well; so let it be," said he. "I shall employ my time in practicing. I will do nothing but shoot, and I hope to succeed."

"Every one may keep his hopes to himself. And now let us drink to the enterprize; for I flatter myself that everybody would not have thought of such a happy expedient."

The toast was drank with much glee; it was followed by one to the bride, another to the two rivals, and one to the future son-in-law. Joy and mirth now reigned to such an extent that the Chief Forester proposed to toast his dear dragon, Miss Neta, as the person on whom the responsibility of the entire preparation would rest. Half angry and half pleased, Miss Neta responded to the toast with a full glass.

"One word more," said the Chief Forester. "I propose that both the rivals may practice at their own homes, that no disturbance may be created; and that they avoid the Omberg until the festival. But, Mr. Kemner, I wish you to invite your parents; and I hope they will honor me with their presence."

"Agreed!" said the Major.

"Agreed!" repeated Charles Augustus, "and I gratefully accept the invitation for my parents."

"The session is adjourned," said the Chief Forester, arising. "After taking coffee, we will go out into the park and select a suitable place for the shooting ground."

During the walk, the young couple found a few brief opportunities of whispering to each other their mutual hopes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"What news? What news?" exclaimed Mrs. Kemner, early one morning to her friend Margaretta, who was driving her cart into the court-yard.

The reason why Mrs. Margaretta had been elevated to a cart and horse was, that she had given up fortune-telling, and had been appointed to superintend Rosenbund during Charles Augustus' absence. Margaretta entered the house, and was met by Mrs. Kemner, in the hall.

"Well, dear Margaretta, what is the news?"

"All kinds of news, my dear madam." And the two ladies entered the parlor. Mrs. Kemner was prepared to hear either of a love affair, or a robbery at Rosenbund; but she entertained more serious thoughts when Margaretta said, "I bring news of the utmost importance."

"I hope the overseer has not run away with the till?"

"No; but Master Charles Augustus arrived last night."

"And you can speak so coldly. But what has happened? You look so serious, I hope he is not ill?"

"Compose yourself, and I will tell you all."

"Thank God, if he is well," said Mrs. Kemner, drawing a long breath, and seating herself upon the sofa.

"I cannot say whether he is sick, or well; but the matter appears so strange, that I thought I would come and tell you before you saw him. At twelve o'clock last night, when we were all sound asleep, somebody knocked at the door so furiously, that the very house shook. It was Master Charles Augustus. Nothing remarkable seemed to ail him, only that he appeared in extremely good humor."

"Are you here, my honest Margaret?" said he. 'Mother has been extremely fortunate in selecting you; you must not leave my house for a long time.' 'Much obliged,' I replied; 'if I can do any thing for you, I will.' I lighted him up stairs. He said he did not wish to eat any thing, for he was sleepy; but that I must awaken him early in the morning, as he wished to ride over to Lindafors."

During Margaretta's recital, Mrs. Kemner remained in her seat like a statue. But as soon as Margaretta paused, she said

"Speak on! speak on!"

"I had gone to bed, and dawn was almost come—but you must not be afraid, for no misfortune happened—when suddenly I heard the report of a rifle in the garret. I rushed up stairs, and there stood Master Charles Augustus, with a rifle in his hand. He had shot; but only at a crow or something like it."

"It was a trial shot, so that he might be sure that he would not miss himself," said Mrs. Kemner, wringing her hands. "Alas! he has been unfortunate in his love affairs. Father! father!" She screamed so loudly that the old gentleman rushed into the room, half-dressed. "Go to Rosenbund. Charles Augustus is about——. O, poor unfortunate mother, that I am. But what did he say, Margaretta, when you surprised him?"

"He laughed at my fright, and said, 'What a fool you are, Margaretta!'"

"That's what I say, too," said Mr. Kemner, puffing and straining at his coat sleeve, which was rather tight. "What is the matter? What has frightened you so, Agneta?"

