

LORD OF THE
SILVER
DRAGON

Laura Goodman Salverson



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TO MY HUSBAND
GEORGE SALVERSON

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In presenting a story such as this to the modern reader certain explanations may well be in order. First, then, the purpose of the book is not to settle those troublesome questions of the possible latitude and longitude of Vineland, or the authenticity of doubtful episodes which so have vexed the foreign scholars and historians, but, rather, to interpret the little known and greatly misunderstood character of the Norsemen. For the benefit of minds to whom the letter is the law and the spirit mere illusion, I confess to having pursued the latter rather than the former aim. There are seeming anachronisms in the tale, but never of a nature to affect in the slightest the intent of the story which attempts to make our Norse forebears live again in fiction as they lived most gloriously in their golden age.

It is not to be supposed that I have chosen the formal manner of speech because of any wish to endow the makers of Normandy and Norman England with an effete manner, which judging from their ancient chronicles, they appear not to have possessed. A conscientious study of Norse mythology, and more especially of the marvelous laws of this virile people, reveals a deep and enduring love for dignity and honor. If through the prism of a thousand years our vision of their habits is both dim and scanty, the fault lies not in them. They were staunch friends, generous sires, loyal husbands, and liberal masters—the truth of this has been too often overshadowed by the tales of their warlike activities. They were not mere furniture for burning ships, these noble men who gave the indifferent North a heritage of literature second only to the glorious contribution of ancient Greece!

The emotions of the human heart are eternally the same, though they may be manifested diversely in various ages, and it is because of that diverse expression, ever difficult of comprehension by the new generation, that I have deliberately chosen to modernise my interpretation of the Norsemen and their reaction to a natural and emotional environment.

In following the Vineland story I have given preference to the *Flatey Book*, since it is more generally accepted by the Icelandic people, who alone of Scandinavians retain, almost unaltered, the speech of their Norse forefathers. It is true that I have attempted to give sounder reasons for Freydis' villainy, while minimizing her actual crimes; I have also

endeavored to hazard a theory and explanation of Leif's early retirement from activities at sea.

The theory is not without its plausibility. Old documents show that from 1150 to 1408 no fewer than fifteen bishops were ordained to serve in Greenland and Vineland. This could not have been possible unless some able leader had first laid the foundations of colonial success. The congregations of Greenland and Vineland must have had direct connection with Rome, for in the Vatican library are documents showing the papal income derived from the diocese across the Atlantic. One of these is dated *Anno Domini MCCCXXII et die Mensis Augusti*. A Bull issued by Pope Nicholas V, 1448, informs us that Greenland and Vineland churches suffered great losses thirty years previously through Indian attacks. According to the chronicle five parishes were spared. In addition, there are to be found records of holy pilgrimages made from Greenland to Rome in which persons from Vineland participated.

Rome could not, therefore, have been ignorant of the Norse inhabitants of America. And, since Rome was the Mecca for all scholars, it is not unlikely that there Columbus derived some information as to the existence of lands beyond the Western seas. At any rate, it is known that he visited Iceland in 1477; that he sailed "a hundred leagues beyond the Isle of Tile, now called Frislanda," and we know with certainty that the island called Frislanda is the Iceland of to-day. A Roman Catholic writer states that Columbus on his visit to Iceland received an inspiration from the Holy Ghost to visit lands to the West. Be that as it may, it none the less appears incredible that the great geographer should have been visiting far-off Iceland merely for his health!

These questions, however, are better left to historical controversy, as they have most happily been the bone of contention over which the meticulous and prejudiced have assiduously wrangled, unsuccessfully, to be sure, but to their own edification. In conclusion, I confess to having a preference for the theory that Leif's booths were planted in New England, and not in Labrador or Newfoundland. The ruins of systematic dams and sluices, the thousands of feet of dry built stone walls extending along the St. Charles River, recalling the Norseman's habit of building public bathing pools for salutary and household uses, and the various other ruins reminiscent of Norse practice, have induced the belief. I quote here briefly from a document by Professor Horsford, because mention is made of a peculiar pile of ruins which might easily have been a Norse Plain of Justice: "Along the north bank of the Charles River, where it rises to not less than

from sixty to seventy-five feet, above the water the whole face has been terraced for several hundred yards. At another place, quite away from the river, terraces have been formed on a natural semi-circular hillside, and in a third instance similar work has been performed in a still more remarkable manner, in a natural depression which forms an almost perfectly round amphitheatre, capable of seating from three hundred to four hundred persons.”

Following is a diagram showing the Norse Law Ring:



Recognition must be made of my indebtedness to the generous scholars whose interest and libraries have encouraged my effort, and perhaps most of all to my dear father, whose knowledge and sincere love of ancient Norse literature has imbued in me a like if lesser fervor.

L.G.S.

CAST

ERIC THE RED—First Lord of Greenland and scion of an ancient house in Norway.

THORHILD—His wife, a wealthy woman of Iceland.

LEIF—Their son; commissioned by King Olaf to spread the gospel in Greenland, and who first planted the Cross of Christ on American soil.

THORGUNNA—A noblewoman of the Hebrides and sweetheart of Leif.

THORGILS—Their love-child and First Lord of Vineland.

THORSTEIN—A younger son of Eric.

OLAF TRYGGVASON—Apostle of Christianity and King of Norway.

THORBJORN—An impoverished noble of Iceland, descendant of King Olaf the White, of Dublin, Ireland.

GUDRID THE FAIR—His daughter.

THORVALD—A wealthy Greenland chief.

FREYDIS—His wife, Eric the Red's baseborn daughter, an unscrupulous and avaricious woman.

THORFINN KARLSEFNE—Successful founder of the Vineland settlement.

Book I

CHAPTER I

The mountains, grey and grim, frowned down upon the sturdy walls of Brattalid, their brows wreathed in swirling mist, and through this ghostly mist the pale sunlight poured its disheartening rays. Chill, whining winds blew in from the ocean, churning with relentless monotony the drifting ice of Eric's Fiord. The sound they made, very like the purring of a gigantic cat, was singularly threatening, as though it were the brooding anger of the mountains made articulate—a sinister purring, akin to that of a gorged tiger curled upon the bones of his victim. And again, that doleful sound seemed an echo from the vengeful ocean, which, like the mountains, resented the intrusion of foolish humanity into this northern Kingdom of Solitude.

The scene was harsh and uninviting, its single redeeming feature the bold, black smoke which leaped and spiralled up the slit roofs of Brattalid. And if a melancholy atmosphere prevailed without, it was no less true of conditions within the fortress-like buildings which clung so tenaciously to the cold, grey cliffs. In the most pretentious of these buildings, the huge banquet hall, Eric the Red, mighty chieftain and first lord of Greenland, sat in gloomy consultation with his stewards and family. A commanding figure ever, Eric was formidable now as he sat, solitary and dignified, in the elaborate Honor Seat of his ancient clan. Fond of state and ceremony, he was dressed in gala robes, though the occasion and the general depression seemed rather to have called for the reverse. The old lord stroked his velvet tunic with a still powerful red and hairy hand, scowled fiercely as he mumbled to himself, and thereby managed to make his faithful steward feel extremely uncomfortable and less than a fool for all the pains he had taken to make his lord realize the gravity of the prevailing conditions.

"It were folly indeed to give out more supplies," the old man faltered in conclusion, his voice uncertain and his manner flurried.

Eric lowered his beetling brows, a terrifying red thunder-cloud.—"Who charges Eric Red with folly in that he will not sit at meat while others perish?" he roared in hot resentment. "What would ye, ye stomach worshippers?"

"But, my lord," Thorhild, his wife, hastened to implore him in soothing tones, "discretion is the rarest wisdom. Do we dishonor Eric by seeking such in him? Moreover, we are at the point of self-impoverishment, and yet thou givest and givest until I fear the very clothes on our backs are none too safe against thy charity."

“There is little barley left, and less corn,” the second steward interjected boldly.

“Then kill the cattle, the horses—what you will,” snapped Eric, “but seek not to bind the hands of your lord.”

Thorhild glanced round at her sons in the hope of finding some assurance of support in them, but found them unperturbed by their father’s attitude. Evidently if any reasonable solution was to be arrived at she alone must force it. Stifling a sigh of despair, she left her accustomed place and with strange humility seated herself at Eric’s feet.

“My Eric, thou art too concerned with this people; had they not followed Eric Red they would have followed some other. Thou knowest the breed.”

“I know it!” he barked vehemently; “but thou—dost thou know Eric so little after all these years?”

Thorhild was a persistent as well as a fearless woman; she now matched him look for look.

“Too well do I know thy stubbornness, my lord,” came the haughty retort. “But now, I pray thee, hearken to reason; let us return to Iceland, where the common necessities are not denied the meanest slave, though Eric’s wife must do without them in Greenland. Oh, I entreat thee, my lord, wait not until this terrible plague and slow starvation shall have laid us all low, but let us make ready to leave when the seas open.”

“Death were sweeter than defeat. I who led men from their Iceland heaths will never head an exodus back again,” Eric replied in a hoarse whisper; then in an effort to be rid of sentimental weakness he struck the arm of his chair so terrific a blow that Thorhild quite expected to see the proud falconhead carved thereon fall in fragments at his feet.

“What avails this argument?” continued the fiery chieftain. “Is it not written that each life must sometime end?”

Thorhild knew herself defeated and acknowledged it with a shrug, but her exasperated glances flew from face to face. The old steward smiled a toothless smile of commiseration. They had weathered many a storm together, and his eyes seemed to remind her of that consoling fact.

Thorstein, the younger of Eric’s two sons, a quiet, soft-spoken youth not yet twenty, now ventured his say.

“It seems to me that with trade established between Greenland and Iceland all these difficulties would cease. One such trader as Bjarni brought

from Iceland some years past would greatly mitigate our present misery.”

All through the preceding controversy Leif, the elder son, had stood with arms folded across his deep chest, leaning against the stately Honor Pillars of his House and watching with keen blue eyes the leaping play of the long-fires which burned in a red-gold chain all up and down the huge hall. This flickering, ruddy glow revealed much of primitive elegance; tapestries, obviously not of northern weave, decked the central benches, the Throne-chair, and the entire wall of the women’s section; rich furs were strewn about on the raised floor under the benches, and row on row of gleaming shields, swords and battle-axes glittered upon the walls. At the far end, near the outer door, stood a stout oak table, or, rather, a carved oaken trestle with a smooth-grained plank upon it, and here reposed a great silver bowl—the Good Will bowl; dishonored now in Eric’s eyes since it held no wine, but only a sour sort of ale which he disdained to drink.

Leif loved the proud simplicity of this spacious hall, where a hundred men could sit at meat with comfort; yet more than all he loved the ancient Honor Pillars, standing like temple gods, two by two, before the throne chairs ranged opposite each other on either side of the long walls. Each rune, each deftly carved figure, had become so familiar, and the history thus unfolded so clear to Leif, that he felt at times a closer kinship with the dead heroes immortalized in these runes than with his intimate companions.

While his mother pleaded and his sire stormed, Leif reached the brooding conclusion that a life so passive and commonplace as this of Greenland were better ended. But on hearing his brother’s diffident suggestion a curious emotion stirred to life within him and he seemed to see again the gay Iceland merchant who had captivated his heart years ago, and to feel anew the driving urge to emulate his colorful example. He smiled at the memory of Bjarnis’ bold leap from his dragon’s prow into the irritable, churning waters of Eric’s Fiord—and of his gay clothes and the heavy gold rings encircling his brawny arms.

For the first time, Leif joined in the argument.

“Those were Norwegian stuffs,” he reminded Thorstein, referring to Bjarni’s cargo. “In Norway lies our hope.”

“But my son . . .” Thorhild began, only to be interrupted by the spectacular entrance of Freydis, her husband’s lefthand daughter. This striking woman could scarcely have resembled her indiscreet parent less. In stature she was rather tall, and more supple than was common in a Norsewoman; her skin was olive-hued; her eyes were heavily lashed and

brown, and her almost classic head was crowned with rich black hair of which she was inordinately proud, and fond of displaying to the best advantage.

She was smiling as she made her way to her father's seat, pleased to have every eye fixed upon her, sure of her own grace and charm. Indeed she made an attractive picture with her sky-blue gown, scarlet cape, jewel-decked hair, arranged in two sleek plaits and falling from either side of the proud oval of her face, to gleam like strands of silken ebony upon the rich swell of her bosom.

"What now, daughter?" demanded Eric, wearily.

Freydis' red lips curled scornfully.

"Nothing new; merely another brace of beggars, and this time it appears that impertinence equals temerity. There was no getting rid of them. They must see the lord, at least!"

Eric knotted his red brows menacingly and glared at his daughter. "Have I not told thee that whosoever seeks Eric in need is not to be denied? Show them in."

Eric had grown accustomed to these visits from his suffering people, yet his generous heart never failed to react to their sorrow. Dauntless in war, a very master of the seas, he felt as helpless as a woman in the face of the tragedy which seemed about to engulf the entire colony. Never before had he been faced with such a problem. Hardship, turbulence, the horror of relentless feuds—these things he understood. But this siege of frost; these endless fields of drift-ice, where no ship might venture though the seas teeming with fish; and this ghastly plague creeping upon one like the polar darkness, squeezing one of energy, of hope, of life . . . all this he had brought upon his hapless followers! For had he not lured them from a pleasant clime with his alluring promises? Had he not deluded them willingly? Why, the very name of Greenland was deliberate irony!

Blaming himself as he did, Eric had given rashly indeed. It was as though he feared to enjoy a single favor beyond that of his meanest slave. Yet, much as he had suffered upon other similar occasions, it was as nothing to the shame which overwhelmed him at sight of the two young creatures who, wild-eyed and haggard, now came and flung themselves at his feet.

"Now, by the eye of Odin, I see too much!" he cried. "Miserable being that I am! The very children of my ablest warriors perish before me."

It was all too true; these unhappy creatures were the only son and the daughter of Swen, a one time warrior-in-arms with Eric, and his staunchest defender in those desperate quarrels which finally had terminated in his exile from Norway and the loss of his vast estates. Swen, then a young man, had followed him to Iceland; had shared his turbulent career even to a second exile, and eventually had emigrated with his family to this land sponsored by his volcanic leader.

Eric's heart was rent with pity and remorse, but as usual his recourse was to anger. He pounded his chair and roared like a bull.

"Thorhild! Wife! Where is thy charity? Where are thy worthless servants? Is there none to show hospitality to Eric's guests? Prepare the bath; set out a table, or am I to turn serving-wench in my declining years?"

"My lord, heed what they say," his wife implored, anxious to stem the tide of his rising indignation; "their father lies dead of the plague."

"Is that an excuse to starve the living?" bellowed her husband. "I have had enough of argument this day. Do as thou art bidden, and when these poor children have rested give them what they ask, and see to it they reach home in safety."

Swen's son, a likely lad some twelve years of age, made a pathetic effort to regain command of himself and to relate his message.

"My lord, we ask not for ourselves but for our beloved father. Death we have been taught to accept, but disgrace never . . . yet now we have nothing wherewith to honor our dead. 'Go to Eric Red,' he told us at the last; 'he will not tolerate that Swen Longsword should be cast to the vultures.'"

"No! By the holy hammer of Thor he spoke truly," Eric interrupted the tragic recital, and lifting the boy to his feet strained him to his breast. "Swen, Swen," the old lord muttered brokenly, "oh, that we had fallen in the glow of battle—this dying like rats in a hole!"

Then, in his usual rash manner, he commanded his chief steward to make ready a train of pack-horses laden with foods and fabrics—the best available; to give Swen's daughter a purse of silver, and his son a certain battle-axe greatly prized by himself. "For," said he, laying a heavy hand upon the boy's shoulder, "who can tell but what young Swen may one day strike a blow for Eric's house!"

None dared to gainsay or thwart the proud chieftain while in such a mood, but when, some hours later, the grateful children had been sent upon

their way rejoicing, a sullen murmur broke out against the improvident master.

Like every other man born to place and power, Eric heeded little such disturbance amongst his retainers, yet their dark looks and surly responses reduced him to gloomy meditation.

Thorhild deplored his excesses, yet both she and his sons were reconciled to his action in this instance—honor demanded no less. Not so Freydis. When she discovered that a certain bolt of fine linen, coveted by herself, had been foolishly thrown to the beggars, as she put it, her anger boiled over and she bore down upon her heartbroken father like a fury.

“Thou wouldst play the kingly part,” she taunted him, “yet findest it nowise incumbent upon thee to wed thine own daughter as a noble should. For all of thee she might sit in the cookhouse waiting the grace of some scullion or other.”

Thorhild flew into the breach, endeavoring by happy jest to turn a bad situation. But Eric had little love for this daughter who reminded him too well of conquests better forgotten. Moreover, in spite of a strenuous life of exploration, wars and hardships, he had retained much of his ancient fire. Leaping to his feet, he studied her one terrible moment in withering, contemptuous silence.

“Daughter of my shame!” he flung at her, “well dost thou prove that a man’s weakness may rise to destroy him. But it shall not be said that Eric Red fails in paternal duty—even be that paternity so unhappily expressed. Erlind,” he now addressed his quaking chief steward, “thou hast heard?”

“Aye, my master, ’tis but a fit of temper . . .”

“Spare thy wits,” Eric retorted, “thou wilt have enough use for them. What remains to me of moneys?”

“A single coffer of Norway silver, some rings of gold, the family jewels . . . little else.”

“There are tapestries and armor besides,” Eric reminded him, “and at least a score of thralls spoiling for a change. Well, then, break off their collars and send them in gift to Thorvald of Gardar, whom we must contract in marriage for our highhanded daughter. Not a word! Make haste about the business.”

“Husband,” Thorhild began in weary desperation, “Thorvald is the richest man in Greenland. The expense of such a marriage would utterly ruin

us. All this day we have pleaded like slaves, and that for our very existence, yet thou rushest from one folly to another with the speed of breakers at sea.”

“And thou snatchest at poor struggling decency like the pitiless undertow! ‘Ruin, ruin!’ ye croak like ravens, but I say better honorable ruin than dishonorable.”

With incomparable dignity the old chieftain gathered his cloak about him and, waving his thrall aside, stepped down from his Throne-chair.

“Another thing,” he told his exasperated family, “let it be understood that a third of my jewels and all of my Gardar Estates will be adjudged Freydis to dowry!” With which emphatic announcement Eric departed for his bed-place and prepared for righteous slumber.

CHAPTER II

Leif had taken little part in the argument against his father, yet he fully realized the dangers threatening his people. The mysterious plague, wiping out entire families almost over night, was indisputably the aftermath of slow starvation, and if the entire colony was not to succumb a wiser method than Eric's indiscriminate giving must be devised. The more Leif thought upon the perplexing problem the less was he resigned to waiting the will of the gods, and the more certain that a foreign cruise offered the only possible salvation. But such a cruise would necessitate much negotiable wealth, and of that Eric now commanded but little. Freydis had tricked her father into squandering his last treasure; yet even she must understand the dire straits of her people. Believing that every sane person must agree to the wisdom of supporting a cruise to Norway, Leif endeavored to soften Freydis' heart; to win her consent to an annulment of the proposed marriage contract and the useless extravagance it must entail.

Freydis laughed at him, taunting him with being in league against her, and told him brutally that the fate of a handful of slaves and degenerates concerned her not at all. What if they perished of a fever—most likely caused by their indolence and filth?—there was no scarcity of their like elsewhere. She saw no reason for heroic measures; summer could not be withheld forever, and with the return of moderate weather there would be fishing enough to fatten the leanest slave and stop his howling. No, Freydis flatly declined to invest her dowry in a ship—a husband was an uncertain enough investment!

Leif listened to her insolence in angry amazement, and, realizing how unassailable such cold ambition must be, withdrew his argument. But if he had loved this black-browed half-sister little enough formerly, he now despised her. Nevertheless, though he was denied assistance where it should most properly have been forthcoming, Leif was no less determined to launch the scheme which, from day to day, took deeper hold upon his heart and fancy. And then Fortune, in the guise of further humiliation, pointed him the way.

In spite of his disapproval, to Leif was appointed the difficult task of suing for the desired alliance—a delicate mission indeed, since in all propriety the offer should have proceeded from the house of Thorvald. But disagreeable or not, he accepted the mission with grace and dignity, scorning the mockery he read in Freydis' eyes. The journey was long enough, he reasoned by way of consolation, to give him freedom for thought.

On his circuitous route to Gardar, Leif did not fail to note the dreadful misery prevalent everywhere. He observed in many cases that the families of freemen were infinitely worse off than those of the thralls. Wretched as might be the life of a thrall, he, nevertheless, seldom lacked for food and fire. The freeman, on the other hand, must sustain his liberty and buy what protection his own two hands failed to provide. Fishing and hunting were his mainstay in this new land, where chieftains had no fields to cultivate or wars to follow; and both these industries had failed him owing to the fearful inclemency of the past seasons and an unusual blockade of Polar ice.

Wherever Leif paused numbers of these ragged, half-starved creatures thronged about him imploring aid and some solution of their terrible difficulties. He gave what he could, and promised what he dared, but with calculated prudence, very unlike his father's. Nevertheless, he pitied them in his heart and was entirely absorbed in their problem.

As always, Leif was deeply impressed with the district of Gardar. Vast snow-capped mountains glittered above the blue waters of the fiords which bound on either side this fertile isthmus. Wind-swept, snow-embroidered, it lay like a valley of sleeping giants, shut in to ghostly silence by its heaven-towering hills.

Leif never tired of this noble scenery; its calm, chaste grandeur appealed to something austere and ascetic within his own soul. It did not stir his pulses as did the sunlit sea, but it seemed to lift him high above the petty cares of life, to force upon him the knowledge that silence is more potent than clamor and patience more noble than rage.

Because of the strange charm it worked upon him, Leif had always resented Thorvald's share in Gardar. Now this resentment waxed double at the thought of Freydis' coming into possession of the enchanted spot; and he found it difficult to forgive Eric so foolish a measure. What did Freydis care for Nature's graces? Why, she would, most likely, rip asunder each emerald meadow in the greedy attempt to coax the growth of stunted grain.

Musing thus he gained a considerable promontory, whence far down the opposite slope he sighted the low, squat buildings of Thorvald's Hall. Like those of Brattalid, these several buildings were made entirely of stone. The largest, built in the shape of a great L, stood in the centre of a stout stone enclosure, and around it were clustered a dozen or more lesser dwellings and perhaps a score of huts. The general impression was one of security and homely comfort. As stoutly built as any Udal Estate of old Norway, Thorvald's Hall defied wind and weather and enemy alike. True, it lacked

the greater stateliness of Brattalid; for wherever Eric had settled, howsoever briefly, he must, as a matter of course, introduce what ostentation and elegance he could.

After the misery Leif had witnessed on his course through the mountains he was somewhat chagrined to find Thorvald and a group of his intimates riotously engaged in an ancient game of ball. Upon the announcement of a visitor Thorvald at once called a halt to the hilarious game and, with every mark of genuine pleasure in an unexpected diversion, called for his cloak. This particular garment affected by Thorvald was a scarlet broadcloth reversed with baby-seal, and was, in addition, the sole care and, one might add, occupation of a diminutive slave, whose duty it was to be ever on hand to proffer and receive its elegant folds. Having flung this enviable wrap on his sloping shoulders, Thorvald hastened to greet his guest.

But on first glimpse of the visitor a grimace crossed his face and he jerked his mustache in a nervous way he had. "The high and mighty Leif," he muttered under his breath, "may the trolls take him!" And Leif, waiting his host, might, indeed, have been some vagrant god wandering the hills of home and momentarily come to halt beneath these old grey walls. The pale spring sunlight turned his flowing hair to gold, rippled down his armor, and flashed upon his jeweled sword. Lazily he leaned against a stone pillar, a smile upon his handsome lips, but the chill of arctic peaks in those remarkable steel-blue eyes of his, which were never subject to discipline or expediency.

Thorvald had no love for Leif; but, as became his station, he bade the visitor welcome in flattering phrases.

"How now, Leif Ericson?" he sang out, "thou hast a look of sanctity about thee. Art contemplating the building of a temple to Balder with thyself as chief mummer to the Golden One?"

"Thou art a rare wit," Leif assured his host admiringly as they strode to the main hall, for he was well aware of Thorvald's vanity on that score, "and more of a wizard! As thou hast surmised, a great dream torments my every hour. In desperation have I sought thee—indeed, how desperate thou wilt soon learn!"

Thorvald melted irresistibly under the warmth of this flattery. Leif, son of Eric Red, come to him for counsel! Never had he dreamed the like possible. And, truth to tell, so completely had Thorvald lived in fear of the roaring old chieftain of Brattalid that he would have despised a son so easily won had it not been for that contradictory glitter in Leif's rebel eyes. He

suspected that this level-spoken, cold-eyed, serenely smiling man was capable of more than dreams and finely flavored speeches. Consequently his vanity was the more inflamed and he quickly imagined himself in the role of high steward and final oracle to the future ruler of the country. His graciousness knew no bounds.

While a lavish feast was prepared and a bard commissioned to compose a fitting harangue on the grace and nobility of the guest, Leif was attended to the bath by two young thralls. There, whilst enjoying the comforts of the steaming water, kept at even temperature by the constant changing of heated stones, his leonine head was thoroughly pummeled and brushed until his unruly mane shone like beaten gold.

When, somewhat later, he took his place in the Honor Seat, opposite his host, not a few eyes appraised him approvingly. Like his father, he was given to elegance; but, unlike Eric, it seemed his natural due. No matter how fine the garb he affected his personality outshone it. Moreover, not a man failed to appreciate the significance of his deep chest, steel-girt thighs and powerful shoulders, howsoever decked he might be in blue and gold. Whereas the women, taking all this for granted, could never for long contemplate the tantalizing contradiction of his passionate lips and cold, indifferent eyes without acknowledging the mad desire to bring about a sudden thaw.

The women of Gardar were no exception to this rule. Even Thorvald's aunt, doing the honors of hostess, donned a white kirtle and, ignoring her forty years and cherished widowhood, summoned every feminine artifice to the winning of something beyond courtesy from the handsome visitor. But Leif was a sad disappointment to the fluttering ladies. Consequently, when they had retired to their own quarters they pronounced him to be a proud bigot, minus heart and passion and intelligent discernment.

Meanwhile, all unaware of the tempest he had caused in the bower, Leif was diplomatically steering the conversation into the desired channels. But in spite of his affability and outward calm, he was indignant at heart. The very feast set out in his honor had offended him. It spoke so eloquently of Thorvald's colossal selfishness. While Eric's stores were being reduced to dangerous limits, Thorvald made certain of his own comfort! It was evident that beggars did not make a habit of trekking to Gardar, nor the master trouble himself about the poor wretches beyond his estate. That Thorvald was both avid of praise and greedy of riches was indubitably clear.

This conviction fired Leif to a new purpose. The sight of a Norseman with the soul of a miser and the greed of a vain woman made him conceive the idea of converting his visit into one of trade as well as diplomacy. He introduced the innocent topic of the weather; how its inclemency was obviously breaking and what a rich haul he might expect at his whaling firth providing he had time to pursue the industry.

“Providing?” Thorvald gasped at the monstrous thought of doubt in the matter, “surely thou art not serious? I have heard now . . . that is,” amended the crafty lord, already nibbling at the bait dangled before him, “if the risk does not appeal to thee why not sell the firth?”

“I have considered it,” said Leif, “but ’tis a rich holding and one I dislike losing. Better to have it lie fallow than that.”

Thorvald parried no longer, but made an outright offer for the firth, and after a very little parley the matter was settled entirely to his satisfaction, as Leif desired it to be.

To celebrate a good bargain Thorvald called for a fresh bowl of ale and over the enheartening brew waxed exceedingly merry. This mellowness so loosed his tongue and reduced his dread of the proud old lord of Brattalid that he burst out in voluble praise of the House of Eric.

“Magnificent race! Magnificent warriors! Magnificent women!” he chanted, alcoholic tears in his narrow slits of eyes. “Magnificent women, my dear lord, magnificent! What a family! What peerless families—Thorvald’s and Eric’s!”

This unprecedented brilliance startling him into profounder speculation, he bounded up, drinking-horn suspended in mid-air, a bleary smile covering his heavy-jowled face, and burst into bold eloquence.

“By the all-seeing eye of Odin! What a magnificent union! The house of Eric and the house of Thorvald! The great with the great, to the everlasting glory of our commonwealth!”

“Thou sayest well,” Leif forced himself to agree, though his fingers itched to choke the muddled braggart. “Yet, to wed a daughter of Eric is no trivial ambition. The blood of kings is never lightly given.”

This did not fail in its desired effect. Thorvald began a heated delineation of his honorable descent; of his vast means and his secret passion for the daughter of Eric. Long had he been looking about for a suitable bride, and none but the imperious Freydis so much as tickled his

fancy! He was determined to lose no time in suing for the lovely lady, but would at once accompany Leif to Brattalid.

Leif had now accomplished his mission; yet, with admirable tact and, it must be confessed, not a little secret amusement, he advised the eager lover to refrain from unseemly haste; to send an envoy in the usual fashion, and thus avoid offending the dignity of Eric. Infatuated and absorbed with his dream, Thorvald would listen to no delay, but agreed, nonetheless, to the feasibility of employing a messenger. So it came to pass that Leif enjoyed the mixed pleasure of seeing Thorvald's steward, twenty fighting men, and several slaves bearing gifts, set out for Brattalid before his own farewells were concluded.

At last even the tiresome business of responding gallantly to the persistent goodwill of the ladies came to an end and he was free to pursue his destined way. And now his course wound through a barren wilderness, wind-swept and glacier-infested, unexplored and dangerous; but Leif forged on, impatient and eager. His objective was Herjolfsnes, that vast estate bordering the distant sea, where Bjarni, the erstwhile adventurer, now led a prosaic and peaceful life. Hope, like a bright star, went on before him, and in his heart he was certain of success. What, then, was hardship? What cared he for the howling winds sweeping down from these hills of death? He was gone to barter for a stout-timbered ship—a ship of destiny wherein to sail the uncharted seas to the magic Kingdom of Norway!

CHAPTER III

Never did Norsemen sit down less willingly to a feast than Eric's people to the banquet prepared in honor of Freydis' betrothal. Not that this was noticeable to Thorvald's envoy, or to his warriors happily devouring the last of Eric's smoked meats, precious corn and treasured ale. No, indeed! They were unanimous in the opinion that never had a more jovial host urged the pleasures of the table upon his guests; nor was there fault to be found in the lady's behavior. Thorhild's smiling countenance gave no hint that she counted each joint of mutton brought steaming from the cookhouse, and, for the first time in life, rued the capacity of Norse stomachs.

The skald commissioned by Eric to write the betrothal song quite surpassed himself, and wove such a web of perfection about the glowing Freydis that Thorvald's ale-muddled retainers were ready then and there to perish to a man in defence of so rare a jewel. But then, it must be owned, she seemed a queenly creature when, with rustle of flowing robes and glittering ornaments, she stepped forward to acknowledge the groom's gifts and, incidentally, to accept his suit with all that it implied. What she thought as she listened to the reading of the marriage agreement would be difficult to guess. But Thorhild remarked later that she had exhibited no daughterly concern over the prospect of leaving her father's house forever.

When the final settlements were made Eric saw his guests depart with a quiet heart. He had done his duty; he had done it nobly; that knowledge would sustain him through the dreary days ahead. No such gratifying thought consoled his people. Gloom, impenetrable as the Arctic mists, descended upon the household. Servants grumbled and not a thrall but believed his days numbered. Even the high-hearted Thorhild was at length reduced to tears and the melancholy pastime of reviewing her many misfortunes—misfortunes occasioned, every one, by her lord's hasty quarrels and execrable temper. She wept disconsolately at the memory of the rich Iceland Estate which she had brought her Eric only to have him lose it through one of his senseless feuds. Unavoidable misfortune she felt she could have endured bravely, but all of Eric's misfortunes were self-created. This present galling humiliation, for instance, was it not the result of the conquest of a country better left to seals and savages? And to what lengths had a man not gone when he needs must carve out a kingdom amidst such desolations?