"You can stand there quietly, when perhaps, even now, you have no son; perhaps he has put a ball through his head. Have you never heard of unrequited love?"

The old gentleman turned ashy pale at the words of his wife, and bade Mrs. Easy to have the carriage ordered immediately; but he was forced to sit down, for his trembling limbs refused to sustain his weight.

"It is not necessary," exclaimed a strong and joyful voice from the entrance of the hall, where the exclamation of Mr. Kemner, as well as the whole conversation had been overheard. "Mrs. Easy has given a false alarm; but I divined her intentions, and followed her hither. And now, dear parents," (here Charles Augustus closed his father and mother in one embrace,) "now you have me here again, I am so far from the wish to leave this earth, that I most urgently press you to make preparations to go to my wedding."

"But the shot, the shot?" exclaimed Mrs. Kemner, before her husband could recover from his joyful surprise.

"It was a trial-shot, dear mother. I shall practice day and night, for fate wills that I shall win my bride by a shot."

"How foolish!" exclaimed Mrs. Kemner, who could not embrace her son sufficiently.

Mr. Kemner, after many vain attempts, at length spoke. "Win your bride by shooting!" said he; "it is impossible, my dear boy. Know you not that you might gain a hundred brides by only mentioning your name, and—"

"Your iron foundries and twenty estates," chimed in Mistress Agneta.

"Yes; that would do you no harm."

"Certainly, if we spoke of common people; but my future father-in-law is not like other men. He is full of odd whims, which I will explain to you as soon as I have drank a cup of coffee, for my housekeeper eloped and left me with an empty stomach."

Margaretta, who was generally a shrewd woman, now stood abashed and confused, playing with her apron strings; but when Charles Augustus spoke of his empty stomach she took courage, and advancing, said, with a happy mixture of

friendship and reverence, "Those who have not a key to this mystery could not help thinking strangely about it; but come now, speak a friendly word to Margareta, that she may not stand abashed before you."

"You need not be sorry," said Mrs. Kemner, protectingly. "You intended well, we all know, although, thank God, you were mistaken."

"But she shall not escape unpunished," said Charles Augustus. "Father, you must discharge Mrs. Margareta, and banish her to Rosenbund, where, perhaps, she will give her excellent advice to a young and inexperienced housekeeper."

"I will serve her faithfully, until death," replied Mrs. Easy, wiping her eyes with an old faded pocket-handkerchief.

The coffee was brought in, and Charles Augustus sat down to the table opposite his father and mother.

"Speak reasonably, now," said the old gentleman, as Mistress Agneta procured a lighted match that he might light his pipe.

And now Charles Augustus related minutely his adventures on the Omberg; describing his lovely Alma; his rival; but more especially the Chief Forester; reporting at last, the most original of all his originalities, the shooting-match of the Omberg.

"I do not believe that during my father's or grandfather's time such a story was ever heard of," said the old gentleman, adding force to his words by emphatic nods.

"The thing is very uncommon, certainly," said Mrs. Kemner; "but I believe, husband, that it would not have turned out so well had not you given Charles Augustus your blessing the evening he started on his journey; for it is a perfect miracle, and no one can solve the riddle to me, how the fierce old man of the mountain has so suddenly become as gentle as a lamb."

"All right," said the old man; "but still, I believe the Chief Forester is not all steady under his cap; but if I had been placed in such a position as Charles Augustus, when I was young, I never would have gone to that place a second time. For all I would care, the old muddle-head might have kept his daughter."

"O, you must not say that," said Charles Augustus, quickly; "for you have not yet seen my Alma."

"At all events," said the matron, raising her head proudly, "everybody, north and south, east and west, will talk of Charles Augustus; and if we accept the invitation, which we must do, husband, I think I already see how the people will stare at us! 'See, see!' they will say, 'there goes the rich iron proprietor from Sudermannland—and the lady by his side is his wife, the mother of that handsome young man, who intends to win his bride by a master-shot!' O, how romantic! I can hardly restrain myself when I think of it."