Thorstein endeavored to enhearten her by the ingenuous masculine fallacy of discounting her fears. He pointed out that all was by no means

lost; that Leif's prolonged absence argued some hopeful venture, and that the continued moderation of the weather was in itself a life-giving promise. But Thorhild refused to be either comforted or convinced. She knew that the thaw would end in another killing siege of frost. As for Leif, he was most likely lying dead at the bottom of some icy chasm; or, worse still, had fallen victim to the wretched savages who were known to threaten the Western Bays and to sweep down upon the unsuspecting fishermen like swarms of locusts.

Poor Thorstein had inherited all his mother's seriousness, but none of Eric's wit and fire. He was lost before this gloomy argument. True to his sex, he decided that wisdom prompted flight, and in feverish haste he began preparations for a hunting expedition to his own estate at Lysefiord.

Of all that large household Freydis alone was content, already dreaming her ambitious dream, reveling in the knowledge of Thorvald's possessions and her own broad acres. If Eric chose to beggar himself Brattalid must pass to others. . . This thought, more bitter than death to old Eric, stirred his daughter's heart to secret exultation.

Into this sinister atmosphere Leif burst, one grey and dismal morning, like a cyclone of living energy. He radiated enthusiasm. Every word, every gesture, every flash of his eye was intensified by the noble resolve which glowed like a steady fire in his heart. Old Eric listened in dizzy silence to that first joyous outpouring . . . the sound of the beloved voice was music to his old heart . . . the unrestrainable fervor recalled his own vanished youth. . .

"My son! my own dear son!" was wrung from him, as he fell into Leif's affectionate young arms. "Thou didst save thy foolish father's honor well," Eric growled when they were somewhat recovered of this emotional onslaught. "That monied braggart saw not how like a bag of grain he entered my reserves. Yet, by Thor's holy hammer, it goes ill with Eric so to bargain!"

"Think no more upon it, my lord," Leif returned passionately; "the honor of Eric's house shall endure as long as seas gird the land. But now is much to be done, for a great hope lies before us."

Then he told of his transaction at Gardar and how it had enabled him to purchase a seaworthy ship from Bjarni Herjulfson.

"So thou, too, art beggared," Eric muttered heavily.

“Call me not beggared!” cried Leif with flashing eyes. “Now shall I ride the sea to honor and to glory. For one mere firth hold I this ship, the *Silver Dragon*; corn and meat to satisfy thirty sailors for many moons, and somewhat besides to barter—skins and Greenland frieze and women’s trinkets. . . Think no more of ill-fortunes, my father; thou didst first of men traverse the frozen seas to Greenland. Thy spirit in me shall again be first to sail the uncharted seas from Greenland to Norway.”

“But thou must follow the known route to Iceland,” said Eric, anxious for this son who was never anxious for himself.

“Such is not my plan,” Leif told him quietly.

“Leif, I entreat thee, be not ruled by rashness like thy father. Rashness! Ever was the word synonymous with Eric Red!”

“Rashness is but a fool’s interpretation of courage,” his son assured him. “Rashness led thee to Greenland and freedom; rashness shall lead me to King Olaf and plenty!”

After that none dared argue the matter. Leif had not only proved his sonship to the adventurous Eric, but had in addition a calm, cliff-like strength against which dissension and dispute thundered in vain. He was certain of his duty, sure of his purpose; nothing short of death might stop him! This unfalterable certainty and shining purpose enabled him to fire despondent hearts with some of his rare enthusiasm and faith in a seemingly impossible venture.

While waiting for a navigable sea every possible preparation was being made for the voyage. Slaves were busy from dawn till dusk making oilskin bags and kits into which provisions and stores were packed. Others fashioned ropes, extra oars, sails, and pitch for the long journey. The women assiduously plied the looms, weaving cloaks and covers; old men polished long disused armor and whetted the edge of many a battle-axe—for none knew whether these men rode to fame and fortune or to death. Lastly, the great ship itself underwent an entire rejuvenation until she shone and quivered at her moorings like a gigantic silver bird poised and eager for flight. She was a remarkably graceful craft; not quite as slender as a ship intended entirely for warfare, but—a goodly combination—deep of hold, with beautiful lines terminating in exactly the same way fore and aft. Her prow was graced with a magnificent dragon’s head, her stern decorated with an ornate tail. The foredeck was left unsheltered, but the poop or stern-deck was covered with a canopy of tanned skins, painted a gleaming white, and bordered with that shade of blue so favored by Eric’s house.

When all was completed, every forethought taken against threatening danger, whether of weather or marauding pirate, the beautiful ship turned her proud head to sea, unfurled her square, red sail, flying Eric's crest—The Holy Hammer of Thor—together with its raven ensign, and, leaving a heartsick people behind, entered upon her undying glory.

CHAPTER IV

Leif had neither compass nor astronomical instruments, nor any other nautical appliance wherewith to ascertain his position at sea. He set forth upon an incredible venture with no actual knowledge of the seas he meant to conquer, and only a certain vague information to guide him. He knew, for example, that the color of the sea varied in one region and another—was now clear and deeply blue; now murky grey or a sickly green—and he appreciated the importance of observing all migratory birds. But for all that his safest aid reposed in the faithful North Star, in the endurance of his sailors, and in his own intrepid courage. Indeed, in the event of storm or long protracted fog, only a keen commander, with stout hearts and strong arms at the oars, ensured safety and ultimate success.

Leif's crew was wisely chosen, consisting of forty fighting seamen, the very flower of Eric's retainers, all trained to combat with equal fury the onslaughts of a raging sea or a devastating foe. They could swim like seals, fight like demons, and ply the oars with incredible grace and power.

For a time all went exceedingly well. Leif's robust sailors roared out their pleasure in rollicking song, lampooned each other in mischievous vein, and, off duty, lolled about the deck gambling away the riches they meant to acquire. One merry fellow went so far as to set at stake a bride yet to be wooed, and lost her to a burly comrade already burdened with a shrewish mistress.

That same night they met contrary winds, whereupon the lucky winner hazarded humorously that his stormy Greta was breathing him a blessing. But even the merriest sobered under the lashing gale which whirled them along in its evil embrace. Leif had hauled in the sail as soon as he recognized heralds of a coming gale in the huge billows which swept over the fore-part of the ship, beating against her bows with terrific impact like the driving of piles. Before the leathern canopy over the poop could be lowered, the rising tempest had ripped it asunder and the huge hides beat and roared in the faces of the struggling seamen, threatening to sweep them into the angry, swirling sea. No sooner had this menace been cut away than the hold of the ship, entirely unprotected from the elements, was found to be fast filling with water.

Then began the grimmest of struggles. While the twenty-eight oarsmen, fourteen on a side, strained and struggled to keep the valiant ship nosing the mad sea, the remainder of the crew took turns in the back-breaking toil of

balancing out the deep hold. Nor did Leif evade this, the most difficult of labors, but kept two men busy emptying the buckets he so ceaselessly heaved up out of that yawning black hole where he stood rooted waist-high in the icy water.

Day and night the gale continued to rage until it seemed to the hungry, tempest-hounded men that they had passed into an eternity of toilsome hells whence there was no escaping. Yet they fought on, scarcely conscious at last of the very toil which preserved them; silent, grim, dogged; taunted by death at every turn, but driven harder by the insistent, brutal energies of life.

Finally, when the point of utter exhaustion and listless indifference was reached, when the rowers hung across their oars like sodden bags of meal, their purple, bloated hands seemingly glued to the wood by the blood oozing from bruised and torn fingers, the fury of the gale abated and, presently, like an uncertain ghost, the battered ship lurched into calmer waters.

Hour upon hour they drifted, these storm-tossed mariners, more dead than alive; caring nothing whither they were faring, dumbly grateful for this sudden peace wheresoever it might lead them. But, just as the great red sun was sliding into the blue embrace of ocean, Leif sighted a dark speck to the southeast. Hope, leaping into life rekindled his flagging energies, but he checked the cry of joy upon his lips, waiting for certainty before disturbing the terrible calm of his drifting ship. Only when a dozen flaming points of light proclaimed this broadening speck on the horizon as the indubitable haunts of man did Leif rouse his weary companions with the glad cry, "Ho! my lads, mark the favor of Thor! Land lies ahead!"

This land which loomed ahead with all the charms of a sunset-enfolded Gimli, bringing new lease of life to the exhausted mariners, was an island in the outer Hebrides. A rugged, picturesque spot was this solitary island, and by virtue of its isolation, its precipitous cliffs and bold promontories, it had been chosen by Rafn, a Norse chieftain, for his fortress home.

Rafn had need of such sure refuge; himself a political exile from Norway, he was continually at war with the petty chieftains of the surrounding isles, and was, besides, constantly threatened by the hordes of Norse pirates which still harassed these coasts. Nor was he less a prey for his marauding countrymen when it became known that he had foresworn the ancient gods in favor of some strange new religion. On the other hand, his apostasy led to an alliance with several other Christian chiefs, whereby his safety was rendered somewhat more certain.

On this particular day Rafn's household was all *en fête*. The long-fires burned in the banquet hall, filling it with cheerful warmth and comfort. In the courtyard huge bonfires were kept crackling merrily by swarms of lusty children, and along the shore at stated intervals pyramidal beacons roared their ruddy welcome.

In the cookhouse and adjacent distillery all was hustle and bustle and noisy goodwill. Deep-bosomed women with strong red arms kneaded coarse cakes of bread, pounded curds, and cuffed indiscriminately the ears of prying little ones. Old men and half-grown boys turned great cuts of beef and deer and mutton on giant spits, and, despite the chief cook's warning, stole juicy bits from time to time. But no misdemeanor detracted from the general merriment, for this feast under preparation was to celebrate no ordinary occasion, but was, in fact, to commemorate that oldest truism, "*Audaces fortuna juvat*"—a truth acceptable enough to stout Norse hearts. And as the spoils of victory were both valuable and varied, the chieftain himself had ridden off in fine fettle to summon the clan, leaving his motherless daughter to superintend the final preparations.

The lady Thorgunna was the acknowledged beauty of the Hebrides; but her charms were of that rare quality which defy description. To one it seemed her graciousness, to another her glorious coloring, and to yet the third it was no more than the cold perfection of a proud sibyl to which she owed her fame. By which it may be safely concluded that the lady was at least different—was not of the usual Norse type—a vagary not entirely in her favor.

There was, naturally, a potent reason for this irregularity, but a reason which her newly converted clan thought best to ignore. Consequently, this slender Venus of the Isles, whose rich young blood danced beneath a satin skin white enough to please the most critical Norse fancy, yet curiously tinged with blue like the frailest china, was given the ponderous name of Thorgunna and forbidden to use the ridiculous appellation Carmona, which she herself preferred and had carried in childhood.

In much was she humored, but in this her excellent Christian parent remained firm; he refused to own a daughter so curiously named; he could not see her labelled like a certain amulet foolishly prized by Thorgunna. Nevertheless, to her old nurse, Elspeth, she remained Carmona, and in her secret heart Thorgunna preferred it to any other title. She should have been named less harshly; there was a witchery in her moods ill-befitting a namesake of Thor.

Variableness was undoubtedly Thorgunna's chief attraction, for with her it was the unconscious variableness of the sea's own self, now flaming and vivid, now silvery solemn and still. So still she seemed at times, so chaste and marble-white, her dark curled lashes lying like a sleepy shadow on the sweetness of her cheeks, that it was difficult to believe her subject to mortal turbulence and passions. But again, roaming the hills she loved, the sunlight falling on the red-gold hair contrasting so strangely with the deep velvet of her eyes, there was discernible in her every agile movement a boundless energy and something of the easy strength of feline creatures.

Doubtless Thorgunna owed much of her unfailing charm to her eyes. Set rather widely apart, their color a dusky violet, they shone in the fair mask of her face, now pensive and serene, now flashing black and passionate. Her mouth was exquisite with its sweet upward curves and the full lower lip in itself a thing of beauty. And when she laughed, which was but rarely, the proud aloofness of her face melted into tender loveliness. In short, this daughter of the Hebrides was at once a potential Bacchante, voluptuous and eager, and a chaste, dreaming Persephone. Nor was she averse to dreaming, but spent, instead, many a peaceful hour in fanciful meditation. She was, moreover, credited with being unusually psychic and gifted with a vision other than that of the physical eyes alone.

But on this day in question the lady Thorgunna was strangely disturbed by a haunting vision. She had dreamed of Balder the Beautiful, the heathen god of light and love. He had risen from the dim curve of the sea, a glorified being, and had come toward her, swift and eager, over the blue-green waves. She had watched his progress in fascinated silence until she was drawn into his golden embrace, there to melt into suffocating raptures.

Sitting in her bower, having her hair brushed and bound with silver webs, gleaming with precious gems, Thorgunna now frowned at the memory. So disturbed was she, so fretted with the belief that this dream had a vital significance, that, her duties done, time wearied her and she grew impatient of the happy chatter round her.

When her elaborate toilet was completed Thorgunna amazed her two young maids by saying she felt stifled for want of fresh air and restful quiet. And, ignoring their crestfallen attitude, she commanded them to find cloaks and to follow her to the sea.

CHAPTER V

Although it was growing dusk, Thorgunna persisted in following a narrow trail which, snake-like, wound in tortuous coils down the ragged hills to the level of the sea. Progress was both difficult and slow. Impeded at every step by rocks and tangled brushwood, the disgruntled maids lost patience with their lady and grumbled at her folly. What madness was this on her part to tempt the Powers of Darkness by such capers? Who ever heard of a lady's leaving the comforts and safety of her hall to scramble down a passage fit only for goats or trolls? Whatever was she thinking of to trail her fine robes over such a dreadful passage? If she was not tempting the Fates—well, then there were no Fates! They at least were certain that no good could come of such scandalous behavior.

Thorgunna paid no heed to their grumbling. She was not in the habit of sacrificing her desires for a mere scruple. Far below them she heard the sonorous booming of the great sea and the spasmodic spray of billows washing sharply against the rocks which jutted out from the gravelly shore. She loved the sound, and loved, too, the sea-washed coastline. Her main desire was to lose herself in that indefinable peace, compounded of majesty and mystery, which seemed the true atmosphere of that romantic shore.

However, peace was not to be Thorgunna's portion this night. No sooner was she seated on a sheltered, moss-hung ledge than all three women simultaneously sighted the *Silver Dragon* crawling into the harbor like some huge slow-moving centipede.

Some fifty yards down the shore blazed one of Rafn's beacons—a glowing welcome in honor of his expected guests. Thorgunna saw that the strange ship was making for this point. Her maids were terrified and begged their mistress to flee at once and to rouse the household. This was perhaps a pirate ship; her crew bloodthirsty heathens bent on mischief. Thorgunna laughed at them. "My foolish ones," she chided lightly, "see ye not that their steed limps? These are not victors, but victims!"

Fascinated, they watched the battered ship making shore; observing how uneven were her rowers' strokes, yet with what frenzied energy the makeshift oars beat the waters. At last the vessel's keel grated on the gravelly beach, and with a grinding moan, as of some dying creature, the storm-blown craft came to her well-earned rest.

What a shout was raised by her weary crew! Never a cry of victory like this! Life, victorious over Death, crying her eternal defiance to the forces of

destruction—this and a profound primitive joy rang in that cry. How shall their boundless delight in feeling again the firm, friendly earth beneath their cramped feet be adequately described? Not a man among them but blessed this unknown land. Like lions loosed from long captivity they roared their relief, shook back their shaggy heads, stretched their tired, aching muscles, and, intoxicated with the mere pleasure of free movement, took such rocks and boulders as lined their way in flying joyous leaps.

Thus, a wild, hilarious company, they made for the welcoming fire, and only when their shouts and laughter gave way to a calmer delight in the comforts of cheerful warmth did Thorgunna spy the solitary figure of Leif slowly following his sailors. When he drew into the ring of light flung by the blazing beacon, her heart seemed to cease its beating. She grew faint; a curious trembling laid hold of her, and a premonition of an inevitable fate filled her with momentary terror.

On sighting land the daring warriors had immediately donned their war-gear, for none knew what their welcome might be. And now, when the red glare fell full upon Leif's bronze armor, which fitted his magnificent figure like a facile mould and reflected the light in rippling undulations, Thorgunna recognized him as the Balder of her dream. This was the lord of her destiny come to her out of the sea!

Thorgunna shook off her weakness and, fully determined as to her course, stepped down from her hidden shelter. "If courage be lacking," she said to the quaking maids, "get ye off to the hall and say that a party of guests is already come. I go to offer these men the hospitality of my lord, for unless my eyes fail me they have fared ill of late."

Her companions tried to dissuade her. They shuddered for her safety. She might be borne off the gods only knew whither, for who could say that these men had not a second vessel concealed somewhere? She would certainly be robbed of her jewels; and small wonder, for they were in themselves an incentive to crime.

There was much truth in this. The lady Thorgunna was famed far beyond her island home, not alone for her beauty, but more, perhaps, for her matchless gems and unrivaled wardrobe. A tantalizing mystery enhanced these possessions with an added lustre. It was generally conceded—in whispers, one may be sure—that they had been amassed by the Rafn family in a manner which their new Christianity might not openly condone.

In fact it was common history that a former Rafn, nicknamed "The Fiery," had followed the precedent of adventurous forebears to the extent of

conducting a protracted Viking cruise. That had been almost a century ago; and that fiery Viking was gone now to his Valhalla some forty peaceful years. Yet his exploits were still the subject beloved of budding scalds and romantic ladies. And it had been a bold adventure, gloriously foolhardy and successful past belief.

Down from the north the fiery marauder had swooped, a fierce, ravaging vulture, upon the dreaming shores of sunny Andalusia. Up and down that pleasant coast he had led his plundering pirates; from the Tagus to the Guadalquivir, and up that majestic river to far-famed Seville. Of the routed Moors the young Viking had spoken with rough affection. He had found them a worthy enemy! But the virtues of their country had pleased him even better, and when he returned to his brooding Northland no small booty was his. Linens and silks, strange foods and sparkling wines, silver and precious stones—all these were his, and a black-eyed, high-tempered daughter of Andalusia besides!

Rumor had it that for every chain of gold and precious gems clasped about her lovely neck the unwilling captor had given the enamoured Rafn a goodly scratch. Yet she had learned finally to love her redheaded Viking, and not him alone, but the grand and rugged scenery of his native land as well.

Six sons she had given him by way of atonement for those livid scratches, and if she had regrets at the close of life they were principally because she had been denied a daughter beautiful and amorous as the airs of her distant Andalusia; golden-red of hair like her adoring lord. So much had she grieved that her husband had consented to a strange whim; he had given her a carven ebony chest wherein the southern beauty had laid away all her personal adornments, fine linens and festal robes, to be kept until such a time as the house of Rafn should beget a daughter combining the grace of Andalusia with that of the imperial Norway. In this wise the lady Thorgunna had come into her enviable possessions, her whispering silks and glittering jewels, and, mayhap, her vagrant dreams.

Like her high-tempered grandmother, the lady Thorgunna was wilful, so now, ignoring the trembling fears of her maids, she bade them be off, and herself hurried toward the strange mariners.

A very queen of loveliness, she emerged from the shadows and, quite without fear, confronted the startled men. Transfixed, they gaped at her, in their amazement discrediting vision and senses. She had no eyes for them. She saw only their commander standing so tall and stately before the blazing fire.

As for Leif, every drop of his clean young blood leaped at the joy of her. Her beauty swept him like a flame burning away the dullness of the flesh, releasing the quick and fervent intensity which slumbered within. The magic of her eyes quite dazzled him. He drank in this loveliness hungrily, dimly aware of his rudeness, but fearing the more to break the curious spell which bound him. He had never seen her like before; he would never see her like again. Terrible thought, engendering madness! He was conscious of an insane desire to bear her off—anywhere, any place—out upon that friendly sea which had cast him at her feet! Madness, perhaps, but Leif knew that in all the world there was none else so to stir him!

One breathless moment they gazed at each other, the cold blue eyes of Norway tempered to quick intensity by the alluring depths of velvet-eyed Andalusia. Then, “By the gods of my fathers,” thought Leif, “now do I swear never more to look upon women!”

Thorgunna was first to recover, and, dropping her dark-fringed lashes to hide the pleased smile in her eyes—for well had she read his admiration—she bade him welcome in her firm, clear voice.

Leif collected himself with what grace he could and, hurrying forward, replied with becoming dignity: “Lady, we are come to crave the hospitality of thy country. The fates have made sport of us of late.”

“Thou art come at a happy time,” Thorgunna assured him graciously. “My noble father, Ragn of the Hebrides, banquets his friends in honor of a great victory over the heathen chiefs to the north. I welcome thee, mariner, in the name of the one God and Christ our Lord.”

Leif was quick-witted. Here was a powerful lady whose aid was most desirable, while his needs were overwhelmingly many. Whatever gods her people worshipped he must seem to honor. Diplomatically he responded: “To thy God be honor, my lady, and to thyself the grateful thanks of Leif Ericson of Greenland. We are bound for Norway and the court of King Olaf. Whither we are come we have no means of telling.”

Thorgunna’s eyes sparkled with eagerness and her delicious laughter broke the restraint between them. “My lord, cease from polite excuses. Even in the Hebrides men are familiar with the daring exploits of Eric Red. I but voice the certain sentiments of my father when saying that a greater honor hath not befallen our house than to receive the son of Eric as a guest.”

“Thou art goodness incarnate,” Leif returned. Then, with a rueful glance at his companions, he added: “But I fear we are a shabby company to join a nobleman’s banquet.”

“Fie, my lord! Thou hast but a poor opinion of our stores, and worse of our hospitality,” she retorted merrily, and with the friendliest gesture summoned him to her side. “We have tarried long enough with our foolish courtesies,” she resumed; “be comforted to know that my maids have already gone to make preparation for thee and thy worthy followers. Let us hasten, then, lest my lord have arrived and be fretted over my absence.”

They needs must obey her at that. Beautiful and gay, she led them up the rocky pathway whence she had descended upon them like some gleaming goddess of the night. In silent adoration Leif’s burly sailors watched her, still doubtful that this was not all a dream. While at her side Leif rejoiced the more to find her witty and wise as well as beautiful.

Thorgunna’s flattery was undeniably charming. “Tell me, is it true that thy honored sire traversed the very outermost seas?” she inquired with sweet naivete.

“The outermost of known seas, at least,” Leif replied seriously. “But of exploration there can be no end; the purpose of life must be a ceaseless quest of something. . . .”

For no accountable reason Thorgunna shivered. “’Tis true,” she agreed faintly, “the horizon hath a charm greater than the shore; but see, yonder burn the lights of home. Thou wilt be glad of homely comforts this once in place of high adventure.”

“Aye, glad my lady, and most grateful,” he replied. And to himself he added, “But not so sure that this be not an highly dangerous adventure.”

CHAPTER VI

Leif was to find his host both jovial and generous, prodigally unsparing in entertainment and comforts for his guests. He was a typical Norse chieftain, proud, domineering, yet big-hearted withal. But, having all his life lived amidst constant dangers, he was grown callous to suffering whether inflicted upon others or himself, and could be in the same hour both cruel and kind. His emotional nature was quickly roused to hatred when pride was wounded; his generosity unbounded when an appeal flattered his vanity.

In appearance Rafn was dignified when on horseback or riding the deck of his warship, but on foot he seemed too short in the legs and inclined to waddle. He was sandy-complexioned and tanned to copper; wore his red beard cut square like a bushy bib; and, from long years of bellowing on shipboard, his voice was become both hoarse and harsh.

Notwithstanding these crudities Rafn was a man to command respect and obedience. His interests were not all in wars. He was fond of song and story, and of all his retinue none was more honored than his skald. He was eager for news of the world and to know how men elsewhere proposed to introduce peace and the arts of peace.

Leif respected the burly old chieftain, and by a courteous deference to his opinions entrenched himself for all time in his host's good graces. As a matter of fact, Rafn felt himself to have been unusually favored of the fates when they drove this entertaining son of Eric Red to his shores.

But though Leif talked well and responded courteously to every inquiry—and of curiosity there seemed no end—his eyes kept roving to Thorgunna's canopied seat, where she shone like a royal flower amidst her laughing companions. And so often as his wandered so often did they encounter hers on a like errand. It left him a little dazed; the wine of her beauty affected him more strangely than her father's free-flowing ale. And it angered him. It was contrary to all worthy precedent that a Norseman, nobly born, should be ravished by charms to which he had no right.

Thereafter Leif embraced every opportunity to avoid the beautiful Thorgunna. He rode about the island with her father, showing the liveliest interest in the sheep and goats and cattle; creatures he had scarcely noticed before.

He flattered Rafn for his acumen in maintaining an economic independence for his people by encouraging so many homely industries. He

swore that the good wives of the island produced better babies and stronger linens than he had ever seen, and consequently was pronounced a delightful and discerning man.

Leif was much entertained as well, but his forced gaiety left him each day a little more weary of it all; and the desire to see Thorgunna increased despite every effort to quell it. And then Fate, who delights to make mock of human conventions, took a hand in the game.

Rafn received an urgent message from an only niece and erstwhile ward. This wilful lady desired him to know that unless he could induce her lord to refrain from kissing every female his roving eye encountered, she would pack her belongings and return to her devoted uncle. Whereat the uncle swore rudely and with considerable heat assured the world at large that he had no intention of letting a passion for serving-wenchs upset the shining peace of his household. Never, if human might could prevent, should that shewolf, his niece, take up abode where he dwelt.

Rafn raged at the unreasonableness of females in general. There was no pleasing the hussies. Mischievous was their element, and their one ambition was to make man miserable. He called upon Michael, wisest of angels, to prove whether or not he spoke truth. Had he not been hounded beyond human endurance to find this niece a loving husband? And now his gentle, loving nature offended her! He raged no less at the thought of leaving his distinguished guest to the doubtful entertainment of his women-folk and house-karls; but at length he admitted that, since no alternative was offered, he might as well go and be done with a disagreeable business. In leaving he was compelled to take along the better part of his warriors, for his way led past many an unfriendly isle where vigilant enemies plotted his destruction.

Leif was ashamed of the eager excitement which swept him when the old chieftain took his departure. He felt that it savored too much of deceit. "It grieveth me, my lord, that the condition of my vessel and the journey before me forbids that I attend thee." Thus he spoke to rout the mockery in his heart.

"Out on thee!" shouted Rafn; "thinkest I would accept the sacrifice? Be assured it comforts me more to know thee here making safer the retreat of my little doves. Fail not to enliven their dullness. They grow weary enough with the young bloods away." With this jesting command Rafn sailed away, leaving to Leif the freedom of his entire estate and its boundless hospitality.

In the days that followed, while his men repaired and recaulked the *Silver Dragon*, Leif drifted into the habit of visiting the women's bower,

where the lady Thorgunna directed the labors of loom and wheel and dye-bath. She was not particularly fond of these occupations, thought so becoming to her sex, but was given to spurts of industry and exhibited a not unpardonable pride in the many beautiful designs she had evolved for the spinners' and weavers' art. But owing to her love of nature she much preferred the study of herbs and roots, and was an adept in their use for medicinal purposes. Beyond most noble women of her day she understood the simpler arts of healing, and was a sympathetic and intelligent dispenser of mercy.

Leif tried to delude himself that the sunny bower with its light, irrelevant chatter, its gaily dressed women all smilingly occupied at their graceful tasks, was what charmed him with its homely appeal. But his heart was wiser. He could not keep away. Thorgunna drew him as naturally as the magnet draws the steel, and with no more artifice, for she was as frightened of her emotions as he was amazed at his growing love. They were both a little helpless, indeed quite without precedent to guide them; for love played a minor role in Norse unions and was not looked upon with favor. Indeed, to be the object of a man's infatuation was considered a disgrace and an affront the family might punish as it deemed fit.

But in Leif was foreshadowed a new type. Meditation charmed him as much as action, and he preferred the solution of a mystery to the forcing of an issue. Where his forefathers had wanted to seek and to conquer, Leif wanted to understand, to measure and to weigh. So now this strange emotion, playing such havoc with his peace of mind, was first of all a curiosity whose caprice he must follow. Thus perhaps the first Norseman to sail a slim keel into unsounded waters considered—and was shipwrecked.

Thorgunna appeared serene enough. She moved about her tasks in a manner graceful and dignified; quite the reserved Norse lady, but careful to veil the splendor of her eyes. It was as well it was so, for in truth she moved in a breathless world, tense and troubled like the sea before a storm. And deep in her heart something as old as the sunlit moors of ancient Andalusia clamored joyously awaiting its release.

CHAPTER VII

Thus were these two caught in the shining web of their love and wholly unable to escape. But when the sweet confusion of this sudden infatuation subsided, Thorgunna wakened to the dangers of their situation. She reflected that women, everywhere, have a subtle gift for prying out the secrets of the heart—serving-women no less than others—and that gossip might be made a formidable weapon in the hands of the malicious. Moreover, she knew that on an estate such as her father's there were those who, eager for self-aggrandizement, stood ready to take advantage of another's folly. Leif could not have escaped the common fate of favorites; many a jealous eye was fixed upon him, and she trembled lest he should betray by word or deed a sentiment liable to be misconstrued and used against him.

Anxious for his safety rather than her own, Thorgunna had recourse to a practice no less dangerous. To get Leif away from the sharp eyes of her women she proposed a reckless frolic. She proposed, herself, to show him over the many beauty spots of the estate, the heaths, tarns, and the far secluded mountain lochs. Altogether delightful were these outings and the comradeship resulting therefrom; but quite possibly had Leif been less nobly born Elspeth, that loving old termagant and Thorgunna's childhood nurse, would never have countenanced such unbecoming conduct.

As it was she scolded and grumbled and wrung her hands in dismay when, one cloudless morning, Thorgunna suggested that a trip to the bird isles would be especially interesting at this time of year. Thorgunna laughed at the old woman, teased her prettily, and with a kiss sent her packing to order the boat.

Still, when old Elspeth had hobbled off to do her bidding Thorgunna suffered a panicky moment. There was a look in Leif's eyes which shattered her assurance. . . . It was a mad thing to do. . . . Nervously she sought to excuse herself. The maids of Greenland would relish a description of her pavilion, pitched a thousand feet above the thundrous sea, and of the thousands of birds inhabiting the isles.

Leif shrugged his shoulders and smiled mischievously at her as he returned, "So thou wouldst make of me a skald for the maids of Greenland? Truth, it were more agreeable to be my lady Thorgunna's boatswain!"

"Thou shalt be my thrall this day, never fear! 'Tis a heavy sea to the isles. But know, my merry wit, that there is a prudence in my mind. As thou mayest comprehend, the time draws near for gathering the eiderdown. In

making this early visit I shall know the better how many maids to send to the picking.”

“Thy reasons are admirable, my lady, but I would they were—less so!”

“Ah, me,” she reproached him gaily, “’tis ever the lot of women to be ridiculed when they are most serious. But is not that Elspeth waving yonder?”

It was indeed, and she wished them a safe journey, though she doubted not that such madness were flying in the face of Providence.

“Elspeth, wilt come with us, my jealous one? The sea hath a croon to it like thy dear old voice,” Thorgunna teased her, knowing how she hated the water.

“Nay, God forbid! Were I worth my salt ’tis thee I should hinder as well. But alas! my days are done.”

“Poor Elspeth, she hath a tender conscience and a wilful charge to account for,” Thorgunna laughed merrily, and busied herself with a silken veil to confine her glorious hair.

“And wisdom no less,” said Leif wickedly, bowing to the wrinkled crone; “wise is he who knoweth when to bide at home, nor seeketh unnecessary dangers—’tis all in the High Ode of the Sibyl.”

“A penguin for your Sibyl!” snapped Elspeth. “Be off, then, and make haste with this caper. Were my lord to come and find ye gone ’tis my bones would pay the penalty.”

With this gloomy prediction dinning in their ears, the young people hurried to the beach, where Thorgunna’s little pleasure boat rocked in the gentle swell.

A smiling day was this. The sea lay before them arched in serpentine billows, grey and cobalt and amethyst, a shining causeway stretching into infinity. And so these two immortal lovers flung prudence to the winds, and, fleeing from prying eyes, slipped away into the freedom of the sea’s eternal lawlessness.

Strangely tranquil was that majestic sea, lazily sunning itself under a blue sky like some amorous creature wearied of past turbulence and eager for peace. The steady booming of its waves breaking on the receding strand made a pleasant sound, half murmur and half chant. Here and there huge rocks stood revealed like grinning monsters when the swell rolled back, and

on these black and evil jetties the waters leaped and danced in ever-changing rainbow effects.