"Yes, yes! we can show ourselves as becomes those who are not fearful of observation," remarked Mr. Kemner; proving that Mistress Agneta's words had fallen like seed upon a fruitful soil. "In the mean time it is disagreeable to be the object of such attention."

"Disagreeable?" said Mrs. Kemner, who well knew how to take advantage of the vanity she had already kindled within her husband. "We might say so if Charles Augustus' parents were poor, and not able to present a becoming appearance; but with your dignity, and aristocratic manners, the part which you will have to play will be an easy one."

"Ahem!" said the old man, complacently stroking his chin, "if Charles Augustus promises me, upon his word of honor, that he will not miss the mark, I will undertake the journey. But this much I will say, I do not mean to represent the father of a rival who is to be made a laughingstock of."

"You are jesting, dear father," said Charles Augustus; "how can any man pledge his honor that he will hit the mark, especially one which he does not yet know? I can only promise this much, by my honor, and by my love, that I shall do everything that a skillful marksman can do. Let the result be what it may, none shall dispute my skill, at least!"

"With that I am satisfied," and the treaty was ratified by a hearty shake of the hand.

From this day a new and stirring life began at Lindafors. Charles Augustus spent the most of his time in shooting at standing as well as flying objects, calling into use the dear old decoy birds, placing them here and there upon the tops of

trees, frequently tearing them into rags.

Mr. and Mrs. Kemner were also busily engaged in preparing for the journey. They intended this time to make such a display as had not been seen during their own time, or their father's or great-grandfather's time.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Upon my word!" said Miss Neta, as she stood near the hearth, the day before the great festival which was to take place on the Omberg. She was surrounded by a whole army of frying-pans, pots, and other kitchen utensils. "Upon my word, I shall run mad if you do not leave the kitchen, and make your noise in some other place. Thunder away about your dogs, your servants, about man and beast as much as you please, but leave me alone. I know what I am about."

"Confound you, you old she dragon!" muttered the Chief Forester; "we will settle accounts together yet."

Thus much concerning the day before the festival. We shall not describe at length the many complimentary welcomings with which the Chief Forester greeted Mr. and Mrs. Kemner that evening. Mr. Kemner had made up his mind that he would find a foolish old man, with bearish disposition; but was agreeably mistaken. The Chief Forester well understood how to treat Mistress Agneta, who had determined to appear "haughty," but now could not seem anything but amiable. Charles Augustus and Alma exchanged tender glances, and the old couple were delighted with her. The Major, who had taken good care to remain at home until the eventful day, was not there. The thoughts of the whole company were placed upon the next day, and we shall therefore hasten on to it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The 15th of August had arrived.

The first rays of the sun had hardly gilded the top of the Omberg before the Chief Forester, with a troop of rustics, was hard at work upon an open space near the summit of the mountain.

Benches had been erected for the ladies around an amphitheatre, which was intended for the accommodation of the gentlemen. The inventive mind of the old man had taken advantage of every knoll and rock which gave a view of the lake. Even in the branches of the trees little seats had been placed, which were reached by ladders, for the benefit of those who wished to avail themselves of such aerial perches.

Opposite the amphitheatre, on the road which conducted to the Eleven Beeches, were placed the targets and marks, which the Chief Forester had erected with due solemnity and care. A slight fence had been erected around one of these targets, concealing it from view. It was the one which was to decide the suitors' dispute, which had become known far and wide throughout the country. The fence was so arranged that when an iron hook which bound one corner of it together was loosened, the boards would fall and expose the target to the view of the spectators.

The breakfast-bell sounded at eight o'clock, after all the arrangements had been completed. The Chief Forester looked over his work again, and found it good. In gay spirits he went home to quarrel a little with his dear dragon, and to receive the guests, who were already arriving to partake of the festal breakfast, which was spread under a canvass pavilion erected in the yard.

Towards nine o'clock hosts of people were to be seen ascending the sides of the mountain, and crowds of boats were crossing the lake. In a short time the forest was thronged with peasant boys and girls, old women and men, arrayed in their holiday suits, and here and there, like a flower in a cabbage garden, might be seen the uniform of a soldier, or the gayly-decorated bonnet of a lady. The seats were soon taken possession of, except those set aside for the Chief Forester's guests. The benches in the trees were filled with little boys, who joined in screams of laughter as a branch broke, and down toppled a group of young fellows, unharmed, into the bushes beneath.

"Don't you think," said a peasant of West Gothland, after a long deliberation with himself, pointing to a long rope extended between two trees, "don't you think that that thing yonder is put up for rope dancers?"

"Yes; probably they will shoot at them when they stand in the middle of it."

"But they will have to pay for that pretty well," said the first peasant, philosophically; "for one of the marksmen might hit his aim."

"Of course," replied the other; "but those rope-dancers are so swift that they bewitch one's eyes."

The rope which gave rise to these sage remarks was extended between two trees, at the height of about twenty feet from the ground. At one end of it hung, on a ring which encircled the rope, a little wooden bird, and the marksmen were to shoot at the bird as it was drawn by a string from one end of the rope to the other. This was done with the utmost rapidity, and it required a sharp eye and a skillful hand to hit the swiftly flying object.

As the day wore on the crowd increased, and the anxiety arose in proportion, especially as the Chief Forester had distributed a couple of barrels of beer among the peasantry.

"There comes Eric of Faglas," was shouted from all sides, as an old peasant came tottering along, evincing strong symptoms that he was slightly under the influence of the potent god, Bacchus; "he wants to shoot too."

"The same to-day as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day," hiccuped Eric, without heeding the pine-cones with which the boys pelted him from the tops of the trees. At length, when the missiles came thick and fast, he placed his rifle to his shoulder and aimed at the mischievous group, and thus succeeded in securing peace.

But suddenly the mirth was interrupted by the music of bugles, and the road from the Chief Forester's house was thronged with gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen. They approached the amphitheatre, the front benches of which were decorated with green boughs.

At the head of the procession, at the rear of the musicians, walked the Chief Forester, with his daughter by his side. Alma's beauty was displayed in a higher degree than ever before. The uneasy feeling, produced by the knowledge of being the centre of all beholders, caused her cheeks to glow with a crimson hue. Her modest demeanor was mingled with a charming and almost childish expression of joy, and her whole bearing evinced that elasticity which bestows such a bewitching charm upon beauty.

Her dress was rendered conspicuous only by its simplicity. A white gauze gown, nearly concealed by a gracefully flowing shawl, displayed her perfect form to the greatest advantage. Her only decoration was a wreath of flowers placed lightly upon her head.

The Chief Forester, who knew how to impregnate his whole bearing with an air of dignity, signified to Alma by a wave of his hand, that she should seat herself upon the foremost bench. On either side sat Mrs. Kemner, and a few of the Major's kinswomen. After the balance of the guests had taken their places, and the gentlemen—among whom were the two rivals—had placed themselves on both sides of the amphitheatre, the Chief Forester stepped out in front of them all, and a general silence prevailed.

It had been decided that the general festivities should precede the principal feature of the day. The first prize was a small silver drinking-cup, which the Chief Forester had caused to be made for this occasion. This was followed by smaller

prizes, such as powder-flasks, shot-pouches and other sporting implements. But the whole assemblage anxiously desired that these small games should come to an end, that they might witness the great one; the prize of which was the most beautiful maiden and the purest heart of East Gothland.

The ladies were unanimous in their good wishes for the fortune of the handsome young stranger, who had won their good favor. The gentlemen, however, with the exception of a few, who stood in the vicinity of Mr. and Mrs. Kemner, whispered to each other, "The Major is a fool if he allows the finest pearl to be taken from its native country."

But see. Leaning against a large oak which grew near the side of the road, stood a warm heart; it was the Old Pilot, who "firm in faith," gave up to the hope that God would assist true love.