Leif sent the little craft along like a skimming seabird, his heart as light as the pleasant task, his eyes seldom leaving the lovely face before him. Thorgunna kept silent until the fullness of her heart became unbearable. Then she sang. And her songs were plaintive and haunting, such as Leif had never heard before.

“Thou hast captured the lilt of the thrush and singest a song foreign to these climes,” he hazarded.

Her eyes glowed. “Truth, these be foolish airs and mayhap displeasing to a warrior’s ears. They lack the vigor of the Norse chant.”

“Of chants I think but little,” he answered shortly, “but the thrush is beauty’s own priestess.”

“What a flatterer thou art, my lord! Most assuredly thou wilt be welcome at Olaf’s court.”

Leif frowned at this. “Would it were less distant, or my need less great! But to-day let us forget duty and the King.”

Thorgunna’s laughter rang out merrily. “Truth again! The noble King standeth in little need of vagrant loyalty. But poor Happiness hath ever a feeble reign and needeth advocates. Away with melancholy and the court of kings!”

A little later the approach to the isles was heralded by clamoring gulls and screeching terns.

“Oh, my beauties, what a noisy cloud of silver ye are!” Thorgunna exclaimed, in unfeigned delight over the birds. A seeming myriad, they whirled and darted, screaming their nervous cries; now circling the cliffs, their wings glinting in the sunlight; now swooping to the breast of the sea to flirt with the cool salt spray.

The passage in and out among the rocky islands was highly dangerous. The sea rolling in, mile upon mile, flung back upon itself, roared its defiance and returned to the attack with redoubled fury. In evil weather the raging spray was tossed in pillars skyward, completely obliterating the treacherous rocks, and even on a day such as this a fine white mist dazzled and blinded the eyes.

But to Leif, accustomed as he was to the angry Greenland seas, it seemed the rarest sport to flaunt these dazzling breakers, and ere long he had

gained the little tickle which led into a peaceful semi-circular haven—a blissful bay shut in by towering cliffs.

Thorgunna's pavilion was built on the highest of these cliffs. It was a huge tent, made of tanned hides, oiled and painted. Its furnishings were designed to accommodate the women whose duty it was to gather the valuable down from the eiders, whose nests were scattered by the thousands over the islands. Skins were strewn about the earthen floor for comfort, and broad, low benches invited rest. On a rude table stood a cruise for water and a wooden dipper. The dipper, as well as the cruise, were marked with a cross to insure safety against the evil spirits who delighted in poisoning drinking water.

Flat stones were laid all down the centre of the tent that fires might be kindled against cold, and for illumination by night. Along the walls were several chests containing blankets, rolls of coarse cotton, dried herbs against sudden illness, and many other suchlike necessities.

The tent faced the east and commanded a magnificent view of the lesser cliffs and the sea beyond. From this high vantage-place Leif and Thorgunna gazed down upon the cool mirror of the tiny bay. So clear, so still it was, that the shadow of a swooping wing looked black upon its bosom.

But now that they had reached their destination Thorgunna grew frightened and wished herself away. Not so Leif. He saw nothing to regret and much to be enjoyed. Stretched at her feet in lazy grace he smiled his pleasure; half quizzical, it is true, for he was reluctant to acknowledge as serious an attachment which must, at all events, end so shortly.

Thorgunna was lovely and gracious—but who was he to aspire to such loveliness? He, Leif Ericson, scion of a ruined house, with his world yet to conquer! There was time enough ahead for such morbid reflection; to-day he meant to live in the pleasures of the moment.

A pair of eagles sailed past them on golden wings and his eyes followed them admiringly. "What a throne thou hast, my Queen. Mayhap it marks the spot whence the gods looked down and found the earth and its dwellers delectable. See that proud fellow preening on yonder ledge near the water—a vain idolatrous courtier, and small wonder when he hath so fair a sovereign to adore."

"Fie! thou hast an oily tongue, my lord. 'Tis his own sweet reflection charms him. Forsooth hadst thou so green a habit, I fear me, vanity would have thee for its own, nor wisdom ever claim thee. 'Tis plain it's none too precious to thee now! Were I about to undertake a dangerous journey thou

wouldst find me more heedful of the truth,” she sighed prettily as she toyed with her silver chaplet.

“Truth?” he repeated mockingly, “truth? Why, never hath the virtue been dearer. ’Tis said the heart atrophieeth under a royal vesture. . . I doubt it not since thou art cruel enough to remind me of the emptiness ahead.”

“What folly to speak thus disparagingly of the court of our noble King. Yet I spoke in part seriously. Thou wilt not take it amiss. . . Oh, Leif, ’tis true . . . it affrighteth me—thy heathenism!”

It was out at last and she trembled for his anger; but instead he laughed at her—laughed at her with a caress in his eyes, for had she not betrayed herself adorably?

“Oh, Leif, it affrighteth me . . .” enheartening knowledge! Delightful tenderness!

Laughing still, he caught her little hand and pressed it to his heart. “Adorable one, mark how this heathen heart beats for thee.”

She snatched her hand away, swift anger tormenting her. What a fool she had been! Of course he made light of her. She had amused him with her reckless abandon. What Norseman could ever understand her? In that moment of wounded pride Thorgunna felt she hated that lovely forebear who had bestowed upon her the precious gift of swift raptures and tender sensibility.

“Thou forgettest I am a Christian,” she retorted her helplessness giving an edge to her voice: “a Christian, my lord, and therefore serious.”

Nothing daunted, Leif recovered the unfriendly hand again and kissed the tender little palm. “Thou art right,” he whispered. “I have forgotten all things . . . honor, wisdom, glory. All things but this—that thou art here and that I love thee. . .”

A frightened cry escaped Thorgunna and she jumped to her feet. . . “Oh, have a care, my lord, thy foolery passeth endurance. Let us away, I implore thee!”

Leif was at her side in an instant. Serious now, he barred her way. “My lady, whatever thine opinion of Leif Ericson, this at least thou must believe, his love is sincere; despise it if thou wilt, but know it to be true.”

It was too much; the hurt in his voice cut her to the quick. Repentant, she looked at him and in looking was lost.

“Oh, Leif,” she moaned, “’tis surely fate!”

“My beloved,” he assured her, “in all the world there is none like thee, none else so unutterably lovely; none other shall I love till I die!”

CHAPTER VIII

The passion of these lovers was no ordinary one. With all the fervor such deep and noble natures invariably possessed, they loved, and, admitting love, denied it nothing. Yet, notwithstanding their joy in each other, this happiness had its alloy. They had no penchant for clandestine pleasures; it was galling to their pride.

Thorgunna derived comfort from the belief that this was her fate. And why not? This was not the first time that those of her blood had snatched at love under difficulty. She understood now how the captive may come to love the captor. Leif, on the other hand, reviled himself bitterly. Not that he loved her less, but that his sense of honor accused him of having demeaned his love.

Such a mood was upon him one evening shortly after their visit to the bird isles. He had been going over the *Silver Dragon*—now almost ready for her sailing—and was pacing the strand in gloomy meditation. Here Thorgunna joined him. She had welcome news. A thrall had just arrived with a message from her father; he expected to be home in a day or two, and requested that, were the distinguished Leif not already gone, he do Rafn the honor of awaiting his arrival.

This added courtesy increased Leif's loathing of himself. He despised himself for having abused his host's honorable trust; hated himself thoroughly, and saw no way out of his dilemma. Thorgunna loved him the more for this display of honest feeling.

"My lord, temper thy judgment!" she entreated. "So great a love as ours could not have sprung from bickering and pride. The thought of being offered up in marriage like some choice merchandise hath ever offended my taste. Besides, we are Christians here and are come to know how fair a thing is affection."

"'Tis well thou hast a high heart, my beloved. Yet is my fault no less grievous for that. Nay, 'tis time I were at Olaf's court. Success or failure in that mission—this alone decideth our future. Failing the King's favor . . . there are darker alternatives! But, with Greenland's safety assured, my lord father would send an army if needs be to contract for so fair a daughter."

This thought was enheartening and Leif plunged with eagerness into the final preparations for the voyage. Then came Rafn, calling a halt to every activity. He had ten kegs of Celtic wine, two hinds, and a dozen spiced

cheeses—the wages of righteous judgment—and these his guests must sample. Not only Rafn, but all his kinsmen, must feast the adventurers, and fearing to offend so mighty a clan, Leif was forced to accept their lavish hospitality.

Thus were many days squandered, days of restless boredom to Leif except for the stolen moments with Thorgunna. But eventually the day dawned when the *Silver Dragon* was pronounced ready for her voyage and her crew sober enough to sail a straight course.

With the dreaded separation close upon her, Thorgunna grew panic-stricken. Moreover, these last days had revealed a new complication, and one of which Leif must be informed. Under the pretext of desiring to exchange eiderdown for Greenland frieze, Thorgunna contrived to get Leif away to the isles. But this time Elspeth was compelled to go along, despite her aversion for any body of water larger than a laundry pool. The whole thing was a trial to her. Added to her terror of the sea was an intuitive fear that all was not as it should be. She suspected Thorgunna's gaiety; doubted Leif's sincerity, and, in general, anticipated trouble. As a consequence she reached the isles in a state of peevish exhaustion and was glad enough to seek repose in Thorgunna's pavilion.

Meanwhile the lovers lived again the sweet raptures of that first island visit, forgetful for the moment of the world and its woes. This respite was all too short. A thousand fears dawned in Thorgunna's soul. With a sudden moaning cry she clung to Leif, her face as white as death and her eyes dark with suffering.

"Oh, my lord, leave me not, I beseech thee. Take me away with thee . . . it matters not whither. Take me away as Norsemen formerly took their loves whither they listed. Nothing affrighteth me; no hardship—nor death itself. Nothing but this separation!"

Leif kissed her troubled eyes and groaned in spirit. What she asked was impossible. Yet how often he had toyed with the thought. If only his life were his own! But the honor of Brattalid was at stake, nor was it possible to evade the obligation owing to the brave fellows who had risked life and happiness to follow him. "My heart's dearest, to bear thee away from thy honored rooftree, like a robber, were to set an imperishable disgrace upon thine house and name. Nay, ask it not of me, my lady."

A quiver passed through her slender body, but she lifted high her little golden head and met his eyes squarely. "Then must I tell thee, my lord, that not I alone will suffer in loneliness when thou art gone . . . but another!"

Leif blanched as her meaning grew clear. Joy, dismay, horror, these in turn tormented his spirit. "Ill have I kept the honor of mine house!" he groaned, "death were my just reward."

"Now thou seest I must away with thee," she pleaded.

But even in this emotional crisis Leif's ability to reason clearly did not desert him. Yet it only increased his misery, for he understood how heartless reason must seem at such a time, still, he realized that as things were, of two evils, the lesser must be chosen. In the Norse code the individual counted for less than the family. In an agony of remorse he caught Thorgunna to his breast.

"Think not too harshly of me, though my judgment seem cruel! What thinkest thou the result were I to bear thee off from thy powerful sire with an handful of sailors? Capture and dishonor for us; disgrace to the entire clan! Feuds and eternal enmity! This were the result. Nay, we it is who digressed from ways found good by our fathers, and we alone must suffer. When thy trial is at hand thou wilt find a means of escape. Cruel though it seems, an escape will be offered thee. . . . Then must thou come to Greenland, and there, my beloved, will I await thee; my lord father, also, as his honored daughter."

Thorgunna wept sorely with pity for her shattered dream. Just then her warm impulsive nature would have welcomed a rash devotion more than such clear judgment. Yet her faith was unshaken and with characteristic courage she controlled her grief. She even managed a smile, misty, sweet, and ineffably touching.

"Dear, my lord," she began, slowly choosing her words, "I who am utterly thine, heart and soul and body, I doubt not thy wisdom. As thou sayest, there will be opened up a way . . . 'tis certain . . . my heart tells me. Oh, Leif," she whispered, her cheek against his tortured heart, "this child will I love and cherish to be thy pride and honor; not thy reproach. Be then of good cheer, my lord, for my heart is reconciled to thy course."

There was nothing more to be said. Heart against heart they suffered in silence; he torn with pity, she more concerned for his safety than her own. But even this bitter sweetness was soon to end. Elspeth recalled them to the tyranny of commonplace things. They had tarried much too long as it was. If her lord were in a frenzy no doubt her old bones would pay the penalty. So she grumbled as she hobbled after them. But when she was safely settled in the little boat her old heart went out to them in pity and understanding. So clearly did she read their misery and suffer with them that for once the sea's

turbulence lost its terrors. God only knew where it would end, but at least she, Elspeth, daughter of an humble slave, would give her life if need be in the service of true love.

The following day, just before his departure, Leif managed to slip away to the bower for a last word with the woman he loved. She paled at sight of him, but otherwise gave no sign of what she felt. Quite calm, she dismissed her maids, and as calmly began to inquire into his needs and whether anything might be added for his comfort. But Leif swept aside this womanly forethought and, taking her in his arms, swore anew his eternal devotion.

“Thou art my one love, my inspiration, my very god,” he assured her.

“Say not so, my lord,” she implored in sweet confusion, laying her fingers gently on his profane lips. Then, taking a little cross from her bosom, she offered it to Leif. “My lord, thou knowest not as yet the message of this symbol, but none remaineth long in ignorance of it in good king Olaf’s court. Yet it seemeth more fitting that from me should come the first sign . . . from me who loveth thee over-well! Thou wilt think upon it when Olaf hath entranced thee; for something tells me that in Norway thou wilt find a love greater than mine. . .”

Leif thought little enough of the cross just then, but much of her tender concern. In turn he gave her a mantle of Greenland frieze, a belt of carved ivory, and the gold clasp he had been wont to wear on his shoulder-straps. “These intimate things I give thee, beloved, so that when thy dark hour dawns thou mayest set forth attired as Leif’s wife, honored and upheld. And now may the gods of my fathers prosper thee and bring thee to my bosom.”

Thorgunna clung to him and kissed him—kissed, too, the sacred cross she had given him. “Nay, my lord Leif,” she found strength to respond, “my God and thy God, may He attend thee, and may He suffer my gift to be a talisman in evil days. For it hath been said of me that my perceptions are not of the senses only . . . and it is in my heart that thou art appointed to great deeds.”

Somewhile later Thorgunna was standing alone, apart from the noisy crowd which thronged the beach to see the departure of the great ship. How proud it appeared, that silver ship! How eager for release! Through a mist of tears she watched the last scurrying activity of the sailors; then saw Leif take his place at the helm. A sudden lull—as on a hive settled in earnest—descended on the ship, revealing the rowers braced in their places, with the remainder of the crew crowded at the foredeck, their arms upraised in salute.

One fleeting moment the ship hovered in picturesque repose, her gleaming grace reflected in a cobalt sea. A sight resplendent—all poetry and romance!

A great shout from shore shattered the illusion. The *Silver Dragon* was waking to life; out from her shining sides the stout oars lifted, poised and fell, the familiar sound striking like a knell upon Thorgunna's sore young heart. Terrible faintness threatened her and she thought she must surely betray herself. Just then a fond though withered arm crept around her waist. "My little one, his eyes are upon thee." It was old Elspeth, and her words were well chosen. Thorgunna flashed to life. Snatching the light veil from her hair she ran to a nest of rocks high above the sea, and there like a shining goddess waved her sad farewell. Slim and beautiful, a brave smile on her lips, she watched the *Silver Dragon* fading into the distant blue.

CHAPTER IX

King Olaf had builded him a new city on the southern flanks of a mighty fiord—because it was the fairest fiord in all Norway—and with much ceremony and clanking of knightly arms had christened it Nidaros. Some were disposed to suspect the King's reasons, but at all events the fiord ran wide and deep, harboring with ease the King's vast fleet, and this, as none could deny, made the site a goodly one for a kingly residence.

Here the King had held court during the past season. Settling the disputes of his kingdom, punishing his enemies, planning new tithes—these kingly exercises had enlivened the winter's dullness; but with spring in the air the fever for conquest reawakened, and with all the reckless zeal characterizing early Christendom Olaf went out roaring for his Lord.

Yet for all that the court was plunged in dullness and spoiling for adventure, it was too early in the year for a lengthy cruise, and the King's presence these months past had reduced the immediate neighborhood to the calm dreariness of a sheepfold. Olaf might experience holy ecstasies over the fall of a dim old idol and the baptism of grimy peasants, but not so his warriors. They awaited impatiently an uprising amongst the nobles or a call to reinforce the power of the Cross with fire and sword.

Small wonder, then, that the sight of the *Silver Dragon* gliding into Nidaros Fiord caused a pleasant disturbance. Swarms of idlers crowded the shore, their curiosity somewhat dampened when it became apparent that no other ships followed, and that this solitary vessel could intend no mischief. Olaf's soldiers scattered the throng with shout and huzzas, and in all the importance of their royal regalia hailed the strange ship.

His message understood, Leif was permitted to land. And when it was known that he was an Iceland, seeking the King's service, his welcome was assured. Diplomacy more than goodwill induced this hospitality, for there was a royal agreement to the effect that "the sons of Iceland nobles might at any time approach the kingly favor, and, if so be it pleased His Majesty, were to be admitted into the Royal Guards; thereupon to be bound to their sovereign until such a time as it pleased His Majesty to grant them Royal release."

Naturally, then, when Leif had proven not only his nationality, but the honorable lineage of his family as well, he was eagerly received by the soldiery and with rough good will was escorted to their encampment, there to enjoy rest and refreshment before presenting himself before the King.

That night Leif donned his finest robes—blue velvet, gold encrusted, scarlet shoes with golden buckles, and a long cape, lined with seal, which partly hid his great sword, all jewel-decked—and with quiet assurance entered the King’s banquet hall. Looking about him with keen eyes and with calculated humility, he took a seat on an outer bench.

King Olaf was not slow to observe the striking guest. Curious and interested, he dispatched his page to inquire his name. On being informed that the stranger was Leif, Eric Red’s son, he commanded an instant audience. Olaf measured the young man bowing before him with shrewd, appreciative eyes. Well pleased, he murmured the formal response to a subject’s loyalty, and then in his native democratic fashion seated Leif at his side.

Olaf was eager for news and as full of questions as the Hebrideans. What adventures had befallen Leif? Why had he chosen to sail so rash a course, and what was his real errand to Norway? However, before Leif could answer the half of these enquiries, Olaf recalled his chief mission in life. What were the conditions in Greenland, and had the holy Christian faith been introduced into that far country?

Leif evaded the latter question, but explained in fervent eloquence the dire straits of his people and how it was his sole desire to establish a trading route between Norway and Greenland. For this had he risked his life and now offered his services to the King in hopes of winning the Royal favor.

“An arduous venture for the sake of an handful of heathen,” said Olaf shortly.

“But, Sire, if they be heathen, ’tis only because thy mighty voice hath not reached them.”

Olaf roared his delight at the flattering retort and slapped his royal thigh. “Fair words, Iclander! ’Tis plain the skaldic genius hath not suffered in yon Greenland wastes.”

Olaf, fascinated with the dream of adding that distant country to his holy conquests, decided at once to win Leif to the Blessed Standard. With this in mind he inquired adroitly whether Leif had any objection to joining his bodyguard for a season. With nothing to lose, and so much to be gained, Leif was prompt in accepting the offer and expressing his gratitude.

“Well, then, ’tis settled,” said Olaf complacently. With a silver rod he struck a sharp blow on the shield at his side, and having thus gained a modicum of silence, commanded his courtiers to attend his words.

“Men of Norway, be it known that one Leif Ericson, of Greenland, desireth to pledge allegiance to Norway’s crown.”

Then the King unsheathed his sword and, turning the scabbard backward, laid the weapon across his lap so that the hilt extended over the right knee. Leif, obeying the royal dictum, knelt at the king’s feet and placing his hand upon the hilt, pledged faith to his sovereign’s hand.

This done he rose and in ringing tones swore an oath of service to the Crown, and again dropped to his knees. Whereupon the King rose to his feet, pledging his Royal faith, favor and protection to his new man, and with a light tap of his sword on Leif’s shoulder, bade him arise.

This ceremony concluded, the royal page preceded Leif from table to table, announcing him to the Guard. As Leif approached each man in his turn stood up and with right hand uplifted pledged faith to the new comrade.

Late that night when Leif at last sought his welcome couch he was satisfied with the night’s events and, certain of success, fell asleep over the dreams of a grateful people and a Thorgunna restored.

CHAPTER X

The King developed a great liking for Leif Ericson, and in all his many excursions round about the country kept him ever at his side. And, hearing the fiery-tongued monarch preach the gospel with a zeal most surprising, Leif was soon converted. At first he was carried away by the King's fervor, captivated by his magnetic personality; but in time he became heartily convinced that a theory which so possessed a warrior-king must be essentially a sound one. Moreover, was not Thor a foreshadowing of the mighty Michael; and Balder, the God of Eternal Light a feeble prototype of the Divine Christ? So at least it appeared to Leif, and so it appeared to the most of Norsemen; nor were they encouraged by the Christian zealots to reflect otherwise, since it made the transference of fealty from the one religion to the other so much more acceptable.

Yet for all his zeal Olaf was not always successful in his missionary enterprises and was often forced to resort to strategy. Such was the case on one of his tours, through an isolated mountain district in the fall of the year, just before his retirement to Nidaros. Leif observed that the people heard their King with scant enthusiasm and with scowling brows, yet Olaf had never talked more forcibly.

The King was indignant at such loutish stupidity, but, hiding his discomfiture, he engaged in amiable conversation with a peasant at the close of the services, thinking to discover the true reason for this perverseness in an otherwise sensible people. He was constrained to merciful judgment when the dour mortal had delivered his halting and gloomy information.

Crops had failed in the two summers past; wolves had raided the mountain pastures; dogs had developed a singular madness, and children had died of a curious fever which turned their little bodies to livid hues. . . This and much more had fallen on the people since the pale Nazarene's standard had been drawing near. . . It was certain that the old gods were displeased at the turning away of the faithful. To appease their anger the people had been offering fine cheeses, fats and other suchlike delectable foods to Thor in his holy temple. Their offerings had been accepted; the foods had quickly vanished. And now, just when it seemed certain that they were again to enjoy Thor's saintly patronage, the King had plunged them into a new difficulty by compelling their attendance upon the dreaded Cross!

Olaf stroked his beard and tapped an impatient foot while listening to this revelation. But at its close he thumped the apostle of calamity on a

tattered shoulder and, smiling quizzically, exclaimed: "Is it so? Lead me thither that I may observe the miracle."

Vague hope stirred in the breast of the troubled peasant. Mayhap the tales of Olaf's unreasonableness were not all true. Mayhap he would depart after this reproof and leave his people to their faithful gods and the sure hope of renewed favor. Yet again, might not the wilful King be plotting mischief to the sacred shrine?

"But — — the — people — , Sire?" stammered the man.

"Out on thee, fellow! 'Tis for the people to know that Olaf wisheth to honor this temple."

Trembling with fear of the King and fear of the people, the affrighted wretch had no choice but to obey. His teeth chattering and with trembling limbs he pressed through the sullen crowd. Behind him rang the heavy steps of Olaf's armored guards, ready, he knew, to avenge any disrespect or disobedience to their king.

The temple was built on a leafy hillside just back of the plains where Olaf was encamped, and the shrine itself stood without the building. The distance was negligible, yet the King found haste impossible because of the throng, which, growling and muttering, dogged his steps and at intervals had to be forced back to a respectful distance by his guard. But at length he stood before the mighty Thor, who, hammer in hand, frowned down upon this upstart king.

Olaf was aware that his position was delicate; a single false move and his men would be plunged in war, and of war he had had enough for a season. The winter was at hand with its multitudinous problems and quarrels to decide. He was eager to avoid an uprising, yet determined to carry his point. In affected humility and silence he considered the giant statue. He saw that it was of ancient origin and falling to decay. The discovery was enheartening. Ignoring the sullen mob about him, he tapped the image sharply with his sword. Horror-stricken, the peasants hastened to make the sign of the holy hammer on their palpitating bosoms; but the King chuckled in his beard. He had heard a faint scampering within the hollow effigy; his suspicions verified, he addressed himself to the people.

"Good folk, 'tis time your judgment be evoked. On mine honor as king will I now prove the sham of this god ye worship, or, failing this, will forever leave ye to the peace of Thor."

An angry growl, like rolling thunder, was the only answer. But quick as a flash Olaf snatched a battle-axe from his bodyguard, and before the roar had died away levelled such a blow at the rotting image that it fell in fragments at his feet. Then a dreadful sight met the eyes of the horrified people. Out from the fallen effigy poured a stream of rats—brown rats, black rats, little rats, big rats, all visibly well-fed and sleek!

Olaf called for his cross. “Men of Norway,” he began, “ye have seen your gods, these revolting vermin, scatter before a blow directed by Olaf’s Christ. And now do I foretell a return of favor to your fields in proportion as ye wipe out the heathen evils amongst you.”

Following this an hundred people were baptized into the most holy faith. Well satisfied with his work, the king felt that he had earned the right to return to the pleasures of Nidaros and the smiles of his Queen. Whether the belief was justified or not, Leif for one agreed emphatically. He had his own particular reasons for wanting the king restored to a more calm and contemplative frame of mind. And the keepers of the now ruined temple, at any rate, were not loth to see the King’s company set out across the hills, their banners floating in the breeze and their lusty litanies disturbing the wonted serenity of the spot.

Once again Olaf had passed over the dales of his Norway like a brisk thunder-storm, leaving behind him an admixture of ruin and rekindled hopes.

CHAPTER XI

Leif had served the King faithfully and well throughout the fall and winter. Howsoever much his thoughts weighed upon him, he had not failed to take an active part in the royal entertainment. He had proven his sagacity and wit, his loyalty and courage. He had, alike successfully, defended his King in single combat and led an army in relief of a beleaguered town. And now spring was at hand, yet Olaf had not seen fit to mention the needs of Greenland.

Leif made up his mind to rouse the royal memory. He broached the subject that evening at meat. Olaf scowled at the thought of losing so capable an aid. "Thou art impatient, Iclander!"

"But, Sire, at home they wait upon my coming as the frozen earth waits the summer sun. Grant me leave, I pray, to trade in thy kingdom, for the time draweth near when I must away."

"Thou art a strange man, Leif; courageous, bold—a true Viking; yet with the soul of a seer and the head of a merchant. By my cross, a strange mixture! Well, trade if thou must, and go if thou must—will that suffice thee?"

"Nay, Sire, thou hast forgotten the main issue, the sole reason for my visit to these shores."

"Now, by the Holy Michael, thou showest impertinence! Thy true reason! To sit at meat with Norway's king; to enjoy his patronage and friendship—these be not sufficient reason?"

"Nay, Sire."

"Heart of God! out with it, then!"

"Sire, thou art informed of Greenland's need of dependable trade. To see it established I have renounced much and am ready to forfeit life if needs be."

The king considered Leif for a long moment, his eyes dark and brooding. "This frozen land, whither thy father fled from broils and feuds, what is it to thee? Here in Norway are fair fields and fairer women. What sayest thou to an estate and the King's niece to wife?"

Leif stiffened and his eyes grew hard.

“To test a subject’s nature is a King’s privilege, Sire, yet had I thought mine honor proven ere this.”

Olaf frowned, yet the answer pleased him. Then a profound sigh escaped his bearded lips. “Lucifer were less haughty, meseems. Well, the lot of kings consisteth in making friends only to lose them. Since thou hast so little love for Olaf and Olaf’s favors, be off about this trading. As for thy country—her prosperity is much to thee, and thou has served me selflessly. Yet it seemeth ill-befitting a Christian king to risk the lives of Christian subjects for the succoring of heathen.”

“Charity is the baptism of faith,” replied Leif.

“By my cross, thou art a priest as well!” barked the king derisively. “But ’tis fortunate thou hast so glib a tongue, for on one condition only will thy wish be granted. On thine oath thou shalt swear to introduce and protect the Christian faith in Greenland. What sayest thou?”

“’Tis thine to command, Sire.”

“H-m-m, and thine to obey—when it pleaseth thee,” laughed the king, now restored to good humor. “Be it so. Thou shalt win me this people’s souls, and mine be the duty to furnish them relief. One ship each season, without fail, shall carry to Greenland’s shores such commodities as thou deemest most essential and vital to prosperity.”

In thiswise was the vexed problem at last decided. Leif had finally succeeded. Soon the terrors haunting his people would be forever removed, and he himself free to pursue his heart’s desires. Such was his happy belief, and, uplifted by it, he plunged into preparations for the long delayed homeward journey.

CHAPTER XII

King Olaf in his *Long Serpent*, with a flotilla at his back, sailed down Nidaros Fiord. Like many-coloured wings the Royal banners floated in a stiff sea breeze, and, fairer than these, the white Cross of Christ waved above the heads of his soldiers. Beside the royal ship ran the *Silver Dragon*, gaily decorated and as proud a Norse ship as ever rode the waves.

At the mouth of the Fiord, with the sea before them in an endless field all amber and jade, Olaf gave command to strike sail. Here from the prows of the *Long Serpent* the pompous Bishop of Nidaros pronounced a blessing upon Leif and the priests he was bearing away to heathen Greenland. The blessed Cross should speed him, the Lord of Hosts confound his enemies, and the right powerful Michael withhold the fury of every monster by land and sea. Lastly, the good bishop assured his brethren in the Lord that for every soul wrested from demon-worship there would, at his blessed intercession, be added a golden feather to their heavenly wings.

Happily for the Bishop's peace of mind, the most of what he said was whirled aloft into the eternal silence of the stellar places, nor was endangered by contact with sacrilegious ears. Thanks to the moaning breeze, the flapping banners and the groaning gurgle of Olaf's priests, the departing crew—who, 'tis certain, prized earthly joys beyond any quantity of celestial feathers—were enabled to preserve a mien compatible with his lordship's dignity. When his powerful challenge to things indifferent and evil had been delivered in the teeth of a rising wind, the portly bishop made way for the king. Olaf was grown restive under the bishop's harangue. Cupping his hands for a trumpet he leaned far over his ship's flank and bellowed: "To the seven hells with speeches! God's favor attend thee, Leif Ericson. Keep to windward till ye pass Norn sherries. The devil take the wind! 'tis blowing up a gale. Hail, then, Iclander! Olaf bids thee a right fond farewell!"

Rough words, but from a great heart and true. Deeply stirred, Leif saluted his King and the glorified bishop. Then to the accompaniment of rousing cheers and the clashing of shields, the *Silver Dragon* unfurled her sail and, borne swiftly by the wind, leaped past the purple headlands into the freedom of the open seas.

The homeward voyage was for the most part uneventful, though not without its intermittent storms and squalls. What rendered it monotonous was the lack of that fascination which is the peculiar charm of the unknowable and unknown. The thrill of the last voyage was gone; Leif had

now some knowledge of his course, and his sailors, spoiling for adventure after a winter's idleness, would have found the weary weeks yet more irksome had it not been for the priests. These two unhappy mortals were the endless source of wicked amusement. They were hill-born and hill-bred and suffered in constant terror of the sea; terrors not to be mitigated by the tales told them. These calculated fabrications were peopled with torments and monsters not outshone by the hierarchy of hell, a circumstance which greatly detracted from the priestly ammunition and rendered them the more vulnerable. Yet, notwithstanding such lack of reverence, Leif's sailors were quick to render mercy when mercy was needed, and when in the midst of the voyage the poor clerics sickened of a fever, they did not lack for friendly care.

All in all the hardships of that passage were rigorous enough, and Leif had need of all his tenacity and cheerful wit to inspire his men and console the enfeebled priests. Often, as his ship sped westward, his thoughts fled to Thorgunna and his heart grew sick within him. What misery had befallen her? What trials of suffering? Horrible fears assailed him. The white hand of Christ might have saved her from death, but not from the fury of Norse pride wounded! Bitter were the thoughts which kept the watches of the night with him.

But once, while at the helm guiding his ship through a night all silver mist and beautiful, Leif recalled the sweet prayers of her heart. From beneath his armor he drew the little cross she had given him and which had never left his bosom. How much tenderness it recalled; what faith and fervor; what strength of heart and soul. Surely, clothed in such virtues, the shining emblem had become his talisman of luck. And musing thus Leif saw a vision: Far to the West, rising out of the sea, he saw the hills and valleys of a vast country. And the light of God came down upon it like a burst of summer rain. Clearer and clearer grew the vision; broader and broader that sweep of mighty land, until he seemed to be gazing into infinity.

Leif shook himself and humorously attributed the vision to an excess of mead. But as the days filed away the conviction grew upon him that Thorgunna's talisman had in some way been responsible for the dream. Then like a bolt from the blue came the recollection of strange lands sighted years ago by Bjarni, the merchant. Bjarni had been blown out of his course and had thrice seen land to Westward, but recognizing in none of them the topography of Greenland, which was then his objective, he had not troubled to touch shore.

“By the Holy Cross!” cried Leif, “’Twas no idle vision. Now do I know these lands to exist.” Then, with his hand on Thorgunna’s little cross, he pledged himself this wise: “For God and righteousness will I seek this land which hath been hid away for some high purpose.”

CHAPTER XIII

After Leif's departure life in Greenland resolved itself into a sort of passionless waiting upon the elements. They dared not hope and they dared not fear lest their wilful doubts should anger the gods and bring destruction upon the adventurer. Their immediate concern was the weather. One other such season of fearful inclemency as the summer past would mean death to many and suffering to all. On the other hand, if Fate were kind and the sea gave forth of its abundance, the little colony would be certain to survive. At all events the spectre of famine, with its train of ghostly fears, would be banished for the present.

To the inexplicable relief of the isolated people, the ice floes shifted—thrust into the uttermost Nifl-Heim by the stout arm of Thor—fishing was abundant, and in the fever of welcome activity, men forgot their hardships and suffering. But human hearts are as variable as the seasons. When the brief Arctic summer was at its close and the grey days of perpetual dusk and eternal silence loomed ahead with the relentless certainty of inescapable exile, spirits flagged and many began to wonder if it had not been wiser to have followed Leif, whether to death or to victory.

They fell prey at last to intermittent hopes and despair. Leif might not have reached Norwegian shores, or, granted that possibility, he might have won scant favor of the King. And, again, the magnificence and luxury of Olaf's court might have so enamoured Leif as to make him forgetful of his unhappy people.

One fact at least was incontestably clear; it was useless to expect him this late in the autumn. But then, had it not been madness to expect that the kingly favor were so easily won? What was an handful of doomed colonists to the great Olaf? Yet, notwithstanding such logical reasoning, the general depression was ample proof of the faith which had been reposed in Leif's mission.

This depression was, naturally, the more pronounced at Brattalid despite the old chieftain's courageous efforts to maintain an atmosphere of cheerful assurance. Fond though he was of ease—save where the noble occupation of war was concerned—Eric had that summer taken a vigorous part in the fishing, and later simulated the greatest interest in the drying and the packing of the product. And, strangely enough considering his former dislike of such menial labors, he it was who hit upon the excellent plan of pulverizing the sunbaked fishbones for winter fodder. If Norsemen were to

be reduced to a mermaid's diet, why not the cattle? Such was his laughing disparagement of an happy forethought. Moreover, having all his life been a creature of the sea, was it not fitting that the sea should nourish him? And was the whale less a whale for the little fishes he swallowed?

But howsoever Eric tried to cheer his household, their faces lengthened with the lengthening nights; their buoyancy fled with the fleeing sunlight; for Brattalid had not only lost its beloved Leif, but his bold companions as well.

Then came that unforgettable day when two of Eric's thralls, gathering driftwood, spied a strange ship making in at the fiord. Frantic with excitement, they cast aside their cumbersome bundles and rushed to the hall.

Their breathless incoherence angered Eric. "Idiots!" he roared, "what shades of past crimes have ye seen? Speak! Nay, hold your rascally tongues! Ships? ships? what say ye? One at a time—am I a thousand-eared Deity to hear all fools in a breath?"

"'Tis a ship, master, making in at the fiord!"

"THE ship, ye mean," said Eric, his old eyes flashing, his red head lifted high.

"Nay, dear master, 'tis not the *Dragon*. 'Tis a black ship with red ensigns."

"Fools! may not a ship be repainted? Quick, bring me my habit and saddle the horses. Erlind! Thorstein! Make ready! We must welcome the voyagers."

True enough, the ship just casting anchor was not the *Silver Dragon*, but when Eric recognized her commander his disappointment was transmuted to joy. It was none other than Thorbjorn of Iceland, a nobleman who had given sanctuary to Eric's family during the difficult time when the national Thing was deciding the Red Chieftain's fate. Nor had Thorbjorn been contented with defending Eric's wife and sons. He had foreseen the ultimate doom of his highhanded friend, and whilst the sages debated on the Mount of Laws, he had secretly transferred Eric's valuables, together with food and clothing, to his finest ship, hidden for that purpose in a tunneled inlet opening out upon the sea.

Eric was not the man to forget such favors. His joy was unfeigned and exuberant. Had he been Odin himself Thorbjorn could not have received a warmer welcome. But then, even discounting past favors, Thorbjorn was a man after Eric's own heart. He was a just and generous-hearted old

aristocrat, whose chief foible was an amusing tendency to recount his descent from good Queen Oud and Olaf The White of Dublin. Overly conscious of his royal blood, he must at all times dispense with a royal hand—an excess of generosity which had become his ruin.

To his friend he now confessed that fortune had gone much against him of late, and rather than live in diminished glory in Iceland he had decided to join the little colony founded by Eric.

“Too many have drunk my ale and munched my fatted beef to make a quiet retirement possible—and a Thorbjorn pitied were an insult to the memory of a queen. Nay, such were unthinkable! Thou mayest believe I banqueted the greedy and the curious to the limit of their bellies ere I took my leave of Iceland. ’Tis not likely many will exceed in bounty that final feast of Thorbjorn’s!”

Deeply touched, Eric flung an arm round his friend’s shoulders. “Alas, my noble Thorbjorn, ’tis a sinking hulk thou hast sought in thy distress. Eric is no longer a dispenser of cheer. Gloom hath taken her abode in his household and lieth down with him in his bed-place. Divorced of affluence, poverty hath claimed him for her own.”

Followed then an explanation of prevailing difficulties and how the one hope of maintaining the colony lay in the possibility of establishing foreign trade—a slender enough hope since Greenland had nothing sufficiently valuable to offer in export to justify a cruise to her shores. Thorbjorn appreciated what this confession meant to Eric. He made a sweeping gesture with his long arm, as though to whip aside the whole worrisome business.

“Friend Eric,” he boomed, “’tis easily seen the destinies of true comrades are bound together. Now do I perceive ’twas not mine own will which drove me forth, but thy honorable need. Command, therefore, thy thralls to carry the ship’s stores into thy booths.”

CHAPTER XIV

Whilst the old friends swore allegiance anew, and Eric's thralls scattered hither and thither like so many noisy ravens to do his bidding, Thorstein had become engrossed elsewhere. He had discovered the rarest of Thorbjorn's treasures. In the midst of a small group of women, however modestly in the background, stood a slender wisp of a maid, all white and gold and softly alluring. Thorstein decided that her sweet simplicity was far more impressive than the grandiloquence of her blue-blooded parent.

When the gamut of pledges had been run, and the old chieftains were satisfied that their fellowship was sufficiently fettered, Thorbjorn bethought himself of his gentle daughter. With obvious pride he commanded her to come forward that he might present his one jewel to the lord of Brattalid.

Finding herself thus suddenly the focus of attention, Gudrid flushed with confusion, hesitated timidly and then, all rosy-red, fled to the arms of her laughing father.

"Friend Eric," Thorbjorn began in oracular fashion, "this is my ewe-lamb, my one treasure, not a maid so desirable in all Iceland." He thrust a huge finger under her soft little chin and tipped the sweet face upward. "Thinkest thou Queen Oud was comelier, my Eric? Dost wonder the skalds crowned her Gudrid The Fair? Oh, well, to each man his recompense; Thorbjorn bereft of moneys is yet rich in his daughter. 'Tis a wealth to be honored, nor lightly bandied. Yet, wouldst believe it, Eric, a common merchant and the son of a freed thrall to boot, dared to offer his suit to my Gudrid. Thinkest it was time Thorbjorn quitted a country where such indignity is suffered to be done an ancient house?"

Eric knotted his terrifying brows and a rumbling growl rolled up from his deep chest.

"The old order passes—reverence, respect, these have no place in the new. Indolence and pleasures incite our young men; and riches are more to a maid than honor."

Gloomily Eric regarded the blushing girl before him. Was she really so innocent and modest? Were those roses in her cheeks the blooms of virtue or of vanity? He sighed. Beauty was at best a costly gift, its maintenance was high. How well his own daughter had known it!

"Doubtless yon merchant had gold to offer—and gold, forsooth, goes well with women's fairness."

“Now by God’s Holy Rood thou sayest wrong, my friend!” shouted Thorbjorn. “Rather a son of Eric, had he naught but the shirt to his back, than the son of a common thrall and the kingdom of Norway!”

Thorstein, meanwhile, was well-nigh as embarrassed by these blustering utterances as the sensitive Gudrid. Seeing how she shrank like a tender reed in a rude gale, he hastened to her aid.

“My lord father, the ladies are weary; mayhap a more practical hospitality were not amiss.”

“Shades of Helia! ’Tis a just rebuke. Quick, bring the horses. Make haste! Erlind! Thorstein! why stand ye like wooden men?—call me that idiot Ulf! Gudrid The Fair shall ride my greyling.”

Ulf, a weazened hunchback, whose huge head, jutting out from a narrow chest, seemingly threatened to over-balance his stunted body, hobbled up with Eric’s horses. Ulf was not burdened with intellect, but he knew good horses; nor did it seem that grace escaped him. He peered at Gudrid with his nervous narrow eyes; shaking back his dark locks quite like the creatures he loved and tended. Then he grinned and wagged his head from side to side—a grotesque enough approval. Yet Gudrid smiled at the simple wretch and her smile was sweetness incarnate.

This pretty graciousness was pleasing to Eric. He approved charity in women no less than valor in men; to his thinking every man should be a potential Thor, every woman a compassionate Signi. With rough gallantry he lifted Gudrid into the saddle.

“Mistress,” he chuckled, “’tis true thou art less hefty than mine ancient shield, but never a brighter burden might man hold in rest upon his bosom.”

Gudrid was shy, but she was not lacking in quiet humor. “My lord,” she twinkled, “’tis not gallant to suggest a shield might be a burden to a Norseman, nor a maid so chill as metal against a noble heart.”

“Didst hear her?” shouted Eric, now entirely captivated. “Didst hear the wisdom of the innocent? By my faith, ’twas a swordsman’s thrust!”

Thorbjorn was ever serious where his Gudrid was concerned; gravely he nodded. “Aye, friend Eric, my Gudrid hath a touch of steel in her, and steel, thou knowest, runneth true.”

“To Brattalid, then, my friends!” cried Eric. “To Brattalid and the alehorn! We must pledge our faith to Gudrid The Fair, truest maid ever bred in Iceland!”

CHAPTER XV

Thorbjorn's timely appearance saved Brattalid from further privations, and, what was more vital, his stores furnished the sorely tried colony with sufficient grain for the winter. All the gold of the earth would not have been more welcome. Old women hailed him as an emissary of the gods—a tribute he dared not accept, he being a new Christian—and young women named their babies in his honor. Cooks frankly worshipped him. Had he not saved them from the indignity of stewing sickly weeds and mosses? This once at least Thorbjorn tasted the delights of sovereignty. Not even the sainted Queen Oud could have received a more whole-hearted acclamation.

These exuberant demonstrations, so flattering to Thorbjorn, irritated Eric. His solid nature craved to bestow some tangible proof of gratitude. For the first time he regretted the loss of Gardar, which might have been a gift more fitting than honeyed words and sniffing tears.

Thorhild agreed with him, eagerly taking advantage of a wife's privilege to rebuke a stubborn husband. In consequence Eric rose to the occasion by deciding to give Thorbjorn an eastern estate long coveted by Thorhild for her younger son upon his marriage, a circumstance which did not minimize the good dame's poor opinion of husbands in general and hers in particular.

But, seemingly, nothing so enheartened old Eric as his wife's occasional tirades. Having entirely disregarded her conservative suggestions, he felt his spirits soar. Thorbjorn was to receive not only that valuable estate, but the water rights to a neighboring fiord as well. And there the Iceland chieftain meant to establish a residence in the spring of the year. In the meantime he and his company were to remain at Brattalid.

Thereafter Eric's house-karls, cooks and serving-wenches had enough to do; for the old hall resounded with merrymaking, the clanging of arms and the chanting of skalds. Judging from the gay activities, the groaning tables and the glittering raiments of its inmates, Brattalid might never have known a day's reverses. For, with true Norse prodigality, the irrepressible chieftains proceeded to enjoy the bounty at hand and each other's greatness, leaving the fickle Fates to look after the future.

In this pleasant, irresponsible fashion the weeks sped by, and if gravity can be said to have returned to any one it was to Thorstein. He was by now convinced that never had there lived a maid to equal Gudrid, and the conviction tormented him. It seemed impossible that so obvious a fact should escape the rest of male creation. Never a company of guests rode up

to Brattalid but that he trembled lest they were suitors for the peerless Gudrid. At last he could bear these nagging doubts no longer, and to the huge enjoyment of old Eric confessed his secret infatuation for the pretty maid.

“Secret?” bellowed his father. “Didst say secret? Trolls take me for a dullard! Never a notion had I ’twas a secret!”

Notwithstanding his bantering Eric was highly pleased. Nothing could have been more acceptable than this proposed union of two families equal in integrity, honor and station. Nevertheless, he did not favor an immediate or definite settlement. That must wait upon Leif’s return; then should the nuptials be celebrated, for with Leif would come a return of fortune for Brattalid. This once Eric was not to be shaken by impetuous emotion.

“Mine honor demands no less,” he declared, “for not to a ruined house would I condemn so fair a lady.”

Thorbjorn was inclined to favor the young lovers, especially after receiving his Gudrid’s dewy confidences. She loved her Thorstein, and who could say whether this Leif would ever return? But, as usual, when Eric decreed none dared to disobey. So, regardless of sweet sighings and soulful glances, life at Brattalid resumed its former routine.

When the fever of entertainment wore away, Eric and Thorbjorn lost themselves in memories of the past—a kindly past, all golden haze and glory, making a royal stairway to the gates of Valhalla! Many a horn was drained in memory of companions once loved, gone now the way of all flesh. And such is the alchemy of great affections that neither the Shades of Odin’s Hall nor the Angels of Paradise were offended by the indiscriminate mingling of saint and sinner in the minds of these two loyal old friends. Christian and heathen hobnobbed there with cheerful equanimity, and, no whit affected, each slipped back into the shadow of his blessed Elysium.

The women sighed their happy relief at this return to calmer pleasures. The late hilarity had fagged even their robust natures. They welcomed with deep appreciation the quiet evenings when an homely peace pervaded the great hall and lingered like a faint perfume upon the senses.

Whilst the crackling fires were faithfully replenished by the house-karls, the ladies knitted and spun, or wove their colorful tapestries on crude little hand-looms. The soft whirring of flying wheels made a pleasant accompaniment for the droning voice of the Saga man, whose duty it was to enliven the hour with tales of heroism and adventure. Young maids grew dreamy-eyed; young men loquacious. Old age frankly slept—oftimes

noisily. Whilst all up and down the huge hall shaggy dogs drowsed in unmolested peace; vigilant ears a-twitter, an eye open now and again to dwell in fond affection upon a loved face.

At such times Brattalid might have been a model of true felicity and cheerful comfort. Thus it seemed to the hunters returning from the hills and the weary fellows just home from the sealing. To them the old hall with its glowing fires, its smiling faces and dreamy humming undertone of constant activity, seemed a true haven of earthly bliss.

Thus the long winter wore away. Darkness fled; the sunlight beamed upon the lofty ridges, and waters laughed down the greening glades. Everywhere the joys of spring were gaily manifest.

Then, as if in premeditated climax, came that rosy dawn when the *Silver Dragon* flashed into view. A gleaming creature, she came drawing up from the curve of the underworld, looming cameo-clear for one fleeting moment against the red orb of the rising sun. Swift and beautiful she came, borne on by a stiff breeze, her sails straining, her proud head and swelling bows gleaming like polished metal in the yellow sunlight. What a vision she was to the rapturous hearts awaiting her! What joyful hope she symbolized! What faith, what daring!

Regardless of age or station, every mortal at Brattalid scurried shoreward in frantic haste to welcome her. Cheers and laughter rent the morning quiet as the summer lightning rends a dreaming cloud. Children danced and capered round the great watch-fires, whose flames shot up in magical swiftness to greet their coming hero. Old men shook hands gravely, as though this were a personal success, now for the first time formally acknowledged. Sentimental maidens wept. Others flew about like noisy gulls, their head-dresses floating behind them in filmy ephemeral wings.

Quite overcome for the moment, Thorhild clung to the gentle Gudrid, whose affection became a tower of strength. Thorhild needed strength just then. Curiously, now that the strain was broken, all she had suffered in the months of waiting, her doubts and fears and anxious hopes, rushed over her in a crushing wave of agony. A spiritual travail not to be escaped, it seemed, ere she might again claim her son. And he, this son coming to her out of the dawn, had anticipated joy upon his return, but not such passionate, pulsing madness as now awaited and quite overwhelmed him. It met him like a deluge. His feet had no sooner touched land than he was caught shoulder-high by a dozen burly fellows and amidst shouts and cheers and pious

acclamation was borne onward to the promontory of grey crags where Eric waited.

Dignified and stately despite his years, the proud chieftain stood silent and inscrutable, betraying no sign of the fierce tumult in his heart. Only the closest scrutiny would have revealed to the observer the strange brightness of his eyes, deep-hidden under their shaggy brows, and the laborious effort of his tortuous breathing as he watched the triumphant progress of his beloved son. Suffer what he might, Eric retained his proud aloofness, making no move, essaying no word of welcome. Not until Leif bowed before him did his reserve crumble and his arms open wide in ineffable affection. Then, with that play of dignity so prized of his race, Eric stepped aside, deferring graciously to a mother's right.

"Woman," he addressed his wife, "behold the honor of thy declining years, our son, who waiteth thy blessing."

"Madam, my mother!" cried Leif, gaily ignoring the suspicious moisture in her fond eyes and all but sweeping the little woman off her feet by the impetuosity of his greeting. "Say that thou hast forgiven thy foolish son for flying across the seas! Tell him thou dost still hold dear his vagabond heart."

Norse restraint gave way at this. Thorhild flung dignity to the winds; let whoso would despise her weakness, she must hold her dear son close in her hungry arms, fondle his dear face, admire his robust condition, and indulge in all a mother's privileges.

Thorstein also embraced his brother and with bashful pride introduced his blushing Gudrid and her illustrious father; whereupon Thorbjorn, not to be outdone in friendliness, thumped the voyager with such whole-hearted vigor that Leif's war accoutrements rattled fearsomely. Yet, despite so much happy confusion all about him, Eric had not failed to note the peculiarly attired clerics, who, gloomy-browed and contemptuous, watched the wild excitement of the heathen.

"Who be these sober fellows in old-wives garments?" he demanded somewhat shortly of his son as they headed the gay procession to Brattalid.

Leif laughingly admitted to having forgotten them. But in truth he had preferred to ignore their demands in the first joys of home-coming. However, he conscientiously added: "They be servants of the One God, my lord, and shortly will explain their true mission hither."

“Humph!” snorted the irrepressible old chieftain, “now by Thor’s Holy Hammer I am inclined to think thy fortune mixed! These fellows have a small-minded expression.”

Leif wisely changed the subject. He had no intention of rousing his father’s hasty temper, thereby endangering the whole cause. But the following day, when the jubilant household was assembled in the banquet hall, he bade the priests to speak and to divulge the beauty of the true religion.

Because of her close association with the Christian Gudrid, Thorhild was a ready convert and together with the most of her retainers was duly baptised into the Holy Faith. Not so Eric. He would have nothing to do with this fantastic religion of self-abnegation, this submission which forced itself upon one with the violence of fanaticism. It astonished him to see people weeping and wailing over sins dug up like dry bones from a long forgotten pit. It convinced him of the decadence of a younger generation reared in sluggish peace. Well, let who would adopt this peculiar humiliation, following where hysterical emotion prompted; as for himself, he refused to forsake the faith of his fathers.

Ere long this resulted in an estrangement between Eric and his wife. Aflame with her new convictions, Thorhild demanded that he accept salvation. If not she would leave him. She would leave him and Brattalid forever. Eric suffered deeply through this altercation, but remained resolute. At last she quite lost patience with him.

“Much have I borne with thee, my lord, suffered thee to spirit me hither and yon; left home and kindred for thee. ’Tis but within my rights to beseech that we come to die in godliness together. ’Tis not too great a penance for past sins. . .”

“Speak for thyself, woman! As for me, the gods of my fathers have kept me above dishonor all the days of my life, and they it is shall keep me till the end.”

“Then must I leave thee!”

“Even so. Of what I still possess take what pleaseth thee. And may the gods attend thee.”

“A fie on thy gods!” Thorhild snapped angrily. Then, touched by his apparent age and sore dejection, her manner softened. Dropping to her knees by his side, she fell to stroking the hairy hand which once had held her heart and destiny.

“My Eric, be less mindful of loyalty to false idols. In truth thou wert ever stubborn, yet I hold it not against thee. My daily life shall be a prayer for thee. I shall build me a church to the glory of God that He may suffer thy sins to pass for love’s sake.”

Eric thrust her away, afraid to betray the grief in his heart.

“Go, go,” he muttered heavily, “build what thou wilt, and in thy dotage play at what thou wilt. Eric Red dies like a man without plea and without malice!”

CHAPTER XVI

Owing to this rupture in the household it was exceedingly difficult for Leif to present to the stricken Eric his new plan of seeking strange lands. Each passing day added to his restless desire, and he was wont to sigh at evening's close: "Another day robbed of opportunity!" All his youthful enthusiasm and eager ambition prompted instant action, whilst his fondness for an ageing parent, wounded to the heart, deferred a confession which would so surely enhance that parent's loneliness. But at last he forced himself to broach the subject, to relate his vision and his vow to seek this land to the west.

Eric heard him in patient silence. "Prayers and visions," said he incredulously. "Strange faith for a Norseman's son. Yet it may be that land lieth where thou didst look—Greenland was once but a dream."

"Aye, my lord, 'tis become plain to me that dreams are forerunners of reality. Indeed, which be more true I know not, since, once manifested, each dream goeth swiftly to decay."

Eric grunted and absently stroked the head of a shaggy hound at his knee. He bethought himself of the injunction of Odin:

"Moderately wise
Should each one be,
But never over-wise;
The wise man's heart
Is seldom glad—
Be he all wise who owns it,"

he murmured more to himself than to Leif. His son understood the rebuke and laughed softly. "Let us away with dreams then, my lord, there is much else of deeper moment."

Then he explained his obligation to the King, how he was in honor bound to protect the priests and to foster the new faith in Greenland. "For such is the royal verdict, that Norwegian trade extend but to Christian shores," he concluded.

"A traffic in religion!" mumbled Eric, his great brows lowering, his old eyes contemptuous. "Not so did thy fathers, Leif. Thinkest thou a man's belly is subject to his faith? 'Food and raiment the sons of men require,' thus spake the wise Odin, nor mentioned what manner of man he be, much less his worship! But honor is honor in Eric's house. Fear not on that account to

follow thy vision—these old-wive canters shall be a charge on me, and none shall molest them nor bridle their loose tongues except to anger Eric.”

Thus enheartened and assured, Leif began to make ready for his mad exploration, for such it was considered by most of his countrymen. Thorstein then insisted upon the consummation of his nuptials before his valiant brother be lost to him again. And by dint of much persuasion Leif was able to reconcile his offended mother to the extent of assuming her duties at Brattalid during the wedding celebrations.

“If my lord Eric presideth at a Christian wedding surely my Christian mother may well do so with better grace,” was his winning shot.

Thorvald and Freydis, with their infant son, rode in splendid fashion to the wedding. A glittering guard preceded them and a retinue of kinsmen and their thralls followed in stately procession. Freydis was in the merriest mood, fairly glowing with self-satisfaction. She was exceedingly gracious to Leif, avowing the greatest concern in his proposed adventure, and displayed an intelligent interest in Norwegian affairs and the court of King Olaf. Leif was agreeably surprised to find her so affable and complimented her heartily upon such sprightly spirits.

“Ah, what greater cause for rejoicing might a woman have? Thou forgettest that in my little Eric I mother the coming lord of a mighty clan. Aye, none mightier in Greenland till thou beget a son.”

It was merrily said, but Leif glanced at her sharply, his old distrust reawakened. “Thou wouldst not take it amiss, sister,” he rejoined, “if such were never to my credit.”

Believing him fancy-free and sworn to the service of the new God, Freydis answered without reserve. “I will not gainsay thee. From Thorstein, who weddeth so soft a bride, my little Eric need expect small favor. Yet would I have him a true namesake of our father, and none in Greenland greater than he.”

All during the succeeding celebration Leif brooded upon the haunting problem Freydis’ playful maliciousness had aroused in his mind. He was fretted with longing for his lovely Thorgunna; torn with fears for her safety and hounded with the desire to acquaint someone with his weight of guilt. But in whom dared he confide? Not in the old chieftain, bowed down by his wife’s desertion. Not in Thorstein, steeped head and heels in the love of his Gudrid. And certainly not in Freydis, who, instinct warned him, would welcome such a confession with chilly grace.

At length, just before embarking, he drew his mother aside, and with all the confusion of a small boy caught thieving stammered out his story.

Thorhild was speechless with amazement. Had he confessed the murder of Olaf himself it had appalled her less. Sudden hatreds, swift violence, to these a man might succumb without loss of honor, but this . . . “My son! Thou didst infamously dishonor a wellborn lady? Thou didst bring disgrace upon an household where thou wert a guest? Thou didst forget the obligations of an honorable name? Leif Ericson, wert thou lost to decency or mad indeed?”

“True, true; thou sayest rightly, madam. Such madness had I thought none heir to! Not for self do I plead, but for that sweet lady whose sorrows are my making. By the most Holy Cross none other shall I love, none else so cherish. My honored mother, for the sake of such little good as I have done pray do thou welcome this dear lady should she reach these shores ere my return. Receive her in charity and guard her secret.”

Thorhild found it far more difficult to overcome her ancient prejudices and conventions than she had found the renouncing of her ancient faith. Yet, amazing though it was, she could not doubt the sincerity of Leif’s unwarranted passion. His distress was evident; his confession torn from the heart at the cost of bitter humiliation. She was constrained to be merciful.

“My dear son, ’tis plain a wellborn man may err grievously and yet not be wanting in justice. It shall not be said thy mother lacks more in charity. I promise thee, Leif, to welcome this much wronged and unhappy lady as befits her station.”

“Madam, thou wilt never rue thy promise. My lady Thorgunna walks in beauty; her thoughts are stainless, her spirit free. . .”

Thorhild interrupted him, silencing him with an imperial gesture.

“Enough, enough! ’Tis not necessary I should know the fatal fluency of thy tongue. Ah, me, thou art as rash in word as thy sire was in deed—yet, I fear me, ’tis the lot of women to love such piracy! But come, kneel thou at my feet, my wayward son, that I may bless thee and thy noble quest.”

Leif kissed his mother’s hands in humble gratitude. “God’s word! Madam, thou hast eased my heart and mind. Thy charity will fill my sail in lieu of happy winds and bear me swift to the land appointed me of God.”

CHAPTER XVII

Indeed, it did seem as though fortune favored Leif and that the winds of heaven sped his *Silver Dragon*. With uninterrupted good weather he sailed a southwesterly course until he beheld a great headland rising out of the sea. Then, and then only, were his sailors convinced that his vision had been other than the fruits of Olaf's mead. They quickly forgot their criticism and bent to the oars with a wild enthusiasm. On closer inspection, however, the country appeared both barren and unattractive. The wind-blown stretches of drab, slate-colored crags were as incapable of arousing interest as a flat-bosomed, toothless crone. It seemed a country old and mourning for its youth. Not a weed waved in the wind. Disappointed though they all were, Leif insisted upon landing that he might note the characteristics of the land and give it a name. And, because of the preponderance of great flat rocks on every side, he called the place Helluland—the land of flat rock—and having so christened it, embarked and put back to sea.

In common with other Norsemen of his day, Leif had much faith in the wisdom of the raven and carried on this journey a cage of trained birds. A full day's sailing from Helluland he let loose a brace of birds. They flew high, circled about with questioning, raucous cries, and then darted due south. Whereupon Leif was satisfied that very shortly he would again sight land. The supposition was correct. This time a low-lying country met their eyes; well wooded and with stretches of white sand gently sloping to the sea. Leif gave to it the name of Markland, but, having known the rugged beauty of the Hebrides and the infinite charm of variable Norway, there was little here to fascinate or charm him. His sailors thought it foolish to fare farther. Why not explore the woods, which might abound in deer and wolves? Why leave a likely prospect for a vast uncertainty?

Leif's reply was to order the sails hoisted. "Ye knew not of Markland when the crags of Helluland dashed your spirits—why doubt ye that a better yet exists?"

Not without grumbling and sullen glances did they return to the toils of the oar. Leif ignored their black looks and as he steered into open sea he sang the rousing lay of Ragnar Lodbroke and his adventurous sons. As he knew, Norse hearts could not for long withstand that gallant appeal. What mattered the end—the spirit of man's labor was the thing! Ere they were aware every last sailor was singing; those not at the oars beat out the rhythm on the shields which lined the Dragon's bows. Thus with the eternal

challenge of stout heart to strange fortune they sailed once more in quest of the mystic land.

Borne on by a steady northeast wind, they sailed for countless hours. Day or night their berserk fury never abated. They must overcome this eternity of silent waters. They must feel the earth beneath their feet and themselves the victors over time and space! They must conquer as never men yet conquered the great unknown!

Came at last that unforgettable, soul-stirring moment when in the luminous rays of the setting sun they saw a great and goodly land before them. "And having come to an island lying to the north of the mainland, they landed there. Having got their bearings they put back to ship and sailed into the sound which lay between the island and the cape north from the mainland. They steered a westerly course past the cape; it was very shallow there at low tide, so that their ship ran aground and soon it was a long way from the ship to the sea. But such was their eagerness to get to land that they could not wait for the tide to rise under their ship, but hurried ashore where a river came out of a lake."^[1]

Grateful and awed in spirit, Leif looked about him. In the mellow light he saw the ocean lying like a royal highway before him, jewel-tinted and spreading to the skies. At his back were mighty woods, and the souging of the wind, mingling with the purling of the river, made of the place a murmuring, sweet-scented paradise. As Leif inhaled the verdant fragrance, hungrily absorbing the loveliness of earth and air and sky, a flash of wings, flaming and glorious, shot past him, and a cry, such as he had never heard before, sounded like a fluted rapture on his ears. Like all Norsemen, Leif believed in signs and symbols. This scarlet-coated bird became a harbinger miraculous, a God-appointed messenger, this little flashing tanager!

Laughing softly, Leif turned to his men. "Comrades," cried he, "bring me the holy ensign, for now am I assured that we have set foot on goodly soil. The seas are dyed to a royal sheen; the birds are ruby red—red as mellow wine—and the very air hath about it a tang to cheer the heart like olden vintage."

When they brought the banner, flying its milk-white cross, which Olaf had bestowed on him at Nidaros, he raised it high, and in a ringing voice made his dedication:

"Most Holy Christ, Who hath revealed that perfect freedom of which our fathers dreamed but dimly, to Thee we dedicate this gracious land that it

may come to be a land of refuge for the wind-blown mariner, and whence peace and plenty may flow to the uttermost parts of earth.

“Hear me, O Christ, Thine humble servant, and set Thy seal upon the land, that, come what may, it must arise a witness to Thine everlasting justice. And, having set my feet upon this fruitful soil, suffer, O gracious One, that in Thine appointed hour the heart of Leif Ericson may be gathered to this sacred dust.”