A powerful blast of the trumpet resounded throughout the forest. Every eye was strained to the utmost.

The Chief Forester took a paper from his pocket, and in a loud voice read the following rules:—

"§ 1. The shooting match is now opened. Every free born Swede, has a right to take part in the game.

"§ 2. Whoever that is guilty of using witchcraft, charmed bullets, or other unholy means of securing success, shall be delivered over to the legal authorities.

"§ 3. If any one shall offend a cripple or deformed person, who shall enter the lists, the offending party shall be excluded from the game.

"§ 4. If one or more ladies, (here the Chief Forester bowed deeply to the front seats of the amphitheatre,) should follow any of the marksmen with favorable or unfavorable glances, she shall be placed before the judgment-seat of her own conscience, and there prove or disprove her innocence."

The Chief Forester read several other rules, which we will not repeat.

The signal had scarcely been given before twelve competitors appeared for the silver cup, and were received with general applause.

Among the marksmen was a young soldier from the grenadier regiment of East Gothland.

With a proud step, the young soldier advanced to his post, bearing his glittering rifle in his hand, and looked as sure of success as though he had the cup in his hands already.

When he arrived at the centre of the amphitheatre, he stopped and looked around, as if in admiration of the beautiful ladies who surrounded him. Then, with military precision, he placed the gun to his shoulder, and quietly awaited the signal from the Chief Forester.

The signal was given, and the marksman fired; but the bird was drawn so rapidly along the rope that it hung unharmed at the further extremity.

Without changing a muscle of his countenance, the grenadier shouldered his musket; and, turning to the right, marched gravely off.

He did not heed the puns with which the boys greeted him, in the least; but there was something in his look which prevented the boys from adding to the force of their remarks by pelting him with pine cones, for which purpose they had filled their pockets.

Now stepped forth a young rustic, and saluted the audience with a deep bow; but he fared no better than the soldier. On the contrary, his retreat was rendered more ignominious by the shower of cones which greeted him from every side.

We are grieved to relate that of the whole twelve not one man was able to hit the flying bird. The cup remained safely in Alma's hand.

The Chief Forester was about to open the lists anew, when a peasant advanced, using his rifle as a walking cane.

"The same to-day as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day," taunted the boys from the trees. "Hurrah for old Eric!"

"Yes, just so;" said the old man, and asked permission to try his skill. The Chief Forester smilingly consented. But now taunts came from all sides; and Eric was forced to use every endeavor to retain his composure. The Chief Forester gave the signal; and, raising his rifle with the utmost ease, the old man dropped the bird to the earth.

Laughter and jokes were now changed into surprise and admiration. But Eric stood there, quietly and unconcerned, as though he did not comprehend why they made so much ado about so small a matter. He placed his lips upon the muzzle of his gun, and blew out the smoke, and would have remained on the spot longer, had not the Chief Forester taken him by the arm and led him up to Alma, from whom the old man bowingly received the silver cup.

"How was it possible for such an old toper as you to see such a little bird?" said the Chief Forester.

"One little bird!" said old Eric with a vacant stare; "there were a dozen at least, and I aimed at all of them."

"Indeed!" said the Chief Forester with a laugh, looking around upon the mirthful spectators. "That explains the whole matter, ladies and gentlemen."

In the mean time, Eric sauntered away, holding the envied cup in his hand, and reciting his old proverb over and over again.

But now the Chief Forester turned, with an altered air and serious mein, towards the assemblage and said: "The lists are closed, gentlemen. Now comes the principal prize;" and his eyes roamed to the spot where the Major and Charles Augustus were standing.

The whole assemblage seemed as though shocked by an electric battery. Some were so excited that even eau de Cologne and Hoffman's drops were necessary to keep their spirits up. Among these, Mistress Agneta was not the strongest, and Mr. Kemner alone knew how he himself felt. In the mean time he endeavored to keep cool by coughing and aheming; but the exertion forced large drops of sweat to his forehead. He glanced at Charles Augustus, as much as to say: "My reputation is at stake, boy. Do your duty to-day. I shall never dare show my face again if the other party snatches away the bride from our very nose."

Charles Augustus *appeared* to be composed; but the fast-changing color of his cheeks seemed to indicate doubt and fear. He cast half-courageous, half-melancholy looks towards Alma, upon whose cheeks the roses gradually vanished, and became lilies.

She had no doubt that Charles Augustus would be her husband, whether he succeeded in the trial or not; but she felt how humiliating it would be if he, in case he should miss the mark, should be obliged to receive her from the Major as a boon of mercy. She therefore feared and trembled. If Charles Augustus was not a complete *victor*, the joy of the festival would be interrupted.

The Major stood with folded arms, as though he was a mere spectator, instead of one of the principal actors.

The Chief Forester had assumed a haughty manner, that none might surmise his thoughts. His whole attention seemed to be fixed upon the target, which was yet enclosed.

The distance was measured; and, at the sound of the bugle, the fence suddenly fell to the earth, disclosing the target, which was a finely modelled Cupid with fluttering paper wings, standing upon a slender column. The far-sounding voice of the Chief Forester proclaimed that whoever of the two rivals should pierce with his ball the left eye of the Cupid, should be rewarded by the hand of his daughter Alma.

Death-like stillness pervaded throughout the whole audience.

The Chief Forester gave to his daughter two tickets, which were to decide who should shoot first. Alma's hand trembled so violently that she could hardly present the two cards to the gentlemen. The Major and Charles Augustus drew the cards. The first shot fell upon the Major.

"All right!" exclaimed the Chief Forester.

With a firm step the Major advanced; and, after carefully examining the lock of his gun, placed it to his cheek and took a deliberate and steady aim. This might have injured his aim; for, in spite of his seeming coolness, a close observer might have seen that his hand began to tremble. He fired, and Cupid's eye was pierced—but it was the *right* eye.

The Major's countenance evinced nothing but coolness and indifference. He blew into the muzzle of his gun, and returned silently to his former place with an expression which seemed to refuse compassion or consolation.

The Chief Forester rubbed his grizzly beard vigorously; but no other traces of anxiety were visible in his demeanor.

And now Charles Augustus looked into Alma's eyes so long and so earnestly, that it seemed as though it was his last look upon her adored face. *Her* face was pale; *his* was flushed. And with a rash step he advanced to the post.

All was again quiet. Alma heard the beating of her heart.

Charles Augustus lifted his rifle; and slowly lowering the muzzle, as soon as the object was sighted, he fired.

At the same moment a low exclamation was heard. It was an exclamation of joy from Alma, which she could not suppress. The left eye had disappeared. Cupid now was entirely blind.

Three deafening cheers resounded through the forest of the Omberg. Intoxicated with victory, Charles Augustus knelt at the feet of his bride.

Mr. Kemner removed the handkerchief with which he had concealed his face during the shooting, and condescendingly listened to the congratulations of the audience. And taking a well filled purse from his pocket, the wealthy man—as proud as his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been before him—threw silver coin among the peasantry.

But let us turn to the Chief Forester as he stands before the whole assemblage, and joins Alma's and Charles Augustus' hands together; listen as he proclaims with a broken but distinct voice: "This young man has won the hand of my daughter, according to the method I have selected to choose between two esteemed and excellent men. I now give him, with my blessing, the treasure of my heart. Three cheers for the bride and bridegroom of Omberg!"

And again the three cheers mingled with the loud blasts of the bugles, and the popping of champaign bottles rung gaily through the forest. But that the effect might not be destroyed, the Chief Forester concealed the fact that Charles Augustus and Alma should have been united at all events. The Major and himself had agreed between themselves that if the former should prove victorious, he should generously renounce his claim; and for such an exigency, which the Chief Forester considered almost certain, for the Major was an expert marksman, the old man had concocted a neat speech. But now that Charles Augustus had spared him that trouble, he was rejoiced that his future son-in-law had displayed before so large an audience, that he was man enough to gain a bride by his own skill.