When the rich voice ceased not a sound was heard save of the murmuring wind and the lapping of the waters. The witchery of the land was upon them; great trunks of men, they stood with bared heads, faces turned to the setting sun, their child-like hearts athrob, their rich blood turned to rapture, like the sap of giant cedars leaping to the call of everlasting life.

That potent silence was their hymn of praise, their myrrh and frankincense, their honest thanks to the God of daring hearts and vast infinities.

[1] Quoted from Flatey Book.

CHAPTER XVIII

Leif took counsel of his companions as to a possible camping site. "When the sea had risen under their ship they rode back to her in their small boat and took the *Silver Dragon* up the river, and afterwards into the lake, where they cast anchor."^[2] And carrying their leathern kitbags, kegs of oil and mead, and their various axes and weapons, they set about making a rude shelter.

To their delight the lake and river was found to abound in salmon; the country was carpeted in rich velvety grass whereon the dew lay honey-sweet; and the luxuriant woods abounded in berries of different varieties. Over their first campfire they marvelled that so fair a place was hidden at the world's edge; and, all untutored though they were, the poetry of their surroundings was not lost upon them; nor was the solemnity of sitting thus, a solitary band of men, in the midst of a silence which breathed of infinite spaces.

Leif soon decided that their wisest course was to hew logs and build permanent houses. And, being an admirable commander who knew to the least foible the natures of his men, he daily appointed the tasks to each, taking care that all should fare alike, nor too long be assigned to a tedious task, since monotony was ever the straw to break a Norseman's patience.

The men responded heartily. Soon the primeval woods were ringing to the sound of swinging axes, and in a twinkling the green logs lay stripped in the sun. While waiting for the logs to dry, Leif set his jolly berserks to catching and curing fish, an occupation they scorned as utterly beneath honest, fighting sailors. But their master had a will of iron and—this they whispered amongst themselves—the logic of an old woman; hence he simply shrugged his shoulders at their chagrin and patiently explained that since none knew the habits of the land it were better to have a store of food set aside against possible future want.

Leif wisely alternated the agreeable with the disagreeable. Each day he sent out an exploration party, on which occasions the lucky ones were left to choose their course, and, indeed, might claim as their own any trophy the forest yielded to bow or battle-axe. But it was unanimously agreed that these explorations should be limited to such an extent that the hunters might reach camp at nightfall. It was imperative because of their small numbers, that they should avoid undue and unnecessary dangers. And so the busy days sped by and in an amazingly short while a cluster of stout log dwellings,

provision booths, and a walled-in keep, looking out to sea, spoke eloquently of their active interest in their faithful toil.

In the first flush of their enthusiasm the carefree adventurers decided to build a real Norse hall for their commander—a great hall worthy a great discovery. “No hut for Leif!” said they. Consequently, the huge dimensions of the ugly pile which eventually reared its massive walls toward a peaceful sky drew many a jest from Leif. It made him feel every inch the king—so he said—albeit his kingdom was an idle and an empty one. Nonetheless, he appreciated the unselfish motive, the forethought, and the spontaneous effort expended upon that extravagant building. And it pleased him that his men should have patience to carve the flying falcon, emblematic of his race, upon the rude lintels of his temporary dwelling.

At the conclusion of these activities, when his berserks were as curious and clamorous as children to be off on extended tours, Leif dashed their spirits by commanding their return to the monotonous drudgery of hewing timber. He laughed at their gloom and taunted them good-naturedly: “By my rood, I wot not that ye were as pleasure-loving as a flock of women. Away with angry looks! ’Tis wisdom to lay up a store of timber, for, as ye know, of that commodity there is dire lack in Greenland. If ye would be rich and loll upon an honor-seat and bask in some maid’s fancy, ’twere well to invest a little toil in these fine-grained timbers; for whither men have once gone they may ever return, and these be timbers of surpassing excellence.”

There was no refuting such an argument, so with characteristic lightheartedness his rebel-spirited Vikings relinquished all dreams of fascinating adventure and bent their backs to toilsome labor. Each noble tree felled to earth represented so much prospective wealth to Leif, and of this wealth they were to receive their just portion. Thus preoccupied with cheerful plans the weeks rolled away, for the most part in calm tranquility.

Few were their mishaps, and fewer still their storms of dissension. One glance of Leif’s cold eyes would suffice to pierce the bubble of their rising angers and, as a rule, a quiet word restored their ruffled spirits. For these simple, fearless men loved their leader and trusted in his judgment and justice. In most part, therefore, their days were cheerful and their associations amicable. But one night, when the exploration party stumbled into camp, Tyrker, an old German, held in much affection by Leif, was not amongst them. A silence fell upon the entire camp. Not a man dared look at his neighbor. Leif’s anger was the more feared because his justice was unquestioned and his temper not easily roused, though once aroused it was an uncompromising factor. Now his face went white beneath its tan and the

withering scorn he turned upon the wretched men whipped them like an evil lash. Sullen and miserable, they growlingly admitted to having lost sight of the old man since the sun stood in mid-heaven.

“By my soul, ye are a pretty lot of fellows to desert an aged comrade! To leave a defenceless old man mayhap to be devoured of beasts! Not to such ignominy will Leif give sanction. Come, ye shall lead me along the way ye have travelled.”

“We have not eaten since dawn,” grumbled one dark-browed fellow.

“So much the better shall ye enjoy to sit at meat with Tyrker,” Leif answered shortly. Then, calling to his cook, he commanded that each man should have a horn of ale to refresh him for the search.

All that night they scoured the woods, carrying burning torches and calling hopefully upon the lost Tyrker, but to no avail. In the early morning, when, weary and discouraged, they were wending their homeward way, they came upon the old man ambling along in unconcerned bliss and singing to himself. Despite his fondness for Tyrker, who had been his childhood’s guardian and instructor, Leif could have shaken the old fellow.

“Thou art joyous, foster father—a very bird of the dawn; yet, though we see thou hast played us the fool, we rejoice to find thee so humored.”

“Ah, my dear lord, happy is this land, and I do but sing with good cause,” returned Tyrker, in unperturbed affability. “Some days ago, while beating my trail, I came upon the wild grape and thought, ‘Now will I surprise my lord Leif,’ and when none observed I stole back to camp for kegs. Having oft seen the vintage made in mine own land, I set about crushing the fruit, and now thou seest the joy inherent in this crude vintage of my brewing. Thinkest thou the gloomy brows of thy berserks will lift at sight of my kegs of wine?”

They were indeed rejoiced to find their search so happily rewarded, and with gleeful shouts tossed the old man to their shoulders and bore him into the thickets, where he had been pursuing, in happy secret, so agreeable an occupation. And that night they made merry over Tyrker’s wine. But first Leif took an horn of the raw vintage and, spilling it on the ground, acclaimed in his firm, full voice: “Now do I name this hospitable land Vineland. May she ever be as friendly to her guests as is that Norseman who offers wine to another.”

So the time passed and, occupied with their various problems and arduous duties, the little band of adventurers were scarcely aware of how

swiftly the seasons followed one upon the other. Summer gave way to autumn and autumn to winter with such gentle grace that they were never done marvelling at the wondrous climate. And they agreed that in a country of such matchless charm and fruitfulness life would be rid of the greater part of its enslaving and terrifying ills.

Nevertheless, when the mellow sunshine of returning spring had coaxed the sleeping buds to leaf, and sent the rivers singing to the sea, they were all on fever to be gone, and with true Norse fervor made ready for the cruise.

The *Silver Dragon* was returning with a precious cargo, her capacious hold crammed with dried timber, rich skins from the motley collection of animals trapped during the winter, quantities of sun-dried grapes, cured fish, and kegs of Vineland wine. They had, moreover, a good supply of self-grown grain which old Tyrker had discovered growing abundantly in a distant vale and which upon grinding had yielded a coarse but not unpalatable meal. This grain was perhaps as great a find as any, for no other single cause has contributed more toward the plague in Greenland than the absence of grain from an already restricted diet. Knowing this, Leif had insisted upon the harvesting and grinding of this meal, howsoever much his berserks grumbled at such womanish work. But now, at last, their commander was ready to leave and they were free to breathe again the briny airs of the unconquerable sea.

This time Leif followed the shoreline, coasting from bay to bay, the better to acquaint himself with the land. And, in the main, the journey was uneventful and to his adventure-loving crew quite without interest. Once or twice, it is true, they ran into trade winds and heavy squalls which added somewhat to the zest of an otherwise dull journey.

Leif had an eagle's eye and an eagle's perception; not a sign which might guide a mariner escaped him. The position of the stars, the color of the sea and its many currents, all served him equally well. Off Markland these currents were treacherous and strong, and for days the rolling mists converted the weary hours into an eternity of slow-moving vapors and grim, black shadows. But once through the fog-banks Leif knew himself back in the cold Arctic seas, and with a light heart he cheered on his sailors.

When at last the white peaks of their barren country rose up before them their joy was unbounded. Behind them lay the wide sea and luxuriant Vineland, but ahead burned the cheerful fires of home, and this knowledge made the repellent land a welcome vision.

[\[2\]](#) Flatey Book.

CHAPTER XIX

Vineland the Good! Vineland the Bountiful! Men spoke of nothing else! Now that the impossible had been made possible, the dream reduced to reality, young and old alike longed to view that distant land of eternal sunshine and exhaustless resources. They must hear again and again each little detail, marvelling, praising both the land and its noble discoverer. Their faith was won, their hearts also. Not a man but was ready to follow Leif wheresoe'er he listed.

But much as this enthusiasm pleased Leif, who already had vast ambitions for his Vineland, there was much to detract from the joyousness of his reception. He found his father greatly altered. The weight of years, his loneliness, and Thorhild's desertion had worked a deadly mischief in his veins. He had grown old and was seemingly resigned to the nagging infirmities of age. Still, for a time he revived and recaptured enough of his former vigor to ride about the country with his son, rejoicing in the honors bestowed upon him.

But, even more than this, the thought of Thorgunna preyed upon Leif's mind. No ship had touched at Greenland during his absence; neither the fair Hebridene nor any news of her had reached the country. What was her fate? Where might she not be wandering, a lonely exile, with her helpless babe, patiently waiting a chance passage to Greenland? That she would come he never doubted—this faith alone checked the mad impulse to plunge off in search of her. Aye, she would come, and, having come, he would bear her away to Vineland, where she would shine a royal jewel in a royal setting—a peerless queen in a peerless land.

There remained his oath to King Olaf to Christianise his country. The priests had made little headway with the colonists, who seemed for the most part deaf and impervious to the charms of Heaven and the threats of Hell. True, a hell of burning brimstone, as contrasted with the milder misery of frozen Nifl-Heim, was a bit startling; but, so far, their healthy Norse nerves had suffered little. It must be admitted that Leif considered the state of their souls less than he did that of their stomachs. If Olaf's ship reached Greenland and his emissaries found a heathen populace, the King's anger would most certainly exceed his charity. It would be certain death to the hopes of the colony. The one thing to be done Leif decided to do—he would himself preach the Gospel; or, to be exact, he would exert his boundless influence to inveigle the people into renouncing their ancient gods.

When Thorstein learned of Leif's decision his first reaction was one of keen disappointment. He had been anticipating a second and immediate cruise to Vineland. But with this religious project in view Leif could scarcely be contemplating such action. Thorstein was not alone in his disappointment; most of the young bloods of Greenland were as eager as he to have some part in the future of Vineland. At length, being urged on by his friends, he approached Leif with an offer to buy the *Silver Dragon*, declaring himself fully determined to conduct a second cruise to the land of golden opportunities.

Leif was amused at his brother's unwarranted fervor, and laughingly accused him of having experienced a spiritual rebirth in his happy marriage. Or was he still so lovesick he must needs seek a softer paradise wherein to cheer his love?

"Whatever the cause," said Leif, "'tis a commendable ambition; albeit I must deny thee the *Silver Dragon*. Be I fool or no, the ship is not for sale—my *Dragon* and I, we sail the seas together or sit at home."

"A ship at home makes little revenue," Thorstein retorted shortly.

Leif laughed, then, flinging an arm about his brother's shoulder, he led him to the doorway facing out upon a long green glade rolling to the sea. To the left, an arm of the sea wound up like a silver shepherd's crook into the grey hills, and there, like a restive captive, lay the *Silver Dragon*. "My Thorstein," he said, "thou hast thy love to cheer thee. This ship hath my heart in keeping; 'tis the temple of my dreams. Despair not, however. Though thy brother's folly lose thee one ship, 'tis certain Thorbjorn will lease thee his vessel. In all else will I aid thee, and my Vineland booths are thine to use at thy pleasure."

Indeed, Leif heartily approved Thorstein's ambition until he discovered that not only did Gudrid intend to accompany him, but old Eric also. This seemed to him the sheerest folly. Eric was too infirm, and Gudrid, just then, in too delicate health to bear the rigors of such a journey. But argue as he would, they persisted in their plans. Gudrid refused to be separated from her husband at a time when so many strange fears worried her young heart. And as for Eric, in his old Norse heart burned a fierce desire to meet the end somewhere on the seas he loved—somewhere "with boot and sword and battle-axe"—a man standing to meet his fate.

After their departure Leif flung himself into prosecuting his mission. A second Olaf, he marched across his country, sometimes accompanied by his priests, sometimes alone, and, having an inner fire to match his physical

vigor, he carried all before him as a mighty wind whirls away the dry leaves of a dead year. Few indeed were the souls who ere the winter twilight fell had not cast aside their heathen images. Well satisfied with himself and the fruits of his labors, Leif retired to Brattalid and prepared to spend the winter in quiet rest and recuperation. He had need of leisure, for he had many plans to reconstruct and formulate.

Now that his pledge to the King had been honorably executed, Leif saw no reason why Olaf's influence might not be sought in behalf of Vineland. Vineland, Thorgunna—these two seldom left his thoughts—a dream within a dream merged into his heart! But even the joy of dreams was limited for Leif. He was barely settled at the old hall when, to his great dismay, Thorstein's ship was discovered battling its way into Eric's fiord.

What a sorry lot of voyagers crawled out of her! And what a sorry tale they had to tell! For months they had been tossed hither and yon upon an angry sea. Lost in the blackest fogs, battered by wind and rain, and driven before terrific gales, they had resigned themselves to death an hundred times. Two of the party had succumbed to the ague, and all had suffered the horror's of ship's fever; yet to old Eric had not been granted the desired release.

In the midst of such ghastly terrors the gentle Gudrid had brought forth her firstborn; had patiently endured the bitter pangs of travail only to experience the deeper sorrows of bereavement. A pale shadow of her former self, she clung to her Thorstein as to her God. And he, gaunt and haggard—for the fever was still in his blood—endeavored as best he could to cheer her. Everything would right itself now they were home again. He would take her away to the healing solitude of Lysefiord, where they might dream and forget—so he consoled her.

Leif was grieved to the heart at their plight, but with a cheerfulness he in nowise felt, he strove to make light of Fortune's vagaries.

"Take heart," he encouraged his brother whimsically, "it hath been said of old that only a fool escapeth danger, and the wise alone come to comprehend the teachings of Misery."

Thorstein sighed. "Such wisdom were better dispensed with. Fortune's fool was I to attempt thy feat—thou of all men the most lucky!"

"None knoweth what the day may disclose till the setting of sun—'tis much the same with men," was Leif's serious reply.

“Aye, ’tis the truth,” old Eric chimed in, sadly, “but, lucky or unlucky, nor Thorstein, nor any other man, shall play the part of Leif and find the gods his advocates.”

CHAPTER XX

Eric never recovered from this grievous illness. Hours on end he would sit in his great hall, a gaunt shadow of his former self, brooding upon the strangeness of life and its burdensome cares and momentary pleasures. But what conclusions he reached as to the whole perplexing business none knew, nor what he suffered in mind and body. His son was his only comfort. With Leif beside him the futility of existence seemed less bitter. He loved to watch, from under drooping lids, this vigorous son of his, especially when the ruddy gleam of the long-fires glanced from the polished shields about the walls and, with a captured gleam from these honored emblems of his ancient house, fell upon Leif's leonine head and kindled an answering fire in his steel-blue eyes.

One night Eric spoke of his death. "My son, on thine oath as a Norseman, suffer none to make mummerly over my dried old bones. Thou art become the champion of an ancient truth newly vested. 'Charity, love!' cry thy trumpeters, and ride it through the dullard with a sword! Ah, my son, such pointed charity had we formerly. Aye, and a softer as well. I ask thee, Leif, wherein lies greater virtue than that ye suffer a man to love his own opinions, nor violate his sense of loyalty, howsoever it may clash with thine, and, albeit he hate thee, feed him if he be enhungered? Thus have Norsemen done of old. Yet, I entreat thee, Leif, guard well mine ancient dignity. Suffer me to meet mine end in the way of all transient things, undismayed and resigned—a silence passing into silence, an illusion returning to illusion."

"My lord, thy commands shall not escape me," Leif responded quickly, distressed beyond measure by his father's suffering. "In all things command me, my dear lord, and rest assured thou shalt be gladly served. Yet, 'twere wiser, mayhap, to dwell on brighter thoughts. Spring is drawing near. I doubt not but its invigorating airs will benefit my lord. Thou wilt yet speed me once again to Vineland the Good, and with thy blessing imbue my heart with fortitude and wisdom."

"Last night I dreamed of the falling falcon, my son, and ever has it been a sign of death in mine ancient house. Yet, though Eric himself be fallen, his spirit will speed thee, for there is that in men which knows not death."

Though deeply concerned, Leif refused to believe his father's illness fatal, adjudging his melancholy but the natural consequence of physical exhaustion. Still, driven by vague forebodings and filial affection, he rode to Gardar, hoping to win his mother's sympathy and commiseration. But

Thorhild was by now a fervent convert, entirely devoted to the church she had endowed. With pious fervor, she admitted that her concern was not for Eric's suffering body, but for his sinful soul. Yet, if Eric sent for her from an humble and contrite heart, she would go to him gladly.

At this Leif lost his temper. "Madam," said he, and his voice was cold as steel, "well hast thou shown me that the lips may confess Christ whilst the heart denies Him. And now must I say—who should never so address thee—that my lord Eric showeth broader grace than thou, and greater trust in righteousness than all thy prayers profess."

But Leif was to find more bitterness in store for him. Shortly after his return from his unsuccessful visit to Thorhild, just when the winter twilight was lifting from the land and hope stirred in his heart, there came a sad caravan down from the bleak hills, bearing the body of Thorstein, who had perished of the fever contracted on his ill-fated voyage.

This bitter blow finally brought the aged chieftain to his deathbed. "Leif, my son," came his last entreaty, "to such a bitter fate and ungracious country have I beguiled my unhappy people. Yet, by my faith, 'twas ever my thought to guide them well. Thou art now the pillar of mine house, and upon thee I lay this burden. Thou art a sagacious man; rashness will not undo thee; but thou art the son of Red Eric, whose oath was ever sacred. Vow me, therefore, never to leave Eric's hall and Eric's people to the avaricious Freydis and her grinning brat, who mocks mine honest name. Leif, thou must swear me this by the most holy honor-pillars of our house."

To Leif this impassioned appeal came as a death-knell to his tenderest hopes. Having kept faith with the King and laid the foundations for his country's well-being, he had begun to look upon himself as free to seek his own happiness. If Thorgunna did not soon arrive he meant to seek her, and, with her to inspire him, to found a colony in Vineland worthy of the noblest dynasty. But now, on beholding his father's concern and hearing his sorrowing confessions, Leif saw these hopes defeated. For duty to family and race was ever a Norseman's first commandment. He thought of the *Silver Dragon*, sleeping like some shining creature of the Fates in the quiet shallows of Ericsfiord—a shining ship of destiny, patiently waiting his will and his practiced hand upon her helm. In that troubled moment it seemed to Leif that death had been more welcome than this guardianship of souls which would so surely make of him a veritable prisoner.

"Thou seest thy duty," muttered the dying Eric.

“Aye, my lord,” Leif replied, and, unconsciously squaring his shoulders as for a heavy burden, he made his oath in clear, unfaltering tones. “Now do I, Leif Ericson, swear by the sacred honor of my fathers never to falter in duty to this my Greenland charge so long as there be might in me to serve.”

When Leif had closed his dead sire’s eyes he stood a long while beside the couch, and it seemed to him that it was not an old man who lay there, but himself, all that greater self which had dreamed of the land of promise and Thorgunna The Beautiful.

Book II

CHAPTER I

The days dragged on in dreary, meaningless succession for the lady Thorgunna after the *Silver Dragon* had borne her lover away. Life had suddenly lost its savour, its sweetness and its joy. She no longer arose with the lark to exult in earth and sky and dimpling waters; nor found in slumber surcease from haunting cares. She dreamed, and her dreams were filled with terrors. Nevertheless, the true cause of her distress was not the natural dread of the inescapable punishment she must suffer in consequence of her folly, but the nagging fear of possible failure; howsoever she plotted and schemed, her plans might miscarry. But cost what it might, she was resolved that the man she loved should escape all shadow of doubt and his name be retained in spotless honor.

Loving as she did, a quality of worship colored her every thought of Leif, and rendered, therefore, more irksome and odious the vulgar necessity of subterfuge. She would in truth have gloried in proclaiming her love from the housetops, yet was compelled to hide it away like an accursed thing. Nay, more; to avert what appeared to her the one unpardonable tragedy she was forced to assume a role alien to her sincere nature and repellent to every tender sentiment.

Never was a proud and noble lady more perilously placed. Whatsoever course she followed, whether to success or failure in her cherished schemes, she was doomed to blackest shame. Yet with this inevitable end before her Thorgunna had the sublime courage to make gaiety her business and laughter a habit, lest by the least sign of melancholy she give ground to gossip ere men had forgotten her intimacy with Leif.

Old Elspeth was certain of Thorgunna's love for the bold adventurer, but as yet unacquainted with the whole of their madness. Consequently, the fond old woman was utterly at loss as to her mistress's present behavior. How was she to understand a lady, formerly as proud and unapproachable as the greatest queen, who, pining in secret for one lover, openly encouraged the infatuation of another—and that other a mere soldier, albeit a brave one? Each day she meant to speak of it, but there was a look in Thorgunna's eyes which forbade the query.

Elspeth's anxiety was increased daily by the knowledge that others besides herself were becoming aware of Thorgunna's singular interest in Erling The Black. To be sure, Erling was a bold figure, but scarcely one to aspire to so great a lady's favor. He was one of the fighting devils—so-called

by Rafn's enemies—which made up the Hebridene chieftain's bodyguard. But, owing to a serious wound incurred in his master's service, Erling had been temporarily transferred to home duty; an exchange which had in nowise pleased the fierce young fighter until Thorgunna's smiles transferred his gloom into mad and rapturous dreaming. Poor Elspeth pattered many a prayer to still the trembling of her heart, though it was her secret belief that even the angel Michael would have a strenuous time in pacifying her master's rage were he to discover his daughter's amours with a common soldier. Sheer terror for her lady's safety at last drove the old woman to brave her young mistress's displeasure.

It was night and they were alone in Thorgunna's bower, where she habitually slept with only her old nurse and a great yellow hound for company. Elspeth was brushing her lady's red-gold hair and in her nervousness made a painful task of the pretty business.

Thorgunna shook off the awkward hands and, whirling about, faced the old dame impatiently. "Good Elspeth, what aileth thee? Art sick of an ague, or plotting one of thy tirades?"

"Oh, dear my lady, forgive thy Elspeth; 'tis love maketh her impertinent, and fear for thy sweet self careless of anger."

"Speak to the point, I pray thee," said Thorgunna sharply, the while her hand crept to her heart as if to still its agitation, and her lovely face turned a sickly grey.

Poor Elspeth locked and interlocked her knotted fingers helplessly, for the moment startled out of her purpose by the suffering, so plainly to be read, in the face she loved best on earth. Quite overcome, she flung herself to her knees and, burying her wrinkled face in her lady's gown, implored her pardon.

"My lamb, my dear, my beautiful one, my little Carmona, forgive thy foolish Elspeth; 'tis not for such as her to point the way to her betters. Yet may the Lord confound me if 'twas not thy good I had in mind."

"Oh, Elspeth, thou art a noodle! Pull thyself together and be done with this foolish prattling. 'Tis my behavior vexes thee? I am no more a credit to thy training?"

"Dearest my lady, thou knowest better. 'Tis thy lord's wrath I fear. Much blood hath been spilled for less cause than what my lord might find where he less engrossed in fighting the savage Celts. Oh, heart of my heart, wherefore dost thou make light of a subject's heart and endanger thine own favor in the

people's eyes? Hast thou so soon forgotten my lord Leif, who, I doubt not, even now dreams of sending his envoys to woo thee?"

Thereat, to poor Elspeth's utter consternation and everlasting remorse, the lady Thorgunna gave a bitter cry and in a sudden storm of tears threw herself upon her old nurse's bosom. Painful as were those tears to witness, the confession she was forced to hear was more painful still. Elspeth was near to swooning with the terror of it all. What was to become of them? The all-powerful Christ would save her lady from the fire, but even He would not forfend a just punishment. "Blessed Michael, save us! Implore the mercy of God. Be pitiful and compassionate," prayed the old woman, and in the midst of her praying was reminded of Erling The Black. The memory shocked the sense of piety out of her and acted like a brake to her galloping terror. At last she understood! The poor wretch was nothing but a dupe! He was to be sacrificed on the altar of Leif's honor! For a moment the thought held her paralysed with horror. She saw, as in a mirror, the gay young soldier, his armor glinting in the sunlight, his black locks flying in the wind, and his eager young eyes brimming with the love of life. No lordling he, perhaps, but a splendid bit of manhood, and the equal of any in the Isles in feats of war. He was of the people and she was of the people. Rebellion stirred in her old heart.

"This Erling—his fate is naught to thee?" cried Elspeth bitterly; "his blood is but a river to bear thy pride aloft! Poor common heart, whose only folly is audacity in love!"

"Good Elspeth, thy sentiments are kind, but thy judgments faulty. Meseems all mortals play a destined part. 'Twas not my doing that Erling finds me fair, nor my lord Leif's that made me so to love him. Ah, Elspeth, think not my heart takes pleasure in deceit, nor lacketh pity for this good young man. And thou dost wrong him, too, for 'tis my soul's belief he holds my fond affection above his very life."

Old Elspeth shook her greying head, sorely perplexed and far from reconciled. "Troth, meseems there's something sad amiss—to die for love and for a treachery, 'tis not the same. . ."

Thorgunna, quite the queen, checked her with an impatient gesture. "Thou forgettest, my good Elspeth, that a soldier's duty is to die."

Elspeth sighed and made an humble courtesy. "'Tis plain thou hast no need of my poor counsels. Thy mind is set—God's pity! My heart informs me 'tis on no happy plan."

"Bind up my hair," said Thorgunna curtly, "and leave my plans to me."

CHAPTER II

The chief steward had no love for the lady Thorgunna—she had, in her father's absence, so often tempered his justice with foolish sentiment. In pride a true daughter of Rafn, her heart, nonetheless, was too tender of the poor and her leniency to lazy debtors too great—a fact which the steward resented, since it had so often demeaned his dignity and rendered his crafty judgments futile.

Now his opportunity was at hand; at last he had a means whereby to humble her haughty spirit. Nothing of what had passed between the lady Thorgunna and Erling The Black had escaped him. Indeed, since her first innocent converse with the infatuated soldier, his spies had been assiduously employed. If Erling passed by the lady's bower and nodded his bold black head, the steward learned of it. If he laid a trophy of the forest at the lady's feet, or spoke a while upon the beauties of the day, the matter speedily reached the steward's ears. And if the lady, perforce, smiled, or so far forgot her station as to walk about the courtyard with the soldier, the incident lost nothing in the telling.

These indiscretions of the lady caused the chief steward none of the anxieties he professed to the agents he employed in watching her. His fear was not that his master's daughter should demean her honored clan, but that he might, after all, discover nothing whereon to base his grave accusation. He might have loved his mistress even less—but admired her the more—had he been aware that his every spy was known to her and her little plays designed to serve him. If he was anxious to get sufficient grounds against her before her lord returned from his bloody skirmishes, she was quite as anxious that his venom should play its part in her tragic scheme.

Despite his eagerness to humble this woman who stood between him and absolute power—for Rafn concerned himself with little save his squabbles abroad—he had nothing momentous to report; nothing, that is, until the day after his master's return.

While Rafn and his soldiers were sleeping away the effects of ale and meats and riotous celebration, Erling had slipped off in the early dawn to hover, like a patient shadow, round his lady's bower. Nor had the lady Thorgunna found slumber possible this night, and she, too, sought freedom from tormenting thought in the sweet morning air. They met as by appointment beneath a little crest of crags that loomed, fortress-like, above

the bower and sheltered that pleasant dwelling from the bitter winds sweeping in from the sea.

Thorgunna was a little startled. "Thou art early abroad, master Erling."

"Aye, lady, my dreams were troublesome," he answered simply, and with unconscious gallantry he spread his cloak upon a rock, making a royal seat for her, for the cloak was of the scarlet and was the reward of fearless loyalty. Rafn had bestowed it upon the heroic soldier in recognition of his eternal indebtedness.

Thorgunna acknowledged the pretty courtesy with a sad smile. "My friend," she said, and Erling's heart beat high at the sincerity of her tone, "a brave soldier has naught to do with dreams; 'tis a silly pastime best suited to weak women."

"Nay, my lady, say not so; without his dreams what were a soldier's existence but an empty clamor and a noisome strife? Even the heathen hear above the din of war the clear call of the Valkyrie, and a Christian soldier—may he not hear a sweeter sound?"

"Let us not dwell on dreams. Think you my lord is happily inclined? Had he a good victory?"

"Aye and nay," said Erling, "the Celts are a red-blooded race, and fierce as the winds of their isles. But my lord hath taken a great island to the north and proposeth to build an invincible fortress upon its wild shores."

Thorgunna clutched at the thought which presented itself. "If that be so, 'tis sure my lord will speedily betake himself away again. Good friend, do thou go with him?" This last she uttered so beseechingly that poor Erling forgot the difference in their station—her greatness and his nothingness—everything but the obvious fact that she was concerned for his safety.

"Fairest, my liege, all unworthy am I of such kind thoughtfulness. To have won approval in thy lovely eyes is better far than great renown and spoils of victory. 'Tis sweeter to have loved thee hopelessly than to have won a thousand lesser hearts."

Thorgunna was so touched that for a moment she was tempted to confess the true reason for her strange friendship, but the impulse passed. After all, she reflected, she had honored this Erling with her interest and attention, and the fate of soldiering was ever an uncertain one; so now she laughed and, laughing, gave the poor dupe her little hand to kiss.

“Good Erling, thou art by way of becoming a skald. I warn thee ’twill count less with me than the brave feats of war.”

“My sweetest lady, command me as thou wilt; do with me what thou wilt!” cried Erling impetuously, his dark head bowed above the slender hands he held most reverently.

Violent and rude was their awakening. Like the angry bellowing of a maddened steer, the dreadful din of Rafn’s unrestrained imprecations fell upon their startled ears. Led by the gloating steward, the angry chieftain stalked, sword drawn and eyes blazing, toward the wretched young creatures, who watched his approach with mingled emotions of dread and relief. For Erling understood as well as Thorgunna that such a friendship as theirs was doomed to a bitter end. He squared his young shoulders and waited, nor made any move to defend himself against his lord. Not so Thorgunna. When her father was within a few feet of the straight young figure she stepped between them and, quite her proud self, met her sire’s eyes fearlessly.

“My lord, a Rafn does not commit murder, and to draw steel against a man whose sword is tied^[3] constituteth no less.”

“Out on thee, wretched girl! Give way that I may dispatch that miserable carrion from the world of decent men!” he thundered, brandishing his longsword in her very face.

Erling tried to put her aside, but she clung to him.

“Touching devotion!” sneered the steward.

“Infamous hussy!” roared Rafn, “would thou hadst perished in the cradle. Give way to thy lord. I command thee!”

“Patience, master,” said Erling coldly, “thou shalt have thy justice. . .”

“Dog! Keep thy solace for thine own ears! Upon my saints, thou shalt suffer rightly!”

“Hear me, my lord,” Thorgunna interrupted her raging parent. “If fault there be in affection, the fault is mine. My lord steward will not gainsay me if I confess to indiscreet and wilful conduct. Is it not so, good steward?”

The steward grunted and twiddled his keys; he feared a trap, and, fearing, walked into it. “It grieves me, my lord,” he began, with a wicked leer at Thorgunna, “to be forced to admit that my never-to-be-forgotten late mistress’s daughter did so far forget her noble origin as to encourage an infatuation which a meaner lady might honorably have punished—nay,

forgive me, my lord, 'tis impossible to deny that the lady Thorgunna herself sought out this man from time to time to take pleasure in his company."

"Michael defend us!" groaned Rafn, his stormy temper blown out, like a gust through an open casement, leaving him sorely perplexed. "Michael defend us! 'Tis surely some sorcerer's spell! Wretch! What hast thou to say?" he demanded of Erling.

"The steward is as good a liar as a fox," Erling answered haughtily. "So fair a face as my lady's needs must draw all hearts."

Thorgunna interrupted them again. "Heed him not, my lord. He seeks to shield thy daughter as once he shielded thee. 'Tis best to have done with words. My lord, in all thy kingdom there is none more worthy than this same Erling, whose only fault is foolish loyalty. . . ."

"Enough, enough!" cried Rafn, "spare my old ears a deeper humiliation. Rash girl, thou art unwitting! Steward, what sayest thou?"

"My lord, is there aught to be said? The sad confession, beseems me, was all too clear."

"Troth! Clear as the fumes of hell! Michael uphold me! I must be just—but is the name of Rafn to be demeaned by bringing such a case to open justice?"

"There is the sword . . ." the steward began softly, and was silenced by Thorgunna.

"Of swords thou knowest little, good steward, yet for thy happy inclinations we thank thee. Aye, my lord father, there are the swords. Since to have loved thy daughter argues no craven soul, I beseech thee, who in truth art alive to give judgment but for Erling's stout right arm, condemn not a brave man to a felon's death, but grant him leave to fight thy chosen representatives for his liberty."

Rafn considered this request in frowning silence, his angry eyes resting first upon his beautiful daughter, pallid now as her northern snows, and then upon the youth at her side.

"What sayest thou, traitor?" he bellowed at Erling; but Erling seemed not to hear.

"Erling! God's Rood! what sayest thou?"

Then a smile broke over the face of Erling The Black. "My lord, bring on thy berserks! Never were swords drawn in sweeter cause!"

[3]

Norsemen tied their swords with a white ribbon when they were worn during feasts, etc., and in friendly territory.

CHAPTER III

Rafn was as jealous of his reputation for justice as of his family honor. Therefore Thorgunna's thrust concerning his indebtedness to Erling had gone deep. The blustering chieftain raged and roared like a caged lion, and, like the lion, was always brought up short by the bars of a sworn code. He dared not murder his soldier in the heat of passion lest men might whisper in times to come that the greatest chieftain in the Hebrides had foully dispatched a man to whose valor he owed his life.

No, never should such a charge be laid at his doors! Let his pride be dragged in the dust, if needs be, but his judgment should be noble. And what nobler judgment could be meted out to such a crime as Erling's than this of combat? Aye, as his poor bewitched daughter had suggested, Erling should die fighting to maintain his manhood and his master's justice.

To decide was to act where Rafn was concerned. That very day at morning-meat he thundered out his grievance and decision to his horrified retainers. The house of Rafn had met such insult as surely merited death. Yet, since no common soldier had dared to lift his eyes to his honored liege, except he were the victim of the Evil One, it was but Christian justice to temper punishment with mercy. So saying, Rafn dispatched his heralds over the countryside with a command to his people that they should foregather on the morrow at sunrise on the Plain of Justice to witness a mortal combat.

All that day the lady Thorgunna kept to her bower, for she suffered as she had not thought to suffer at the sad fate of this Erling, whose honest eyes had looked upon her so worshipfully. At dusk her father's page appeared to command her obedience to her lord's will. She was not to show her face on the Plains under penalty of death, nor to speak one word more to the doomed Erling.

Thorgunna dismissed the youth curtly. "Good page," she said coldly, "I have no mind to witness my lord's pretty villainies, which please you to relate truthfully. And if so be thou hast a good memory, remind my lord that the accused hath a grievous wound but partly healed."

When the messenger was gone Thorgunna called old Elspeth. "In all this 'stede' is there an honest thrall and one who thinks well of me?" she questioned earnestly.

"Dear my lady, doubt it not! There's many love thee truly, as well they might, who art of women the most charitable, as the most beautiful. . ."

“Good Elspeth, spare thy eloquence and tell me truly whom I can find to serve my need?”

Elspeth wrung her hands, despair and entreaty in her old eyes. “Sweet Thorgunna, thou wilt not cross thy sire in this evil hour, and there’s the steward. . .”

“Aye, there’s the steward, poor fool,” agreed Thorgunna, “whose violence served me well. Still thy trembling, poor Elspeth, ’tis not mine intention to leave this bower. Find me this honest thrall and thou shalt have an woolen shawl for the doing—nay, stop! tell him to see me on the morrow, for now I am wearied and would rest.”

But the night yielded little rest for Thorgunna, and she rose with the dawn, haggard and oppressed, nervously awaiting the first sounds of life from the Great Hall in the distance. And when at last the clang of sword and shield and the march of heavy feet told her the evil hour had come, she fell into a nervous rage. Pacing up and down her pretty bower, she stormed against her lord and threatened to defy his cold command. Wicked though she was to lead a man to death, she might at least be near to cheer him in his struggle.

Elspeth prayed to the category of her saints, albeit with little solace. Her sniffles irritated Thorgunna beyond measure, and at the same time turned her thoughts upon the thrall who was to do her bidding.

“Didst make my desire clear to Swart?” she demanded petulantly.

“When the people have gone to the Plains he will come, my lady. ’Twill not be safe ere then.”

“Thou hadst best be sure of it or else ’tis thyself must do the deed.”

Elspeth groaned. “’Tis my old bones will pay the penalty, no doubt, God’s pity on them! But Swart will come. He hath a fondness for this Erling, who shot him a roe the winter past, and—forgive my impertinence—he hateth my lord, who. . .”

“Nay, nay,” Thorgunna interrupted her sharply, “we speak not of my lord, but of his thrall. Get ye to the courtyard and wait his coming.”

Swart was as good as his word, for as soon as the last squad of soldiers had swept over the brow of the hill on their way to the place of judgments, he crept down from the crags where he had been keeping watch and raced to the bower.

Thorgunna was simple and direct. Drawing a bag of money from her bosom, she handed it to the thrall. “Good fellow, when they have slain the brave Erling,” she said, “use this gold to melt some stony heart, for I would have the soldier conveyed hither on his shield as becomes the noble dead. Dost understand?”

“Aye, aye, mistress—hither to thy bower.”

“Hither to my bower. Do this and thou shalt not lack the price of freedom; and now make haste.”

Meanwhile, a great company had foregathered on the Plains of Justice. This was in truth only a strip of sward flanked on either side by booths, where the nobles might sit and enjoy the prowess of their soldiers, or pass judgment upon duels and other forms of combat designed to settle insults and disputes. Rafn, his chief steward, and their intimates occupied the central booth, whilst ranged at their sides stood the bodyguard, resplendent in glittering armor.

In the centre of the field was an elevated, circular mound, where the crier took his place, and upon a sign from Rafn acquainted the populace with the wrongs to be righted.

“Men of the Isles,” he chanted solemnly, “be it known and comprehended that, most just and mercifully, the lord Rafn executeth judgment. Be it further known and comprehended that one Erling The Black, formerly of the exalted Bodyguard, hath been found guilty of treasonable conduct and condemned to expiate his offence in mortal combat.” The crier paused for effect, bowed to the lords before him, and with a flourish resumed:

“Erling The Black! stand forth, and if thou hast a grievance in this matter voice it in the hearing of the people, for thus justly ruleth the lord Rafn!”

A hush fell upon the curious multitude when Erling disengaged himself from a little knot of soldiers in the background and with measured and unhurried step pressed toward the crier. Arrived at the hill of judgment, Erling stood in silence a moment, the morning sunlight glancing from his polished armor in dazzling brilliance.

“Speak, Erling The Black, if thou hast aught to say.”

“I am ready, nor have complaint to make. Yet, if my lord so please, and would incline his ear, I should but ask to have my judgment tempered by the

ancient code.”

“Tempered!” exclaimed the crier incredulously, and in an undertone; “Fool, thou hast but killed thyself!” But the crowd, milling close in their curiosity, were enraptured with the idea. “Holla!” they shouted, “Judgment! judgment! Grant him the judgment! Holla! Erling The Black!”

The crier looked across at his lord, and Rafn, ever quick to respond to a noble impulse, nodded. Very much displeased with the whole affair—for he had bet a round sum that Erling would quickly dispatch the berserk chosen to combat him—the crier chanted the old Norse code: “‘A brave man should attack two enemies, stand to meet three, give ground a little to four, and only retreat before five.’ This is our father’s code, by which brave counsel the accused desireth to abide in lieu of more lenient judgment.”

At the close of this delivery Rafn stood up and with gruff sincerity bade his berserks weigh and reflect whether they were prepared to defend their master’s honor. “If so,” said he, “step to the field and wipe out the indignity which stains mine house and name.”

Men did not soon forget the combat which now ensued. Five men were in the field—the flower of Rafn’s bodyguard—strong as lions and unbelievably agile despite their heavy war-gear. But Erling faced his opponents with that strange exaltation which ever fortifies a brave but doomed heart.

So sudden was his onslaught that his opponents barely had time to guard themselves. Lightning swift, his sword cleft the shield and helmet of the foremost berserk, striking him down, a bleeding corpse. The remaining three leaped to right and left and then with enraged howls and redoubled fury they closed in upon him. Erling was well satisfied to leave the attack to them, for he was resolved to sell his life dearly. He eluded their assaults with amazing skill and dexterity, keenly alert and watchful for the crucial moment when he might best render punishment. He whirled and wheeled; leaped and sparred; the while their blows rained like hail upon shield and broadsword. He seemed at once everywhere and nowhere—a whirling dynamo of gleaming steel and supple muscle. His cat-like movements and grim laughter exasperated Rafn’s berserks, lashing them into that peculiar frenzy common to their kind. As their gorge rose they roared their fury.

This blinding madness served Erling only the better. So powerful was he that he could leap his length, whether up or backward whilst clad in full armor, and he might undoubtedly have worn out his enemies by these tactics had his strength not been much depleted by the wound still gaping in his left

shoulder. But as it was he knew his vigor to be failing, and this knowledge sharpened his wits. Plainly, the crucial time was come. He slackened his play, thereby drawing down upon himself a fierce yell of joy. But, swift as light, when his enemy rushed in to take advantage of his weakness, he made as if to leap back, but instead swerved sharply to the left, whirling his great sword furiously in the dreaded windmill circles. Barely escaping this whirlwind of death, one of the berserks tripped on a loosened thong and lurched in his comrade's way. Terrible as Thor's thunderbolt, Erling charged, cutting to left and right with his double blade, killing the one outright and so wounding the other that he was barely able to crawl from the field.

But there still remained Olaf The Broad, a ruthless and terrible foe, whom the sudden and unexpected end of his companions roused to an inhuman fury. His blood-stained visage was terrible to behold, his eyes rolled in his head, he foamed at the mouth and bellowed his hate like a goaded bull. "Yield, murderer! Yield!" he bellowed, "Yield, yield!"

They leaped at one another with frightful energy, hacking and hewing, the din of their combat making horrid thunder in that gentle dale. Their madness spread to the populace. Wild and fierce-hearted, it broke into an uproarious excitement. "At him, Erling! At him!" yelled a voice. "On, Olaf! on, Olaf!" shouted another. "An hundred ells of wool on Erling!" cried a third. "Kill him, Erling, kill him!" screamed a woman, "Thou shalt have favor! Kill him! Kill him!"

But neither Erling nor Olaf heard their cheers or their imprecations. With glazed and bloodshot eyes and bursting eardrums, they grappled now, man to man. Broken were their longswords; their axes and shields discarded; knife and muscle were to end the fray. They strained, they thrust, they toppled and fell like twin towers of steel, and lay wallowing in their own blood. "Up, Erling! Up, Olaf! Up and at it!" roared the frenzied people. Then, as suddenly as if the heavens had parted, revealing the wrath of their God, a deathlike calm fell upon that maddened multitude—a silence which seemed to quiver and moan in shuddering sympathy with the human tragedy before them.

In one last final effort the antagonists had struggled to their knees. Their eyes were unseeing; their tortured breathing came in rattling gasps—thus for a moment they swayed in ghastly weakness and then, like an automaton charged with sudden power, up flew Erling's hand, the knife descending on Olaf's throat. Conquered and conqueror, they rolled over and lay motionless on the ground.

CHAPTER IV

The awe-stricken silence which had followed the previous uproar now broke in a storm of tumult. Cheers, hysterical sobs and ribald laughter mingled together in one intolerable clamor; a mob's tribute to poor fallen Valor. So crazed were the people to obtain a closer view of the torn and bleeding heroes that Rafn's soldiers were compelled to beat them back lest, in their cruel curiosity, they should tread one another underfoot.

Whilst this chaos was being reduced to a semblance of peace and order, the nobles looked on in utter indifference. For them all interest had died with that downward plunge of Erling's shining blade, and this unrestrained feeling on the part of the populace aroused in them no more than a bored contempt. A living berserk was an interesting speculation well worth a wager or two, but a dead one could scarcely be regarded more than any other carrion. They were eager to be off; back to the hall where they might drain their alehorns in comfort and settle their bets with right good will.

But in his secret heart Rafn harbored a more humane sentiment towards his men, and had it been compatible with the prevailing ideas of dignity he would have welcomed a less exacting honor. He was now determined to show himself magnanimous. When he could make himself heard, he stepped to the mound and in stentorian tones acknowledged his eternal gratitude to the men who had died defending his good name, and after exhausting his repertoire of praise he ordered his bodyguard to carry home the valourous dead that they might be given suitable burial in consecrated ground. Having so spoken, he turned on his heel and without so much as a glance in Erling's direction, quitted the field.

Now was the time arrived for Swart to act. As soon as Rafn and his coterie were well on their way, he leaped to a nearby boulder and, dangling his money-bag, appealed to the justice of the people. Was so brave and gallant a Norseman as Erling to be left to the mercy of his enemy and the loathsome funeral rites of the vultures? Was not a brave defence the outward mark of a courageous and sincere heart? Who dared judge the dead, and who withhold from the departed his honest due?

A hissing roar, as of the turning tide, was Swart's answer, and, quick to sense the awakening sympathy of his kind, he proceeded to confide to them his lady's trust. "Who, then," said he at the finish, "hath an heart to do the lady Thorgunna's bidding?"

More than enough responded. Indeed, so many stalwart lads stepped forward that the difficulty resolved itself into an unbiassed choice. But at last Swart settled upon six youths from the interior of the island, concluding wisely that it were as well for the participants in this kindly act to be recruited from amongst such of Rafn's people as were not under his immediate eye.

So it came to pass that Thorgunna, watching from her bower with nervous impatience, saw at last where a procession, scarcely less dignified than the one which signaled the coming of Rafn's berserks, wended its way down from the hills. True, the lads carrying Erling's inert body on his dented and gory shield were not clad in the glittering costly habiliments of Rafn's bodyguard; their coarse tunics were brown as the earth they tended, but their mien was as marked with native dignity as the rugged Hebridene hills.

Tears sprang to Thorgunna's eyes, and at her side poor Elspeth groaned and crossed herself devoutly. "Peace to his soul," muttered the old woman huskily, but her mistress said no word until the sad group halted before her doorway. Then, true to her Norse blood, she drew herself up proudly and, motioning them to enter, spoke the time-honored greeting: "Home comes the warrior dead. To him be everlasting glory. Nor with him enter grief nor dark dismay, but deathless pride to take its kingly seat and to forever bide." No greater homage could the lady pay.

But Thorgunna was not a woman to be content with sentimental utterances alone. There was much to be done, and it must be done hastily ere her sire got wind of it. With exceeding calmness she outlined her plans. She meant to have the dead man conveyed to her bird-isles and buried there in a certain cave looking out to sea. His armor and weapons were to be cleaned of their livid stains and polished as befitted so bold a warrior, and his body prepared for interment with all the care customarily reserved for those of nobler origin. This she would have done if perchance it might ease the burden of remorse which weighed so heavily upon her soul.

Of that little company every one was eager to do her bidding, and while the hill-men were polishing the armor, Swart and Elspeth set about bathing the frightfully mutilated body of the young soldier. Elspeth wept and groaned at each new wound revealed, the mother-heart in her stirred to rebellion at such reckless annihilation of precious life.

It was a sad duty this of hiding ghastly, gaping wounds in the tender flesh under vestments of new-spun linen. Elspeth's tears flowed fast and her prayers were tireless. Nor was her grief the less when, their office

concluded, Erling lay upon his impromptu couch in all the splendid dignity of death. She could not leave him. It was as if his dark and solemn beauty held her in a spell. Thorgunna, too, seemed incapable of further action and sat at Erling's head, her hands lying idly in her lap, her thoughts going round and round in a tortuous treadmill of misery. For the first time she doubted the code of her fathers. What, after all, was honor that it should be so dearly purchased? Nay, nay, that was not the question! But was honor honor if so upheld? And was not love in itself a worthy thing? But what was love? To Rafn it was a passion for renown; to her it was the memory of Leif. And to this honest Erling, dead before her, what but the smiles she had so falsely given? So round and round in relentless questioning her troubled thoughts took their way. And in the background of her heart and mind burned the intolerable knowledge of her sheer deception.

A sudden scream from Elspeth broke in upon the torpor of her misery. "Michael defend us! The holy angels guard our senses! Sawest it, my lady?"

"Sawest what?" queried Thorgunna fearfully.

"God's mercy!" screamed Elspeth again. "'Tis true, he lives! He is not dead!"

It was true enough. Somewhere a spark of life had lain hidden, and now manifested itself in a slow tremor which troubled the quiet body of Erling as a passing wind may momentarily disturb the tranquility of a calm sea. In a fever of sudden hopes and fears the women resorted to what simple restoratives they knew, and in an agony of suspense hovered over the soldier.

In response, whether to prayer or potion, the pale lids lifted at last from Erling's good brown eyes, and in that second Thorgunna's humanity triumphed over her station. With a cry of thankfulness she dropped to her knees and, taking a poor bruised hand in her own, began pouring out her remorse and undying gratitude. With the tears streaming down her lovely face, she confessed her wretched behavior and implored his pardon. And as she wept and agonized, it seemed the fire of her distress entered the body of Erling to revive it.

From who shall say what depths of eternity consciousness was returning; the glassy eyes softened as the light of reason entered once again, and at last an unmistakable smile curved the corners of the laughter-loving lips.

"My lady, my lady," sobbed Elspeth, "compose thyself, for 'tis plain our Erling wishes us to know somewhat."

It was true. The dying man was gathering his little spark of life in one last splendid effort. And he being Nature's child—Nature, whose very name is struggle, whose aim an overcoming—she did not let him fail.

“God rest thee, lady, and speed thy lord's return.” The words came very slowly, very faintly, but they struck upon Thorgunna's heart like hammers of steel. Her eyes dilated and she thought for a moment that her reason was failing. . . He knew . . . he knew! He had always known the truth! At that a great light flooded her soul. And then the lady Thorgunna did a beautiful thing. With loving care she slipped her arms around the expiring Erling and, drawing his head to her bosom, kissed the pallid brow. “Dear brother of my heart,” she sobbed, “forgive our insolence and vanity. In life we held thee lowly; in death thou knowest our littleness. From the richness of thy heart forgive our pitiable insolence!”

But whether Erling heard this tearful plea or comprehended any part of it no one will ever know. A weary sigh, like the breath of lonely autumn stirring withered leaves, broke from his lips, and with no other heraldry his brave soul passed.

CHAPTER V

Fortunately for the lady Thorgunna an event now befell which was destined to absorb her father's attention to the exclusion of all else for some time to come. Before the alehorns had been drained in memory of Rafn's berserks, a messenger stumbled in from the North to warn his master that the terrible Celts were preparing to storm the island he had so lately wrested from their fierce grasp.

Rafn paled at the news; not that he dreaded a fresh encounter with his arch-enemy, but because it struck him as singularly ominous that this uprising should take place on the eve of Erling's death. He could not escape a sense of guilt in the matter, though convention had justified his action. Certain it was that were it not for Erling's loyalty and heroic intervention on that fateful night when a Celtic javelin would have made quick work of him, he had not lived to enjoy his coveted possession.

This island had long been a bone of contention between the Hebridene chieftain and the Celtic tribes of the mainland; principally because of its situation in the Minch and its almost inaccessible approach, characteristics which made it especially desirable as the site of a formidable fortress. Such a fortress Rafn was ambitious to build. And now, just when success seemed assured, this new danger threatened him. Was it possible that a dead man's curse was about to be wreaked upon him? Had he been too hasty in judgment and unjust in condemnation? But there was no time to give way to melancholy forebodings. The little handful of men he had left to guard his new possession would be overthrown quickly, and, once again entrenched behind those lofty crags and impregnable promontories, the enemy would hold out indefinitely.

This knowledge eclipsed every other concern. Consequently Thorgunna and her insubordination faded from his mind—might, in fact, never have existed for all the thoughts he bestowed upon her. Leaving his tables still groaning beneath their burden of meats and wine, Rafn and his warriors embarked under cover of darkness, and, with hate to stiffen their muscles, made quick work of crossing the little Minch—that restless arm of sea which separated Rafn's holdings in the outer Hebrides from this coveted island of the inner group.

So while her sire waged his battles in the North, Thorgunna found temporary peace wherein to lave her troubled spirit and fortify it against the

ordeals to come. Seldom now was she seen abroad. Even her splendid courage quailed at the thought of public curiosity and possible pity.

Most of the day she spent in her bower, weaving bits of tapestry, into the woof of which she fashioned her dreams. But oftentimes at night she stole away in her little skiff and, with Swart to ply the oars, followed the dim seas to her bird-isle. Here, while her faithful thrall caught up with his interrupted sleep, she kept tryst with the memory of happier days and planned for that glad future when Leif and she should be reunited. Thus the slow months wore away, their drab quietness welcome enough to poor soul-weary Thorgunna, who knew not what her fate might be once her sire was returned and acquainted with her condition.

In the meantime Rafn had been entirely successful in routing his enemies, and though the uprising was in itself unimportant, it had the effect of rousing him to a clearer conception of the imperative need to fortify his island if he wished to retain possession of it. Most certainly he courted no other possibility. In fact, some considerable work had already been done to that end, as a mountainous pile of quarried rock and a solid and extensive foundation convincingly testified. Moreover, it was whispered abroad that the great headland was in truth honeycombed with serpentine labyrinths and secret dungeons, which valuable attributes were a touching memorial to the defeated hopes of the vanquished Celts.

At any rate, thoroughly convinced of his need and the wisdom of his plans, Rafn now plunged into the work, driving his men night and day with characteristic fury. And not until a massive wall circled the brows of that inaccessible headland, enclosing jealously the rapidly growing castle, did he bethink himself of home and the pleasures there awaiting him.

He was, however, doomed to disappointment and chagrin. Though he had sent a herald to announce his home-coming, no radiant daughter sped to meet him, nor with her pretty charms cast a spell of graciousness over the banquet dutifully spread in his honor. His first reaction was sheer amazement. Why was she not there as filial affection demanded? What womanish whim possessed her?

Then came fear, and very paralysing fear, for after his fashion the stormy chieftain loved his daughter. Something had befallen her; he saw it confirmed in the downcast faces about him. But what, and why had he not been notified? What terrible thing held his retainers thus glum and silent? Death? Nay, death had moved them to tears and sympathy. . . Fear, contending with natural impatience, rendered him speechless for the

moment. Nor was his apprehension lessened when he finally forced himself to voice his dread, only to be met with a still more leaden silence and an uneasy stir like the breaking of a destructive wave over the entire hall.

Certain now that his surmise was correct, he groaned in travail of spirit. "Oh, my daughter, my poor, sweet daughter," he muttered. "She is dead, the mainstay of my hopes; she is dead, the light of mine house!"

At this display of unexpected sentiment in the rude old warrior, some light-headed retainer at the back of the great hall tittered foolishly. The sound affected the chieftain like a blow across the face. Livid and ashen in turn, he glared around the room. Not a man dared meet his eye; from the least to the greatest not a subject but seemed turned to stone, and engraven on each face was the unmistakable consciousness of shame. Never had the proud chieftain endured such a moment; never in life was he to forget it. It was altogether intolerable, like some hideous nightmare from which there was no escape. He thought the heart must surely break in his bosom, for instinct, no less than his audience, confirmed his fear that some ghastly thing had overtaken the beloved and only child of his honest love. A thousand evils presented themselves . . . mutilation . . . madness . . . sudden death. . . But would such misfortune occasion laughter? And such insulting laughter! Came then,—who can say from what mysterious source?—an ugly suspicion of the truth, sending his blood in rivers of ice through his veins. "God of my fathers, forfend us!" he groaned in sudden and passionate piety. And their fatalism, if not their deity, came to his aid. What the Fates had decreed must doubtless be, and a man must not cringe even before his destroyer. So much he recalled of his code, and it enabled him to summon up a smile, wry enough it is true, but, after all, somewhat gallant; and, calling for the alehorns, he made as though to dismiss the matter from his mind.

"Truth, good friends," he cried, "of troubles there be plenty, but of ale never enough. Drink, then, and let us be rid of nagging misery . . . at best she's but a glum-faced concubine. Drink on, my lads, to a better mistress and a softer bed!"

But howsoever much they affected carefree revelry, there was underlying it all a sinister something of which they were all aware. And Rafn, keenly alive to the situation, waited impatiently for the magic of his ale to dull the edge of idle curiosity and waken interest in less morbid issues. Then, leaving his company to their alcoholic dreams, he slipped out quietly and hurried to his daughter's bower.

She had known he would come and, pale as death but unbelievably composed, she waited his denunciation. The sight of her, confirming as it did his worst suspicion, quite unmanned him. There was about her, too, a strange dignity and a quiet strength before which he felt completely helpless. What could he say to this stately creature who was, after all, blood of his blood and, he now surmised, as impatient of convention as he of any barrier. Meeting her thus he seemed to be confronting his own rebel-nature face to face.

The knowledge of this might have softened his judgment had he not in fancy heard again that contemptuous snicker. The memory of it maddened him. By all the Holy Saints, how had she dared to drag his honor in the dust? To make herself a laughing-stock for fools and the butt of vulgar jesting! Cholerick always, he now almost strangled in the fury of his soaring rage. Dreadful was the word he hurled at her. At sound of it the nails of her little hands bit so deep into the tender palms that the blood broke through; but she said nothing. She let him heap malediction upon malediction until his anger had run its volcanic course. It left him sadly shaken and bewildered. Flinging himself on a bench, he fell to laughing foolishly, "God's rood! a man knoweth little what thing he nurseth in his bosom! The while he buildeth strongholds against the stranger, his own blood raiseth up dishonor to slay him! God wot, I had not deemed my daughter such a traitoress!"

"My lord, were Norse pride less exacting, the wretched creature thou railest at might even now be an honest matron, nor forced to hear thy shameful speeches!"

"Heaven-blest Michael!" gasped the amazed chieftain, momentarily dumbfounded by such temerity. And, being quite unconscious of her true meaning, concluding, naturally, that it was of Erling she thought, he immediately flew into an ungovernable rage—"Wert thou but a man I'd kill thee in thy tracks! Decadence taints thy blood; 'twere better off the earth! As God's my judge, thou wert much better dead!"

"My lord, if taint there be, who is the author of it? If not thyself, thou must have chosen ill in her who mothered me. And if not she. . ."

"Silence!" roared the chieftain. He had no taste just then for family history. "By my saints, thou shalt be silenced properly."

At this old Elspeth, who had all the while been huddled in the corner, came and flung herself at her master's feet. "Oh, good my lord, be merciful. Think upon thy sainted lady these many years in paradise. Think upon her tears at knowledge of her dear child's misery. . . Think how 'twas to thy care

she left the babe. . . And thou, my lord, hast thought more of wars than of her happiness? Think not by murdering thy child to escape the punishment of paternal duties undischarged.”

Rafn glared at the old creature balefully, but in truth his heart was troubled. There was something in what she said—he had not considered his motherless daughter as he might have done. Why had he not, long ere this, married her off, safeguarded her from mischief and temptations? Why had he not considered what pitfalls line poor Beauty’s path? Why not, indeed!

“Fool!” he barked at Elspeth, by way of easing his conscience, “who said aught of murder? Though, doubtless, thy years have taught thee to believe that nothing less may silence women’s prattle! But know, good wench, mine is a better plan. Silenced ye shall be, and silenced every other wagging tongue besides. Thou needest not look so scandalized, my crone, ’tis but to piety I mean to wed a lovely daughter—aye, ye shall both have goodly opportunity to babble prayers and to reflect upon the soul’s iniquity.” Then he fell to laughing again, mirthlessly, his inflamed eyes running from one to the other in cruel meditateness.

“God’s rood! ’Tis strange what deeds men do and the reasons of them! Had I but known my fortress was to home so fair a captive I might have builded even stouter walls! Yea, ’tis curious to think on it. . .”

“Master,” old Elspeth began imploringly, “I pray thee put our minds at rest. Taunt us no more, nor torture us thus cruelly, but tell us what thy pleasure is in this?”

“Pleasure? Thinkest it pleasure to exile an only child?”

“Exile? Oh, good my lord . . .” broke from Thorgunna, vague hope stirring to life in her heart; but at the look in her father’s eyes she checked herself abruptly and bent her head submissively.

“Wretched creature, think not to air thy shame in distant lands, to work more havoc amongst decent folk. Nay, thou shalt be made to rue thy worthlessness. These shores will see the last of thee ere long, and that proud island which cost me such great price shall keep thee safe”—again that horrible laughter shook him—“Aye, my sea-girt Dun David—ah, thou seest the humor of thy blind sire’s choice of names! A brave name for a bold fortress, thought I—well, thou wilt have time enough to coin the laughter of it, for, as God’s my Truth, ’twill keep thee out of mischief for a while!”

“Truly, my lord,” his daughter somehow had wit and courage to respond, “’tis not so humorous as just. If ’twas meet to honor my grandsire’s memory

by so grim a pile—he who scrupled not to take love where he found it—’tis not unsuited to add a sacrifice of human devotion. A prison built to honor David Rafn without its prisoner of love were but a farce indeed!”

CHAPTER VI

Over his father's bier Leif assumed official command at Brattalid. Men drained the farewell horn to the old lord and pledged allegiance to the new upon that impressive occasion. All the district was there to render honor to their country's founder. Yet, despite this proof of affection, many an old man, though confessing the new religion of simplicity, felt that an indignity was being done the venerable chieftain because his funeral rites were so lacking in that magnificence which once would have been considered his indispensable due.

But in all things Leif had respected his father's desires. He had the funeral-mound raised high on a promontory overlooking the sea, and thither was the body of the aged chieftain carried in solemn silence. In yet deeper silence he was lifted into the throne-seat awaiting him in the mound. Seated there in state, his battle-axe and shield and sword beside him, Eric of the proud heart appeared to smile out upon his people a beneficent farewell.

When the mound had been walled in it was heaped high with earth and rock that none might know it from the Greenland hill. And, in further concession to Eric's wish, a fire was kindled upon the mound, a leaping blaze to light his lonely soul to Valhalla and to shine out upon the darkling seas he had loved so well. And this beacon, lighting for him the way to fields Elysian, was to be kept burning through the winter twilight that it might greet the spring and with it the first mariner home from the sea.

Despite her Christian fervor, Thorhild had returned to Brattalid to participate in her late lord's wake. Now he was dead her heart reproached her for her former coldness, and to make amends she gratefully accepted any opportunity wherein she might show honor to his memory. With the help of the disconsolate Gudrid, she served the guests "the horn of remembrance" with a touching dignity which transformed the old custom into a beautiful and holy rite.