"We," whispered the Chief Forester to the Major, "we will retain our old friendship."

"Until death!" replied the Major.

The company now formed themselves into a procession; and with the blind Cupid at their head, they commenced their march towards the residence of the Chief Forester.

The guests adjourned to a magnificent supper, after which came music and dancing.

It was not until after Mistress Agneta had been invited to dance the first minuet, and not until old Mr. Kemner had seated himself at the whist table, and the guests had distributed themselves in various parts of the park, which was illuminated by bonfires, that Charles Augustus and Alma found opportunity to interchange their happiness with each other. They walked away from the noise and confusion and ascended the mountain. They arrived at Alma's little bower, which they entered and sat hand in hand, looking first into each other's eyes, then upon the blue bosom of the lake, over which the sky had stretched forth its star-decked canopy.

While they were thus engaged, they were suddenly enfolded in a warm embrace. The Chief Forester had sought for his children at the place where he had once separated them, that he might bless them, and give vent to his joy unseen.

And night spread her mantle over the lonely groves of the Omberg. Still the guests thronged the park. And at the amphitheatre—where the Old Pilot provided refreshments for the peasantry—cheers and songs were to be heard, frequently mingled with Father Eric's proverb:—"To-day as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day." The light of the fires flickered here and there, illumining the green arches of the forest.

In the house cheers upon cheers followed each other in rapid succession, and the ball-room was thronged with merry

dancers, who frolicked gleefully in the mazes of the waltz. Perched upon the shoulders of his son-in-law and several of his guests, the Chief Forester overlooked the happy scene.

"Long live the Chief Forester—the first—the best—the happiest host. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Let me down you rascallions! It's all right, it's all right."

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Long live our host, the Chief Forester of the Omberg!" And they circled around him again, with cheers that made the old building tremble.

THE END.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Charles Augustus had good reason for surprise to see a sea-captain in Lake Welter at the date of our story.—*Authoress.*

[2] A celebrated Swedish writer.

[3] The twenty-fifth anniversary of a marriage, is called the silver wedding-day—the fiftieth anniversary, the golden wedding-day.

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TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Parts of letters are interspersed with dialogue of the reader(s) of the letters. Although that dialogue is in plain text in the original book, it has been italicized in this version.

The advertisement for the "Fall of Poland" on page 233 was incomplete so the partial sentence at the end of the page was deleted. It read "This work recommends itself to public notice by its clear and concise history of a coun-".

Some words which appear to be typos or misspelled are printed thus in the original book. The following changes were made to the original text:

Page 11: changed *eyebrows* to *eye-brows*

Page 41: changed *door-way* to *doorway*

Page 43: changed *commened* to *commenced* and *Its all nonsense* to *It's all nonsense*

Page 84 and 206: changed *Sudermaunland* to *Sudermannland*

Page 86: changed *gentleman* to *gentlemen*

Page 87: changed *your are* to *you are*

Page 113: changed *Hoetsthalm* to *Hoestholm*

Page 114: changed *to to take* to *to take*

Pages 117, 140, 183, and 198: changed *birth-day* to *birthday*

Page 154: changed *strategem* to *stratagem*

Page 157: changed *He people* to *Her people*

Page 161: changed *lead* to *led*

Pages 187 and 203: changed *surprized* to *surprised*

Page 190: changed *a soft-hearted, weak women* to *a soft-hearted, weak woman*

Page 206: changed *mysel* to *myself*

Page 223: changed *author s thoughts* to *author's thoughts*

Page 226: changed *remarable* to *remarkable*

Page 227: changed *Iu truth* to *In truth*

Page 229: changed *Alexandor* to *Alexander*

Page 234: changed *Thacakary* to *Thackeray* and *daguereotyped* to *daguerreotyped*

Page 235: changed *proesy* to *prosy*

[End of *The Bride of Omberg* by Emilie Flygare-Carlén]