Clad in their finest robes the women passed round the hall; preceding them walked a diminutive thrall, all decked in green and gold, carrying a silver bowl and dippers. From this bowl of ceremonial wine the ladies filled the drinking-horn of each guest, beginning with the most distinguished noble and ending with the humble retainers who lined the outer benches. When all were served Leif rose to his feet and called upon the assembly to pledge an oath to Eric's memory—to hold it inviolate above all reproach and indignity, as they had held him in life. Never was a "skal" to a Norseman's

memory more readily drained, for with all his faults Eric had been greatly respected.

The ladies now retired, leaving the men to their banquet, when, like every other wake, it resolved itself into a great emotional revival. Friendships were renewed, forgotten ambitions re-energized, and noble resolutions burst forth with hot intensity.

“Let our honor be tangible and noteworthy,” began one greybeard; “let us honor our lamented leader by living greater lives.”

“Aye! Aye! let us live greatly, as Eric lived!”

“Let us make this country such as he dreamed,” another voice responded; “a greater Greenland is the fittest memorial.”

“’Tis well put,” agreed the first speaker, who, besides being the oldest guest present, was perhaps the most distinguished so far as lineage went, and was, therefore, privileged to be heard. “’Tis well and sanely put, and to that end let us now pledge his son, whose valor we know and whose sagacity we may well trust.”

There was no half-heartedness about the response which followed. Not a man but sprang to his feet eager to demonstrate his loyalty to Eric’s son. They drank to his house and they drank to his kindred. And, since the true Norse nature has about it something of the vastness and stern dignity of the eternal hills which first cradled the race, there was no question of compromise. Leif was their chosen leader henceforth. In all things were they to uphold him and the pride of Brattalid.

Yet, notwithstanding these sincere protestations, Leif smiled to himself in sorry humor when at last he was left alone. “In all things to uphold me!” He turned the words over in his mind as a connoisseur of ancient trinkets turns a new acquisition over in his palm. And he reflected that in common with all antiquity the principal value of the avowal of loyalty lay in the glamor it carried from the past. Their fervor was indeed good to look upon, but quite possibly it was not suited to a workaday world. He knew for a certainty that every man who had taken that pledge would follow him to death in any quarrel, but would they follow him in the dull pursuits of peace? He thought not. Nonetheless, since he was doomed to a life of service in this barren country, he meant to make that service worthy. “Ye shall indeed uphold me, my good countrymen,” Leif told himself, adding grimly, “and for that upholding I doubt not ye shall hate me mightily.”

CHAPTER VII

During his pilgrimage in the cause of the Holy Faith Leif had conscientiously observed the ways and means of life in Greenland, and he had come to the conclusion that much of the prevailing distress was the direct result of poor management. Of the available produce the distribution was both inadequate and unequal. The wretched condition of the few existing roads, which connected the two main settlements with their far-flung and isolated whaling firths and fishing-grounds was, he thought, the worst contributing factor in a bad situation. Obviously, then, his first effort must be towards the betterment of that condition. And so the greatest of adventurers, denied the freedom of the seas he loved, decided to carve out for himself a passable highway over the sullen country which was his living prison. Indeed, as has been said, there was in Leif the foreshadowing of a new type—the invincible Norman type—observant, appropriating, retentive. While in Norway he had not been content merely to bask in the King's favor, or mechanically to carry out the Royal will. He had taken the keenest interest in the economic and social advancement of the people. He had been especially attracted by the cod and whale-oil industry, which was rapidly growing into an invaluable asset to Norway. Such an industry might well be fostered in Greenland. Indeed, he already dreamed of an overland highway, with storehouses at stated intervals, where huge quantities of cured fish and oils, whalebone (Greenland ivory) and hides, should be stored for future supply and export.

If he could bring this about, and additionally could institute a yearly expedition to Vineland, he felt certain that Greenland's comfort would be fairly assured even though Norwegian traders failed them. In any case he thought it just as well not to be entirely dependent upon Royal caprice.

King Olaf would make good his promise to send ships, this Leif knew. But after Olaf, what then? Olaf was not of such stuff as dies in dotage! No, something warned Leif that a king as fiery as Olaf was destined to flash across Norway like a mighty comet—no sooner recognized than gone. Such is the common fate of glory.

None the less, howsoever wise his decision might be, Leif knew that his efforts would be impeded on every hand by prejudice and intolerance. The leading men of Greenland were recruited in most part from the fighting stock of Iceland, and for men of that breed the building of roads and the peaceable pursuits of commerce had little fascination or appeal. Such men were accustomed through precedent to leave the care of field and herd and

hall to slave and house-karl. If the seasons brought failure it troubled them little. Why should it? Was there not a wide sea, a treasure-laden sea, without their borders? And were not their long-ships equal to any chase? To men accustomed so to reason, Leif's economic ambitions were bound to appear singular in the extreme. Small wonder then, that an iron determination, cold and calculating, by degrees usurped what in him was formerly buoyant enthusiasm. In truth, this period would have been unbearable to Leif but for the quiet administrations of Gudrid.

Gudrid had lost both husband and father in the same season, since which terrible time she had adopted the charge of Brattalid, for Thorhild would not leave her church. There was comfort in her gentle ways and subtle sympathy. She went about the old Hall with sweet solemnity, like a ray of golden light gliding over cloistered walls. She seldom spoke, and always with a soft gravity, as if each word were lifted from the sacred places of her heart.

Leif often watched her with an intense, absorbing gaze as she stepped about the Hall filling the horns of an evening, so small and fragile, yet with what unmistakable dignity. Weak she might be, but as safe in that weakness as a colossus in his strength, for she was that type of noblewoman which none might mistake. And since she was incapable of suspecting indignity from any man, the meanest thrall would have died to save her from disillusionment.

Leif found her gifted in understanding as well as in sympathy. On many an evening he left his own seat and unceremoniously seated himself on a footstool before her cross-bench. Then he would tell her of the plans which burned within him, and always she listened with pretty respect. And ever she found these plans entrancing and wonderful.

"My lord," she once said to him, "all that I possess I offer gladly if so be it may serve thee."

"Thou art much too generous, my sister," he returned smilingly, and read only womanly modesty in the rosy wave which swept across her fair face.

But on the day Leif set forth to interview the district leaders on the subject of road-building, the old steward, who was his sole companion, mentioned Gudrid significantly as they cantered up the hills of Brattalid.

"A fairer mistress this great Hall could not boast," said he.

Leif experienced a distinct sense of shock, disagreeable shock, and for the moment was really angry with the old man. But Erlind seemed

unconscious of the reproving frown. "There is none fairer in Greenland," he stubbornly continued.

"True, true," Leif agreed irritably, "yet if she be such a treasure the less we boast the better lest we lose her."

"There is a surer remedy, my lord. . ."

"In remedies I am little learned, good sir."

"Then, there is a duty . . ." the steward insisted.

"Of duties I have in plenty," Leif interrupted sharply as he spurred his horse into a brisker pace. He permitted no reopening of the subject and soon forgot the old man's insistence and foolish insinuation in the stress of the day's events.

Leif was warmly welcomed wherever he went, but, as he had anticipated, found little enough interest in his proposal, and very few anxious to join him in his purpose. This only served to make him the more determined to win. He would batter down their indifference! He would wear them out with repeated attacks—at least, he mused humorously, the problem will vex them! And what, if not vexation, could rouse a Norseman to furious activity?

CHAPTER VIII

In returning, after weary days of hard travel and still harder effort at persuasion, Leif came homeward by way of Gardar. There all was in its usual state of bustling commotion. Certainly the air of constant activity had not diminished under the sharp eyes of the new mistress. Freydis had a way with her and the way was effective.

She had her share of intelligence, this black-eyed daughter of Eric, and with it a keen sense of management. Very little explanation was necessary to convince her of the wisdom of Leif's plans. She saw in a flash what it would mean to her husband's scattered possessions if this scheme of bettering distribution and foreign trade materialized. Why, the overland highway alone would save them huge losses in waste product! She would support him, never fear! Gardar would support him she assured her brother heartily.

Leif was wickedly amused to see how completely Freydis ignored her husband's right to an opinion. It was very evident that Thorvald had not so much taken to bosom a wife as a master. He would have preferred to maintain an existence of easy comfort, trusting to his treasure-chests for future safety. His ambitious lady was otherwise inclined. Treasure-chests, she reminded him scornfully, were not to be emptied, but filled. Indeed, she was all for making a legal contract with her brother, and that immediately.

But though Leif reproached himself for lack of appreciation, he could not for the life of him respond to this extreme enthusiasm, which, despite his need, repelled rather than encouraged him. He avoided a clash by declaring that the situation did not call for any such heroic and hasty measures, a rebuke which the hot-tempered Freydis accepted with admirable grace. Over the evening meal—not quite so lavish as Leif remembered Thorvald's meals to have been of old—she introduced another topic.

"It is said that Gudrid makes a fair mistress at Brattalid. No doubt such is her ambition."

"Madam," Leif returned with quiet irony, "'tis scarce conceivable she could be aught else—she was not idly named Gudrid The Fair."

Freydis laughed gaily at the retort, but her dark face flushed hotly. "Claws are hid in soft cushions, my lord brother, and a gentle hand may itch for gold. . . In truth, 'twould grieve me sore to have thee played upon."

"Thou art unduly concerned," retorted Leif haughtily, "and meseems it ill becomes thee. Yet, lest thou shouldst grow wrinkled with anxiety for me,

I do assure thee that no lady in Greenland dreams of Leif but to her own distress.”

“Poor maids!” Freydis trilled merrily, pleased with his answer, and equally pleased to have ruffled his pride, “poor, unhappy maids!” Then, summoning a thrall, she ordered a bowl of spiced ale and with her own hands she served her brother.

During the remainder of Leif’s visit Freydis showered comforts upon him; the entire retinue of servants were at his beck and call—and woe to those who should displease him! She did more. Having recognized how deep-seated her brother’s prejudice was toward herself, she sedulously avoided further reference to his plans. Instead, she harangued her poor husband in secret and through him accomplished her desire.

When Leif took his departure he had won Thorvald’s promised support—so he believed—and Freydis was content to let him believe it. She was graciousness itself; no courtesy was omitted. Before he was permitted to ride away she insisted, with happy pride, that small Eric must present the stirrup-cup to his distinguished uncle. “Findest him not a promising lad?” she asked as her brother received the drink from the little boy’s hand. The child was comely enough, and certainly not lacking in fine attire. His bright blue jerkin was bordered in silver, and the grey cape swinging from his shoulders was lined with richest scarlet. A handsome lad he was, but with his mother’s swarthy complexion predominant.

Noting all this, Leif could not check an indescribable gesture of amused contempt. For there had flashed into his mind the unpleasant memory of how this swarthiness was acquired. “He looks over much like his grandmother to bear the name of Eric,” he thought to himself, but to Freydis he replied sensibly, if somewhat coldly, “The lad seems sound enough—and in a manchild ’tis what’s required. Step back, young Eric! Farewell, good mistress, farewell!”

Freydis stood, her son’s hand in hers, watching the gallant rider disappearing down the glade, black anger in her heart. “Aye, my haughty brother,” she whispered through clenched teeth, “sound enough to sit one day in Eric’s Hall.”

In sudden passion she caught the little boy to her bosom, crushing him in so fierce an embrace that he shrieked, and in as swift a fury sank his little teeth in the firm column of her throat.

Freydis’ laughter rang out sheer and sharp with the delight of it. “Oh, thou art a Viking, my Eric. Thou wilt avenge the stain upon thy mother’s

name.” And in the best of spirits she swept into the Hall and hunted up her lord that she might show him the marks of the fierce young teeth.

CHAPTER IX

When Leif and his companion topped the hills of Brattalid they reined in abruptly, so unexpected and astonishing was the scene which greeted their eyes. Far below lay the fiord in broad silver folds, and, riding the restless swell, a strange ship. It was a wondrous ship—a black dragon, encrusted with gold-tipped scales—and in the sharply reflected sunlight the effect produced by this singular coloring resembled a constant play of leaping flames—darting tongues that flickered and flashed about the noble bows and arching neck of the huge vessel.

Frozen and transfixed with the suddenness of the sight, Leif dared not believe his eyes. Cruel, icy tremors, tortuous as an ague chill, pervaded his hardy frame, and more cruel than these was the alternate tide of hot fears and joyous hopes. What if she had come at last? What if this ship of flame had brought his loved and never-to-be-forgotten lady? The mere possibility acted like a drug on his senses, reducing to helplessness while it incited to madness. Life seemed to hang suspended, in that exacting moment, betwixt two dread extremes.

Fortunately, the old steward, intent upon the same sight, had not observed the play of strong emotions so manifest in Leif's face, but he did give vent to a peevish exclamation when the young lord's horse suddenly reared high under an impatient heel and, like a winged creature, dashed down the sharp decline. "Now by the new Devil of the Christians, my lord thinks mischief!" muttered the old man, and made after him as fast as age and caution permitted.

Leif did indeed find a distinguished visitor waiting him at Brattalid, one of the wealthiest traders of the time—Karlsefne, the Iclander. But he was doomed to disappointment in matters of the heart; there were no women in Karlsefne's party. His mission was one of traffic only. He had sixty men in his crew and a rich cargo, and he proved a most generous and jovial guest.

Karlsefne spent the winter at Brattalid, giving himself heartily to the merrymaking. But this did not prevent him from carrying on a thriving trade. From far and near visitors flocked to meet the entertaining Iclander, and ended by bringing him skins and ivory and Greenland frieze in exchange for his grain and nails and much needed tar.

Naturally, Karlsefne became profoundly interested in Leif's tale of Vineland, and as spring drew near began to question the wisdom of returning home without venturing thither. Now that he had come thus far westward

why should he not press on to that much-lauded land of luscious fruits and teeming waters? In truth, he was almost resolved to do it. There was only one thing he desired more. But, then, the question was, must the one be sacrificed to the other? That problem still perplexed him. However, true to his Norse nature, he did not intend to let it vex him long, but straightway went to Leif about it. He was greatly enamoured of the gentle Gudrid, and now confessed to his host a deep and abiding admiration for the fair widow. Leif was not ill pleased. Karlsefne, although a trader, was a wellborn gentleman, and in character and talent all that a Norseman should be. Nonetheless, Leif referred the lover to the lady, for in her status as a widow Gudrid was entitled to settle the matter for herself; whereupon Gudrid veiled her soft blue eyes and to all Karlsefne's urging replied only that she wished to abide by the lord Leif's decision.

That night Leif re-opened the subject as Gudrid sat at her weaving. With careless grace he lounged on a bench at her side, admiring her deft little hands and the winsome grace of her manner. "Thou art aware of our friend's desire toward thee?" he began. "'Twould please me to know thy true will in the matter."

Once again the telltale red swept Gudrid's lovely face, and her hands toyed nervously with the golden clasp of her girdle. "My lord," she managed faintly, "it is my sole desire in all things to be guided by thee . . . oh, good my lord, in all things would I please thee!"

Leif regarded her in sudden gloomy penetration. How fair she was, how fair and how affectionate! "Happy the man," he thought, "whose love is reposed in so gentle a bosom." Then with one of his swift smiles, so like a flash of brilliant light across a brooding sky, he replied in whimsical melancholy: "'Tis sure the heart of gallantry lives not in me, for loth am I to lose the sunshine from my house. Loth, indeed, though in so good a cause! Still, forsooth, there's none more worthy of my Gudrid than this Karlsefne. And yet I envy him so sweet a fortune."

Gudrid rose to her feet in obvious confusion, her star-like eyes dark with pain, her bosom stirred to agony. She spoke with unusual fire. "My lord, 'tis evidently thy pleasure to make jest of me. Yet I assure thee thou shalt have no cause to find fault in me—what it pleaseth thee to give away so freely shall remain a gift worthy of thee!" So saying, she swept from the room, her little golden head very high and her long red robe rustling proudly.

The astonishment which flooded Leif at witnessing this strange display of spirit in a hitherto docile and selfless lady was only the forerunner of

many similar experiences. With her betrothal to Karlsefne Gudrid seemed to have assumed something of her future lord's determination. She developed views and ideas, and she expressed them. She let it be known that so soon as his ship was ready for the Vineland voyage she was ready to become his bride, and not before; nor would she countenance the idea of being left behind in Greenland.

Nothing could have so much delighted the enamoured Karlsefne, nor, if the truth were told, surprised him more. He was familiar with the tale of Thorstein's unfortunate voyage, and had anticipated an altogether different attitude on the part of his future bride. "But, no," she told him, "this harsh land grows wearisome and I hunger to feel the roll of the waves under my feet. 'Twill rejoice me, my lord, to see the ship leaping the billows," and in her heart she added, "what matter if it leap to death!"

And so the preparation went on gaily, and when the Black Dragon was ready to leave a great company was gathered to wish her Fortune's favor. Certainly, of these boisterous well-wishers, Freydis was not the least effusive. With tenderest solicitations for her sweet Gudrid's health and happiness, she flung an elaborate and costly mantle over the bride's shoulders as a parting gift. Whereat Gudrid, whose heart was guileless as a child's, kissed the stately dame in sweet contrition and gratitude, chiding herself the while for her former doubts of the lady's charity.

Leif smiled to himself as he watched the pretty tableau, vastly amused, as always, at his sister's hypocrisy. Some while later he could not withhold the taunt which sprang to his lips. "Wert thou not too generous to a grasping hand?" he twitted her wickedly.

Freydis was in excellent humor and replied with gay if ruthless honesty: "Nay, brother, ten cloaks were not too great a price to rid thee of so soft a pair of eyes."

Leif, too, was in high spirits, having just seen off the first expedition to his beloved Vineland, and that under such able leadership. He found it easy to be lenient. "Thou hast the courage of thy mischief-brewing convictions, at any rate, sister, which is somewhat of a virtue. But now let us to the Hall. 'Tis in my mind to consult with Thorvald on my new plans for the Eastern highway. By my cross! Freydis, this Greenland shall yet be made to seem a country fit for men!"

CHAPTER X

Though the colonists had been so reluctant to enter into Leif's schemes, yet when the first rough stretch of road marked the beginnings of a determined effort, the thing of itself induced a sort of mad contagion. It became a matter of pride, a war between human ingenuity and patience and Nature's cruel obstacles and cold imperialism.

More and more the discontented freedmen inclined to Leif's service and contrived to join his forces. As the work progressed the entire community began to speak of it with affectionate partisanship. "When our road is completed," became the open sesame to all excellence. Children were to be christened "when our road is completed," maidens were given in marriage and bumpers drained to the dead. And old wives had already coined such phrases as "Mind ye not he was born when our road had but reached the Blue-Jokle?"

That was a happy and prosperous season in more ways than one, for Leif encouraged his fishermen no less than his roadmakers. And disagreeable as these occupations had ever been to a pastoral and fighting people, he managed to make them more appealing through the prism of his greater foresight.

For him life was certainly arduous. In addition to superintending his numerous works, he was compelled, upon occasion, to fly to the rescue of his priests when they were deeply embroiled in one dispute or another. And as first chieftain of the country he must, necessarily, preside at the Parliament and be prepared to argue the people's case upon appeal, and, as a matter of course, give his undivided attention to each and every charge.

All this, added to the constant inner strife, the consuming desire to be off where love and freedom beckoned, and an iron restraint upon a naturally fervent nature, had made of the once merry-hearted adventurer a stern and silent man. Yet, despite this harsher aspect, his generosity was not diminished and his entertainments, whether of friends or laborers, would have done justice to old Eric. For this the people loved him.

Moreover, Leif had devised the plan of paying such hirelings as were bound to him for the entire season in quantities of corn and fats, paid at short intervals. The consequence was that such men found life infinitely more enjoyable than did their neighbors, who had feared to trust to Leif for their maintenance. This, too, increased his popularity, and his people's faith in him.

Freydis, however, found fault with Leif's policy and chided him roundly for such rash extravagance. He would ruin himself, she said, and when the supplies Karlsefne had imported were exhausted, he would have a thankless and greedy populace down upon him at once. "Thou but enlargest their stomachs, not their hearts, my lord, by this fat feeding," she warned him. To none of which he paid the slightest heed beyond assuring her that the booths of Brattalid were safe for a long time to come.

Time fled by and with the approach of winter Leif was forced to suspend his enterprise. With real reluctance he dismissed his men, but it was imperative that they hasten home to get their huts in readiness against the dread cold. For himself, he prophesied an interminable stretch of loneliness, of black days and nights when the very memory of happier times would but enhance the melancholy atmosphere of Brattalid. Fortunately, at this crisis, Thorhild's interests swerved from the Church to her handsome son. She was not only become aware, but greatly worried over, the worn and harassed appearance he so often presented. Convinced that he needed care and that in administering to the promoter of the faith she was certainly serving the Cause, she resolutely locked the door of her cloistered cell in the church she had built and, quite her wilful self, set out for Brattalid.

Her arrival was well-timed, for the day was cold and dark and the brows of her brooding son darker still. Womanlike, she enjoyed the situation and her dramatic reception. "Madam!" gasped the astonished steward, his old face twitching with sudden emotion, "Aye, aye, 'tis the dear mistress herself!"

"Mother!" cried Leif, as he sprang to meet the proud old figure. "Madam, my dearest mother, welcome to our Brattalid!" How they laughed at that. But, oh, how sweet it was to be seated again in her old accustomed place. How good, how ineffably good! And there, down the dim old hall, stood the great throne-chair, her Eric's chair. In the illusion created by the firelight it seemed as if the falcons, on whose dark heads his hands had so long rested, nodded understandingly. "Welcome, mistress," they seemed to say, "welcome to Eric's Hall!"

But Leif was watching her and to all appearances what he needed was mirth. Up came her proud old head and laughing merrily, she launched into the absurdities of the hour.

Not for many a long day had Leif been conscious of so light a heart. While listening to his mother's flow of reminiscences and cheery gossip he felt the strain of care and worry slipping away on the tide of her gaiety. "The

fires take on a deeper brilliance now thou art come, and these old walls a glow of comfort,” he told her gallantly, which pleased the dame despite her new penchant for humility.

“Oh, thou hast a ready tongue and a smooth manner, my lordly son,” she chuckled contentedly. And then, in true maternal concern, she added, “but art thou not thin? Aye, as thin as a field-thrall. I must see to thy table.”

CHAPTER XI

If this interlude of years separating the faithful lovers had seemed long to the busy Leif, it might well be said to have been an eternity to the lady Thorgunna, languishing in her father's gloomy fortress. A long and harassing time truly for a tender and constant heart, for the spring marking the beginning of the East Highway in Greenland made the fourth in a dull and intolerable chain of dreary years for the fair Hebridene.

Years they were of unmitigated monotony and intermittent black despair, brightened only by the sweet ways and bubbling laughter of her little son! Never was a child more worshipped and adored than this blue-eyed son of the exiled Thorgunna! When her sad gaze rested upon his virgin charms asleep or at play, she told herself fiercely that what she had endured was a mere bagatelle in comparison to the joys he had brought her, this golden-haired baby with the eyes of the man she loved. But for all this she had suffered greatly—more, indeed, than she cared to remember.

At first it had not seemed so intolerable. She had been so grateful for a safe retreat, an impenetrable solitude where curiosity, cruel-eyed and leering, might not follow to spy out her misery. Like some creature of the wilds creeping away to die, she had been thankful for the eternal silence of her isolated prison. And for weeks following the birth of little Thorgils she had hovered 'twixt life and death, racked with the delirium of fever, the despair of poor Elspeth, but for the time mercifully unaware of her world.

A grim world truly it was unto which to return from the very portals of the Great Unknown. A frowning, formidable sea-girt pile of rock was this inaccessible spot which now comprised her world. Nothing less than genius had inspired Rafn to choose this particular headland for his wall-enclosed fortress. Sheer, precipitous cliff, it reared its bulk two thousand feet from the level of the sea, save only to the south where a narrow isthmus bound it to the main body of the island. From this vantage point alone might its perilous slope be scaled. But with the tide in no vestige of this slender thread of land was visible. Sea-girt and solitary, the grim cliffs defied intrusion.

No human engineering could have devised a safer retreat, yet because of its difficult approach Rafn had installed his soldiers in rude, rambling quarters on the lower levels of the island, and here he established a precedent later to become a custom with his Norman kinsmen—the very excellent custom of taking into training the sons of nobles and such young freedmen as showed unusual qualities of mind and body.

Here in this huge camp a merry sort of existence marked the passing of time. Youth vied with youth in feats of strength and prowess, and old masters of the arts of war took pride in spurring on the hot young bloods. Nor was the hunt despised by these rough men of the sea, though, if truth must be told, the camp was more of a pirate's den than a hunter's paradise. A rendezvous it truly was, whence the long-ships of the Norse chieftain shot out to descend like some dreaded monster upon the unguarded hamlets of the mainland.

But of this vigorous life with its dangers and excitement Thorgunna knew little. Rafn had promised her solitude, and solitude she had. In the great fortress she lived a solitary queen of dismal empty rooms and yawning corridors, her sole companion, old Elspeth and a mute Scot, black-browed and stooped with years, and carrying a burden of bitter memory.

To the north and south, in box-like enclosures breasting the battlements, Rafn's look-out men kept watch night and day, signalling the camp on sighting danger or the appearance of some luckless ship which promised happy spoil, which knowledge added no whit to Thorgunna's comfort. On the contrary, this unswerving vigilance was her despair, for how might she ever expect to escape from under the very noses of her father's watchmen? Nor did it lessen her sense of helplessness to know that, deep in the bowels of the earth, under her gloomy fortress, in vault and subterranean cave, many a captive more luckless than herself awaited his doom.

How keen the ears become in the dread silences of the night! How quick to interpret insignificant sounds! In truth, what language there is in the tread of men's feet! Thorgunna knew them all by now, these muffled testimonies of violence and misery. The grating of a keel on the shallows of a hidden cave, the straining scuffle of unwilling feet down dark and tortuous corridors; the click of steel; and sudden silences—horrible silences, bristling with untold secrets. All these she knew and trembled at the knowledge.

But little Thorgils grew and waxed more vigorous from day to day. The long black halls and the great barren rooms, cluttered at times with strange merchandise, were to him a pleasant enough adventure. And the great wall encircling his world troubled him not at all, though sometimes he wished he might dip his little hands in the foaming spray which far below licked the grey cliffs supporting it. Oh, yes, he would have liked a closer view of that roaring thing billowing all about his little world. Its terrible voice was his first acquaintance; it was his invisible companion on stormy nights. It thrilled him with strange ecstasy, and if no better opportunity presented itself he waited until Elspeth slept, then, mouse-like, he stole out from his warm

blankets and by dint of patient effort climbed up the uneven, jagged wall till he reached the deep recess of the narrow, slit-like window. Oh, then, what a sight he beheld! What mad rush of breakers and heaving sea! To the little Thorgils it was a living entity, that sea. It called him, it charmed him, and he loved it. No threat of punishment from Elspeth could keep him from these nightly vigils. To the window he must go. And sometimes, to his own humiliation, he fell asleep there, like a little eaglet in its high retreat, while poor Elspeth implored her saints and bewailed her years and ponderous bulk.

“A bat were a better nurse than I,” she moaned to the amused Thorgunna one night, when the young mother surprised them at their game. “’Tis beyond my powers to climb walls, my lady; ’tis not to be expected at my years.”

Thorgils, safe and high, chattered down at them like a gay little monkey.

“Thou art unkind to vex thy nurse; ’tis not a brave thing to do,” Thorgunna chided him, though she found it hard to be stern in the face of the roguish smiles.

Dear was the sea, but dearer still to Thorgils his golden-haired mother. Now he gazed down at her with hopeful affection—perhaps she would crinkle up those starry eyes of hers and laugh at him in that soft way she had. But no, tonight it seemed he could not have them both, his smiling mother and the wild, mysterious sea.

It was all very perplexing, but, obedient now, he began to descend the damp wall, his little naked feet moving from rude projection to projection with the ease of long practice. But when he was tucked into bed once again he spoke his revolt in a fine, high purpose. “Some day I’ll climb the big wall,” he said, firmly, “some day I will.”

CHAPTER XII

Only upon the rarest occasions did the Lady Thorgunna see her father, and these occasions were painful to them both. But Rafn, whether by way of penance for heaven knows what crimes, or from some hidden fount of tenderness, deemed it necessary to visit the exile at least on Mid-Summer's Day and at Yule Tide. And be it said to his credit, he strove at these meetings to be friendly if not effusive.

It was farcical to observe them at such times, each endeavoring to maintain a rigid courtesy, avoiding what was of paramount importance and solicitously inquiring after trivialities. Strange interviews, giving satisfaction to neither one; for Rafn was waiting a penitent daughter and Thorgunna a forgiving parent. But she was neither penitent nor humble, nor he prepared to forgive.

Notwithstanding the gloomy outlook, Thorgunna had of late found her hopes reviving, and the reason for this soul-quickenng revival was the slowly changing attitude of Scoti, the black-browed thrall whose duty it was to guard her.

At first this scarred old creature, whose tongueless mouth and bent and twisted body bore damning witness to Rafn's ruthlessness, had evinced an unholy joy in her suffering. The sight of her misery had been like balm to his smarting spirit, and the thought of his master's humiliation a heart-healing pleasure. But of late Thorgunna had surprised him many a time in the act of studying her with troubled and gentle eyes. And this relenting towards her, whose kith and kin he had such ample cause to hate, she attributed rightly to the old thrall's ever-increasing affection for her little son.

Little Thorgils, with a child's unerring instinct for the sincere and the true, howsoever deeply hidden, had discovered in Scoti a subtle something which from the dawn of intelligence had quite captivated him, and he had quite surely won the sore heart of the wretched thrall.

Hours on end the little boy followed in the ambling footsteps of his mute companion. Up and down the gloomy corridors and round and about the cold, damp chambers, so curiously stocked with multiple things:—pots of pitch and oil, suspended over piles of dried peat, waiting the tinder and the howls of the enemy; queer towers of hides and slender poles standing like gaunt giants over their caldrons of death; and seemingly endless arrays of weapons and musty armor. Damp and dismal playground surely for a little

golden baby, but his laughter shrilled the merrier when his happy noise startled the bats overhead and sent the rats scurrying into their holes.

Like a sportive hound at heel he gamboled after Scoti on his rambles about the ragged plateau surrounding the castle, and now that his legs were sturdier he even accompanied the old man on his visits to the great wall. And once he had caught a glorious vision of the enchanting ocean from the sentry-box itself.

But this occasion, which so delighted the little boy, had affected old Scoti quite otherwise. The sentry in a fit of rough humor had caught the wriggling Thorgils in an iron grasp and for one breathless moment held him suspended out from the sentry window. Hundreds of feet below the waters hissed and roared like a hungry monster lashing about the grim grey rocks. Thorgils' shrieks of childish glee delighted the sentry, but Scoti, snatching the child in hungry protective arms, had stumbled off in angry haste, his heart pierced with sudden fears. Rafn hated the child. Some day the mother's fortitude would crumble and she would accept her father's terms. What would then be the fate of little Thorgils? Who would want to protect and cherish an ill-born and undesired child? These thoughts tormented the old thrall.

Then, quite unexpectedly, Rafn appeared on the scene one smiling summer's evening. And Thorgunna was no less apprehensive than old Scoti when the sounds of grating keel and straining anchor heralded the chieftain's approach. Elspeth, all in a flutter, scurried off to the bed chamber with the little boy, while Thorgunna dutifully hurried forth to greet her father.

She found him singularly affable, almost gracious, and to her woman's heart this argued fresh danger. Nor was she mistaken. His too jocund conversation bore evidence of calculated pleasantry and effectively betrayed him. Even a simpleton might have known that this affability was paving the way to less agreeable issues.

Although the evening was warm and the after-glow of sunset still illumined the earth and sea, the room into which Thorgunna led her father was dim, and but for the fire which Scoti had kindled would have been damp and chill. When they were seated on a comfortable bench before the cheerful blaze, Thorgunna took her courage in hand and, smiling with disarming sweetness, put her question plainly:—"My lord, thou hast a reason for this visit; just what is thy will with me?"

Rafn did not reply at once. Instead he tugged at his ragged beard with nervous fingers, scowling the while with fierce intensity into the farthest

shadows of the apartment. At length he spoke in curt disjointed fashion. "'Tis quickly said, but heed me in the saying. I have made peace with Gillebride the Celt—a devil he, and a foeman worthy of our steel . . . But I am old and have no male issue. Why waste my substance warring with this youth, who, by virtue of his years, must one day undo all my labors? Thus I reasoned, and Gillebride, more wise than I dreamed, quickly agreed to an alliance. Come Midsummer's eve 'twill be sworn and celebrated here at Dun David; thence on, Gillebride and Rafn will rule the Isles of the Minch and hold them safe against any intruder."

"But what has this to do with me, my lord?" The question broke from the lady Thorgunna in a tremulous whisper, for a fresh apprehension had hold of her.

"Gillebride has heard of thy beauty and because of thy station is constrained to forget the mischief of thy youth. 'Tis part of the alliance that thou shalt wed him."

Thorgunna sat silent, struggling with the indignation which raged within. Why must she be the sport of men, she wondered, bartered like some senseless chattel to increase the cause of selfishness and ambition? Had she not suffered enough? Was there no end to her humiliation? Death were preferable an hundred times to life with this foreigner, whose every thought and act would be alien to her sensibilities! She could not bear it, would not believe that this was the end of all her scheming and patient waiting; this the reward of constancy.

Rafn watched her as a tiger watches his prey, delighting in its helpless misery, yet mistrustful and vigilant lest somehow it escape. "No doubt such sudden good fortune overwhelms thee," he said, significantly, "and good fortune it is; Gillebride is a man among men. . ."

The amused derision of his eyes and voice rousing the fighting spirit within her, timidity and fear fell away like a discarded garment. Thorgunna met her father's eyes and laughed—a little recklessly perhaps, but in unmistakable merriment. And before his astonishment found expression, she dropped on her knees and, taking his hand, laid it to her cheek. "Oh, good my lord," she murmured, "thou hast a tender heart; thou hast not altogether cast out thy Thorgunna."

"Tush!" he growled, astonished and pleased with his easy success, "'tis best to put the past away. Rise, my child, spend not thy pretty affections upon my ugly carcass; 'twill better please the young chieftain, Gillebride. And now we must speak of less happy details. Where is the brat Thorgils?"

CHAPTER XIII

Thorgunna had been waiting for something like this, yet the question struck upon her consciousness with the fearsome intonation of a death knell. But, now she was on guard for something dearer than self—fearful or not, she gave no sign of it. On the contrary, to Rafn it appeared that her whole attention was absorbed in the veil which had become disarranged when she knelt before him. The vanity pleased him and he repeated his question less harshly. “Daughter, where is the child Thorgils?”

She shrugged her shoulders indifferently and shook out the golden locks of her hair to better advantage. “Indeed, dear father, I know not, unless he be asleep.”

Unfortunately, this happy artifice was sadly upset by sudden peals of childish laughter from the chamber beyond. Rafn grunted, giving his daughter the benefit of a suspicious glare. “A merry sleeper! Come, Thorgunna, lead me thither; I would see the lad.”

There was nothing else to be done. With feigned indifference she preceded him down a short, uneven passage leading to the child’s bed-chamber. Old Elspeth glanced up apprehensively when the door burst open revealing the unwelcome visitor, and with the unconscious movement of a mother bird ruffling her feathers, she pushed the child behind her. She had been telling him a merry tale of noisy trolls and ingenious young princes, and this sudden appearance of a bristling, fearsomely armored stranger in the doorway seemed a confirmation of the tale. All agog, little Thorgils stared at his grandfather from behind the voluminous folds of his nurse’s habit. Rafn misinterpreted the child’s spellbound wonder for timidity and scowled his displeasure.

Elspeth, watchful as an old dog, took fright at the expression, and, thinking to get rid of the child, she gave a cry of simulated annoyance and with a sharp kick sent a fat and frolicsome puppy, which had been gamboling about her feet, yelping into a far corner of the chamber. Thorgils loved the little animal dearly, and at this display of unprecedented cruelty on the part of his kindly old nurse, he gasped with amazement and, flinging a childish rebuke over his shoulder, ran after his little pet, quite as the shrewd Elspeth had intended. And the little dog, thoroughly frightened, scampered madly away, yelping and ki-yi-ing down the shadowy chamber and on through an open doorway into the winding corridor beyond. Elspeth

congratulated herself on the success of her ruse and beamed her relief. Rafn met her cheerful smile with a terrifying scowl.

“Thy temper groweth not in grace with the years, good wench,” he growled, offended and displeased at so rude a reception.

“Aye, ’twas ever my cross, noble lord,” she fawningly agreed, and, in anxious haste and smiling amends, spread a heavy rug on a nearby seat for his comfort.

“Thou wert ever a fool,” Rafn reminded her ungraciously, as he accepted the proffered seat, but there was a twinkle in his eye as he watched her heavy efforts to increase his pleasure. Yes, Elspeth was grown ponderous indeed! Ah, Age, he thought, how cruel a jade is she; what game she maketh of poor humanity! Though he would not have admitted it, little Thorgil’s laughter had turned his memory backward, reminding him of scenes long gone and long forgotten. His face softened perceptibly. “Ah, yes, good Elspeth, thou wert ever a fool, ’tis true—but once a sprightly fool. And thy sweet mistress loved thee.”

Two vagabond tears rolled down old Elspeth’s furrowed cheeks at sound of this. “Dear master, God’s peace upon thee for thy kind remembrances,” she responded with eager courtesy. “And may the sweet mistress await thee with open arms in the blessed Paradise.”

These solicitations barely ended, in marched the little Thorgils, his young brows drawn in a stormy knot and hugging to his bosom the panting puppy. Thorgils marched straight to Elspeth. “Thou shouldst have kicked me, not Rolli,” said he in grave and emphatic rebuke. “Thou shouldst, for ’twould not have made me howl!”

Rafn grunted, interested despite himself. Then, on second thought, an expression both humorous and cruel curled his bearded lips. “Aha! So thou art a bold braggart!” he drawled derisively. “Come, my brave one, give me thy hand on it.”

Thorgunna paled at the command, and only her years of self discipline made it possible for her to check the cry of fear which rose to her lips. Had she dared, had it not entailed greater evils, she would have sent the child away. But knowing her father as she did, she was forced to smile upon his cruel jesting. And little Thorgils, with a sublime faith and seriousness, stretched out his hand, impressed and pleased to have won the attention of this amazing visitor.

Rafn chuckled as he clasped the tiny fingers, and laughed as he ground them cruelly in his powerful grasp. The child winced with the unexpected pain of that iron contact and lifted innocent, startled eyes to the face of his laughing tormentor. For just a moment his scarlet lips trembled and a quiver of pain passed through his young body. Then down clenched the tiny teeth and an odd expression, determined and hard beyond his years, settled upon his little face.

Rafn increased the cruel pressure, and the child's face whitened, but no sound escaped him. With a roar of sheer delight, Rafn let go the bruised fingers, noting with pleasure that Thorgils made no attempt to nurse the aching members. Hands clenched, straight as a young willow, he confronted his grandsire quite undismayed, appraising him with critical and indignant eyes.

“’Tis a fair showing, God wot!” Rafn shouted generously, perhaps to ease his own mind. Then, “What thinkest of me now?” he demanded of the child, in sportive seriousness.

Crisp and clear came his answer: “I hate thee!” Then, to conclude a disagreeable scene he turned on his heel and, calling his pet to follow, retired to the far corner of the room.

Anger burned like a flame in Thorgunna's breast, but she was wise enough to restrain the bitter rebuke she longed to utter, for her father's hard eyes were fixed upon her. Uncomfortable despite his bravado, he studied her suspiciously, but she disarmed his doubts with a smile dangerously sweet. He was frankly puzzled; from start to finish her manner was past divining. “Well, daughter,” he barked at length, rising to his feet, “I must away. Gillebride's envoy waits me anxiously at camp.”

On their way down the long corridors winding to the outer gates he referred of his own accord to the child's apparent hardihood. “A brave little devil, and no mistake,” he admitted ungrudgingly. “’Tis well, and maketh amends somewhat. Aye, ’tis in my mind to put him out to foster. In truth, the stuff of soldiery is in him and the camp's a better training ground than a woman's chamber.”

Thorgunna did not trust herself to reply for the moment, lest she betray her dread and displeasure and thus precipitate what to her constituted tragedy. If Rafn ever suspected how much she feared this very thing he would certainly remove the child at once from her care. Knowing this, with a woman's guile she kept silent and let him unfold his aggressive plans. Not until he was taking leave of her did she offer a single suggestion or essay an

opinion. And even then the irony of her words was lost upon him because of the honeyed sweetness of her voice and smile.

“My lord,” said she, softly, “may it please thee soon to find a daughter worthy of thy strategy; and may her gratitude for these thy generous plans be shortly proven.”

“Let be, my child! ’Twas ever against mine inclinations to harbor grudges—a soft-hearted fellow, thy old father, truly; and ambitious for thy welfare. God’s my truth, it doth rejoice me to find thee grown so tractable! And now let bygones be and turn thy mind to the niceties of the wardrobe, for ’tis my pleasure to have the chieftain Gillebride find a bride surpassing all rumor in grace and excellence. Aye, by the saints, thou shalt yet be a credit to the house of Rafn!” In afterthought he added—each word dropping from his bearded lips with cruel, cold finality—“Gillebride knoweth nothing of the child—a youthful indiscretion, aye, which may befall the greatest and add the tempting spice to virtue’s dullness—but not the child! Thou canst but see the sense of it; my meaning is clear to thee?”

“Aye, my lord father,” she returned in her throaty voice as, smiling bitterly, she inclined her glorious head. “’Tis very plain, indeed, and it beseems me most justly said.”

Highly pleased with himself and the success of what he had deemed a difficult mission, Rafn hurried away, leaving his daughter to her sore dilemma and her desperate thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV

On her way back, as she hurried along the dim and winding corridors leading to her chamber, Thorgunna was arrested in her headlong flight by the unexpected sound of heavy footsteps, coming apparently from the sheer walls around her. Accustomed though she was to mysterious and awesome noises, this ghostly manifestation, in a long familiar and heretofore prosaic passage, struck sudden terror to her heart. In truth, her nerves were already badly frayed through her trying interview with Rafn, so that very little was needed to precipitate the helpless panic which now seized her.

Wide-eyed and trembling, she clung to the damp wall, awaiting she knew not what; and to her keyed-up senses the sinister sound of those secret footsteps was magnified an hundredfold. Unbearable sound! Each halting step seemed to beat upon her brain like a hammer blow, and yet she must listen in tense, strained eagerness. On, on, with slow, patient persistence, they crept; now quite plainly ringing on solid rock, now muffled on sand and wood! Nearer and nearer they drew, but with a dragging slowness which tortured the listening woman.

And then, to further increase her panic, Thorgunna caught and interpreted a fresh sound—the indefinable sound of a heavy body being dragged over a rough and arduous path. Whoever was following that mysterious labyrinth was not alone. Of all the disheartening sounds Thorgunna had heard echoing through the grim walls of Dun David, none had so terrified her. But just when faintness was closing down upon her in a paralysing cloud, the sharp grating of stone upon stone galvanized her benumbed senses to life, acting upon her fainting spirit like a beneficent narcotic.

Attentive and alert now, she watched and waited, straining her eyes to see more clearly through the murky gloom. And then possibly some fifty feet ahead of her, the apparently solid wall bulged slowly inward, breaking into an ugly, leering fissure, and, with a final groaning protest, swung wide apart to reveal the ungainly head and torso of old Scoti! Thorgunna's astonishment so far exceeded relief that her one desire was to shake the old man soundly. Then the ridiculousness of the whole thing threw her into peals of hysterical laughter.

But the thought of Scoti's mysterious burden pulled her up sharply and with a brave show of composure she hurried forward, greeting the old thrall nonchalantly, quite as though it were a matter of daily occurrence to meet

him coming out of the walls about her. Scoti, on the contrary, broke into hideous noises and wild gesticulations at sight of her, his tongueless mouth twisting and writhing like a restless snake in the dark parchment of his wrinkled face. At first she could make nothing of his frantic efforts beyond understanding that he had something in that ill-smelling secret passage which he wished her to see. His excitement, however, had the curious effect of restoring her shattered self-control. Quite her normal self again she checked his noisy mouthings with an imperative gesture. "Good Scoti, what means all this? What art thou smuggling down that passage with such great toil and secrecy?" she demanded sharply.

Poor Scoti was spared his struggling explanation. A feeble groan from the black depths beyond made answer for him.

"God's mercy!" gasped the lady Thorgunna, "what villainy is this? But whosoever it be, bring him forth at once. Haste, haste, old thrall; haste, I say! 'Tis ill done to stand a-chattering whilst a fellow-creature suffers!"

Thorgunna was quite prepared for the dreary sight of some wretched prisoner recaptured in the act of escaping by the watchful Scoti, but when the willing thrall had dived into the yawning mouth of the wall, reappearing with his fainting burden, she was dumbfounded upon beholding the unmistakable features—now dazed and bleeding—of her father's faithful sentry. Questions were idle. Scoti's excitement rendered his gestures unintelligible, and the sentry was unconscious and very much the worse for some strenuous encounter or other. But to her profound relief she discovered that his heart beat strong and rhythmically. "Quick, good Scoti," she urged, "get him to my chamber whilst I haste on to make my potion ready. Meseems 'tis not so much wrong with him yet. I doubt not he hath a tale to tell."

He had, indeed, nor was he backward in the telling of it when, through Thorgunna's skilful ministrations, he was restored to consciousness. His tale, however, was straightforward and unadorned. Rafn, it seems, had brought along with him on his visit a young stripling closely related to the chieftain Gillebride, and the inquisitive youth had expressed his eager desire to see and explore the great wall of the fortress, with its dark underground dungeons and its famous passages burrowing down to the sea. Rafn, naturally, delighted in fulfilling his future kinsman's request, and consequently left him to the entertainment of Snorri, the sentry, who knew the island and its fortress as a mother knows her child.

All might have been well had not the impetuous youth begun to boast of the superior warfare of his race, boldly instancing as proof of it Rafn's anxious desire for an alliance with Gillebride. Snorri had never been noted for a mellow temper, and this boastful statement insulted and enraged him. Whereupon the mischievous youth, exulting in his power to irritate the dignified sentry, had overstepped all bounds, goading the quick-tempered Norseman beyond endurance and into an action never contemplated. The consequence was that on his return from the interview with his daughter Rafn found the youthful braggart groaning and moaning in a most unknighly heap in the corner of the sentry-house. Snorri had thrashed him soundly.

Here was a dilemma for Rafn, and no mistake! Snorri had served him faithfully and well for many years, and was, to boot, a valiant Norseman; but, on the other hand, the stripling was the kinsman of his future son-in-law and a sprig, though a foolish one, of a powerful tribe. What he did he felt to be unavoidable. Snorri suffered the stripes and was sentenced to a short imprisonment in the fortress; whilst, to appease the wounded pride and indignation of a youth whose mischief-making propensities might work him harm at a critical moment, Rafn gave over the important post to the vainglorious Celt. To be sure, the old chieftain had no intention of patrolling his great wall with half-baked striplings for any serious length of time, but as matters stood he felt that this loose-tongued kinsman of Gillebride were safest in the solid keeping of Dun David.

Rafn had not considered the twisted caricature of manhood hopping about the sentry-house, nodding and grimacing as though the sight of a Norseman's shame brought ineffable joy to his heart. The great Rafn troubled not to interpret the mirth of the poor thrall, whose spirit he had so effectively broken long years ago, and whose unquestioned obedience he had since commanded. But Scoti came not of a race ever cowed or likely to forgive injustice! His meek compliance had its purpose; trusted and unhindered he went his ambling way, watching, always watching, and with a patience born of unmitigated hate. And now, at last, had come his opportunity! Rafn's attention was all absorbed in the forthcoming alliance with Gillebride. In a day or two he and the most of his retinue would be well on their way to the Celtic country, whilst at Dun David, for the first time in its history, a sentry ignorant of its innumerable passages guarded the west wall!

Though as yet unaware of Scoti's thoughts and purpose, Thorgunna saw immediately that the sentry's righteous indignation might be made to serve

her. And she realized quite as clearly as any soldier confronted by a hazardous issue that if she were to succeed she must act at once. Snorri's anger must not be permitted to cool, giving way to calmer reasoning and the long established habit of loyalty. "'Tis said a Norseman fears nothing but disgrace," she began, with suave insinuation. "If it be so, what's to hinder thy escape now that Scoti hath freed thee from the dungeon?"

"Even hate mans not a ship, my lady; two hands dare not defy these waters."

She smiled at him soothingly as one smiles at the weak protest of the sick. "Ah, is there perchance a skiff to be had, if so be willing hands are found to man it?" she asked softly, evenly, despite the mad hammering of her heart.

Snorri laughed mirthlessly. "Lady, thou knowest over little of thy lord's prowess so to ask. Were all the ghosts who haunt this rocky pile to walk this night, they'd find them skiffs enough in the vaults below to sail a conquering fleet. Yea, and not so few of these slim-keeled boats biding Dun David's need were once the pride of now rotting Celts!"

Thorgunna sprang to her feet and, flying to a huge chest, drew out an ebony box. In it were such gems as made the eyes of Snorri to burn with sudden envy and fierce covetousness. From this splendid array Thorgunna chose a curious green stone—once the all-seeing eye of an Eastern deity—and this gem of fabulous worth and incomparable beauty she offered to the astonished sentry.

"This is for thy past vigilance!" she cried; "'tis called the gem of wisdom. No doubt 'twill bring thee great renown in foreign parts! Mistake me not, good sir, 'tis not to salve wounds of my father's making I thus endow thee, but to escape a bondage more hateful than Dun David's."

Snorri was thinking fast. It could be done, thanks to that strutting sentry disgracing an honored post. But how to get a heavy skiff through the mad waters of the Minch. . .

Thorgunna seemed to read his thoughts. Oh, there must in truth be some way to man a ship! Such an opportunity as this was surely God-given! In her desperation she swung round upon Scoti and caught on his face so fierce a light of exaltation that for a moment her former doubts of him returned. "Oh, Scoti!" she cried, "Scoti, say not 'tis hopeless! Leave me if needs be, but go thou off with Snorri and the child. Thou lovest my little one and canst carry out my will as regards him. God will reward thee, good old man, and give thee repose in the land of thy fathers. Oh, do thou this and I. . ."

Scoti cut short her plea with a hoarse burst of gutturals and frantic gestures, directed in turn to herself and the now thoroughly aroused sentry. Snorri apparently divined the old man's meaning and, judging by its effects upon him, it was most enheartening.

"God's truth, mistress!" he shouted, "in all this madness it hath escaped me that in the west-wall dungeon are two berserks waiting judgment at Mid-Summer's festival for some offence against the Holy Faith. 'Twill not misplease them to play the fox one better. Nor are they traitors whose might we dare not trust. But we must haste, for sundown to-morrow marks the change of sentry; and though, perchance, 'tis possible to escape the notice of this upstart Celt, 'twill be less simple when Swen The Big comes to the post. But cheer thee, lady, a little gold will far outweigh the danger to yonder freedmen waiting lashings from a squeamish priesthood."

Thorgunna heard these words in rapt and prayerful silence, her eyes burning with a martyr's determination, her whole face a shining mask of hope. "Thou art right!" she cried; "haste we must and shall! Good sentry, do thou command my faithful Scoti; 'twill please him much to serve this rebel cause. And do thou say from me to yonder berserks they shall not lack for gold to make their freedom lively."

Snorri nodded, a grim touch of humor curling his lips. "Lady, 'tis strange that hate should turn a tool in thy sweet service, but thou shalt find it no less harsh than my lord's gratitude. Haste, then, in thy preparations, and, if so please thee, remember that a light burden giveth a swifter flight."

Somewhat stiffly Snorri got to his feet, testing first one limb, then another. A satisfied grunt was his reply to the anxious questioning of the kind eyes fastened upon him in sympathetic concern. Then, as he turned to hobble after Scoti, he smiled at the lady whom duty had compelled him so long to hold imprisoned.

"Be comforted, mistress. Unless my wits befool me, the dawn will give a misty sea and a sentry snoring at his post—a happy circumstance not often to be met with at grim Dun David."

CHAPTER XV

One evening, shortly after Thorhild's return to Brattalid, Leif was enjoying a quiet chat with his mother as she sat at her embroidery frame. The old dame was sedulously employed in the beautifying of an altarcloth for her beloved church, whilst he was as studiously engaged in admiring the graces of the lively old lady herself.

This peaceful contentment was rudely interrupted by a young thrall, who, breathless with excitement, dashed in to say that at last the Norwegian trader had arrived. King Olaf's ship was drawing up the fiord!

Thorhild sprang to her feet. "Quick, my son, go thou to welcome the king's trader. I shall see to the comforts of the house. Oh, my son, now at last will thy worth be really proven to thy people!"

Leif hastily donned his outer garments and ordered horses for the steward and himself, but the news had failed to waken the old ferment and fever of hope in his heart. His first thought now was of the welcome stories which the king's vessel undoubtedly carried, and of Olaf, the great king, who had not forgotten him. Yet, as he neared the shore and saw the Norwegian ship rocking gently in the swell of the sea, an indescribable sensation overwhelmed him; a curious sensation, neither excitement nor fear, but a co-mingling of both, and, impelling it, an intuitive certainty which he dared not believe and yet could not doubt. And, incredible as it now seemed, when he drew near enough to distinguish the people aboard her, he saw at the ship's prow the unmistakable figure of the woman he loved. The unexpected, immeasurable joy of it tore through his apathy with the searing force of a lightning dart, leaving his whole being on flame with reawakened joy and desire. For one whirling, dizzy moment Leif was lost in a storm of tumultuous emotions; afraid to believe his enraptured senses, despairing of disillusionment, and tormented most of all lest he seem cold to the one heart whose approval he coveted—a maddening, cruel eternity demanding of flesh and blood the impossible! He must hide his joy from jealous and unfriendly eyes, curb the natural instinct to cry aloud his welcome, restrain the burning desire to rush aboard that magic vessel and claim at last his heart's beloved! Unbearable and impossible, had not prudence and sagacity, the twin spirits who ever guarded his singular destiny, rushed to his aid, reminding him that his sweet lady's honor demanded a calmer and courtlier mien. Aye, rapture was out of place, he told himself sternly, as he urged his horse down the rough winding trail inclining to the sea.

Never had Leif found an act more difficult of performance than his simulated indifference to the lovely passenger watching him from the prow of the vessel whilst he received the ship's commander in hospitable friendliness. Never had the amenities of polite conversation seemed so inane or a fraction of time so endless as the restless interval whilst he awaited for the beloved Thorgunna to present herself! As for the lady, she was praying for strength to carry out successfully the difficult role she had set herself, and was grateful therefore to have won a moment's respite. But the meeting could not be deferred indefinitely. Sooner or later they must endure the torture of meeting, after the long and weary years, in the presence of callous and curious spectators. They must meet as they had parted, with false smiles and veiled speeches; they must laugh, though the heart be wrung with tears! Her head held high, with no show of the faintness which assailed her, Thorgunna left the ship determined to play her part bravely, and in her slow, graceful fashion made her way to the spot where Leif and the commander stood apparently lost in animated conversation and the genial activity round them.

But Leif was really lost in nothing else save thoughts of her, saw nothing else but her, heard very little of what the good captain was delineating for him. In fascinated rapture he watched her drawing nearer and nearer. How beautiful she was! How far exceeding the fairest memory! The proud golden head on its shapely column of throat; the rounded bosom and peerless line of thigh and slender foot; the tapering fingers, pressed now upon the heart which beat, he knew, for him alone—all were woven into the fabric of his very life! Ah, yes, she was the same incomparable lady, and yet not the same. Her great violet eyes were now circled in dark shadows—pathetic halos in the marble pallor of her face—and at sight of them a hitherto unknown emotion stirred Leif's fiery heart. Tenderness and pity made him yearn to kiss away these sad signs of suffering. And out of his compassion sprang the tender knowledge that the very marring of her perfect beauty had but rendered her doubly dear and eternally his.

Thorgunna endured his appraisal with amazing composure. To outward seeming she was as politely indifferent as convention decreed a lady must ever be to the interested scrutiny of strangers. But her lovely face was drained of color and her great dark eyes were unnaturally dilated and bright. The ship's commander alone was at his ease. He smiled upon his fair passenger, and, smiling still, turned to Leif. "This is the lady Thorgunna of the Hebrides," said he, "whom, praise God, we were permitted to rescue from death at sea."

Leif, never daunted by the grimmest danger, sickened at the mere thought of such a fate. Impetuously he stepped to her side, his blue eyes alight with unutterable love. "My lady, never hath fortune availed me the honor of offering my house to a more welcome guest," he told her, and, under pretext of conventional courtesy, added, in tones intended for her only: "My heart's dearest, art thou alone?"

She smiled at that, her radiant, well-remembered smile, and replied: "My lord, thy hospitality is graciously offered and gratefully received; yet, I fear, more greedily than thou mayest find seemly in a stranger, for I must accept not for myself only but for my son and his good nurse as well."

That, too, was a bad moment for Leif. Only the soft understanding smile in her eyes steadied him. Even so, the rapture of his voice as he replied had surely aroused curiosity at a less engrossing time. Well for him that the ship's cargo attracted more attention just then than a strange lady, howsoever charming, for not only were his words curiously chosen, but he spoke them at a pitch for all the world to hear. "Lady, never was a son more truly welcomed by a father than this son of thine welcomed by Leif Ericson to Brattalid!" he cried, in no doubtful tones or half-hearted courtesy.

During this exchange of seemingly exaggerated pleasantries Elspeth had made her way unseen amongst the scurrying thralls who were feverishly unloading the vessel. With an air of vast importance she now approached the enamoured couple, giving Leif the benefit of a searching glance as she proudly presented the little Thorgils to his beautiful mother with some idle remark concerning the child's attire. Leif stared at the child as if it were an apparition. The little blue-eyed creature regarding him with such immense gravity was so much like himself that he marveled men did not cry the truth broadcast at once.

Thorgunna smiled softly. "This, my lord, is the manchild thou hast welcomed as thy son. Thinkest perhaps thy offer was too lavish?" At which Leif, caring little what might be said, swooped down with a merry laugh and, tossing the little fellow to his shoulder, cried in his hearty voice: "Friends, make haste to Brattalid and drink with me to the health of the small adventurer whom the Fates have brought me to son!"

Followed then much shouting and cheering and good fellowship. "For," said the people, "who is deserving of honor if not a little child delivered of God from a watery grave? Our generous Leif doeth well; yea, 'tis a deed worthy of Eric!"

And so, with his little son and the lady Thorgunna at his side, Leif led the gay procession over the hill to Brattalid, where Thorhild, in flowing robe and scarlet mantle, waited her guests, a gracious and dignified hostess.

One glance at Leif's face and the fair stranger beside him and the astute old lady knew that the unbelievable had come to pass. When Leif had assisted Thorgunna to dismount, the mistress of Brattalid hastened to greet her guest. "Madam," said she, "enter this dwelling as though it were thine own."

CHAPTER XVI

It was not until next morning, while the banqueters, heavy with ale, still slept, that Leif found a moment alone with Thorgunna. Neither of them had slept that night, and in the cold, grey dawn they met as though by appointment in the empty banquet chamber. Leif had just entered through the outer door and stood, a noble, statuesque figure, musing above the smouldering embers of the long-fires, when a gentle rustle at the back of the room heralded her coming. To the heart-hungry man she seemed an inimitably resplendent vision as she glided forward, graceful and smiling and ineffably dear. Her habit, of some curious Eastern stuff, as softly shimmering as a moonlit sea, clung to her supple body in jealous protection of the tender flesh it hid; and, since the morning was chill, she had flung across her gleaming shoulders a magnificent cape, dark as the midnight sky and heavy with gold embroidery. But what pleased Leif the most—whose weakness ran to fine attire—was to see that in place of costlier gems her single ornament was the simple girdle he had given her at parting. Oh, simple heart and true, to treasure such a trifling gift throughout the bitter years! Somehow the little incident spoke volumes, told him the tender secrets which bud and blossom like fragrant flowers in a fond and constant heart.

Swift and eager, his blue eyes alight with love and happiness, Leif sped to meet his love and with a smiling courtesy befitting the queen of his heart, he seated her in the ancient throne-chair whence the bold voice of Eric had so often thundered its welcome—but never to a guest so fair as she! They had no need of words. A joy so deep as theirs was past all telling; a love so unalloyed, above the flimsy bolstering of pretty speeches! It contented them, these two incomparable lovers, to sit on in silent communion of heart and soul whilst the flickering firelight cast fantastic patterns on the walls and the purple shadows crept like ghosts of vanished revellers about the dim old hall.

High above the smouldering fires they sat like solitary images of some sweet long forgotten faith. A rare tableau they made; he as impressive in his magnificent strength as she in her soft loveliness; and when she drooped upon his breast it seemed a sweet portrayal of the ancient fable of Tenderness giving itself to Courage to make it divine.

Leif was the first to recover from this sweet intoxication; first to remember that Brattalid's retainers would not always sleep and that there was much he desired to ask his lady.

“Ah, thou hast suffered greatly, my beloved! Tell me how it chanced thou wert on the seas when Finbogi—God’s grace upon him—so happily saved thee.”

“My lord, it would but distress thee were I to dwell on past mischief. Thou didst know my intent to guard thine honor. In part my plans succeeded. Leif Ericson is still revered in the Hebrides! But my father found a giddy daughter, and—God pity his hasty temper—did violently condemn a simple fellow who found my smiles intriguing. Oh, Leif, thou must hear more of that noble heart one day, but now let us be spared the sorrow and the pity of it!

“In truth, my lord, what took long years of living may well be told in few and simple words.” Then very quietly she spoke of the lonely years spent at Dun David; of the long deferred hopes of escape, and of the strange combination of circumstances which finally made that escape possible. But even with the Fates favoring them at Dun David, the fugitives had all but perished at sea. They had been caught in a gale and tossed about for days until, miraculously enough, the Norwegian trader, storm-driven and hugging the shore, all but ran them down in the ever-present fog characteristic of the waters off the Scottish coast. Finbogi, the thrifty commander of the well-timed vessel, accepted Thorgunna’s gold as a heaven-sent windfall, and with jovial goodwill had consented to carry her erstwhile conspirators back to Scotland, and herself to the land she so long had sighed for and which it delighted her to learn was his true objective. Thus, in the very midst of despair, deliverance had come, bringing a renewal of hope to Thorgunna and ineffable joy to old Scoti, restored at last to his native heath. Thorgunna wiped away a silvery tear as she recalled the old thrall’s pathetic pleasure in the sight of his rugged homeland; wishing him peace of days and unhampered freedom; little dreaming that the fruits of his sowing would one day mean the overthrow of proud Dun David and the transference forever of its power and glory to Scottish hands!

“That explains all,” she said in conclusion of her tale. “Nor is there need to dwell on the difficulties of our passage. Storms and stress at sea are not strange to thee, but love is mighty and prevails over all.”

“Thy words are Wisdom’s own, always,” humbly returned Leif, “and little worthy am I of such great love and sacrifice. A lifetime were not sufficient to make amends to thee! Yet such as I am ’twill be my one desire to keep thee from all future grief, and nothing now shall part us more save death.”

“Nay, my lord, not even death! In death thou wert still dearer, who art in life my all!”

Then Leif must know her mind on other things—what her will was concerning the child Thorgils—was it her desire to have his rights proclaimed at once, or would she wait till they were wed—and would she wed him shortly—or, better still, at once?

Thorgunna smiled wistfully at his impetuosity. “My Leif, I would not love thee as I do without full knowledge of thy noble attributes. Yet meseems ’tis still my duty to maintain the honor of mine house. Nay, look not on me so amazedly! ’Tis true the hour seems late for such fine scruples; but why shouldst Greenland folk—thy folk—make jest of thee? I pray thee in the name of thy sweet love, which hath been treasured above gold by me, give them not cause to say insultingly, ‘Our lord foolishly weds this Thorgunna, a light woman of the Hebrides!’ Nay, good my lord, it must be managed otherwise. Treasure thy little Thorgils, train him in all things to be like thee; call him thy fosterchild, teach him to love thee; and as for me . . . truth, ’tis not unheard of that a great lord weds a widow, so be her wits are sound and her wimple snowy! But in all seriousness, ’tis better so—’twill surely prove so to thy sounder reasoning. ’Tis surely best that none should scoff in secret at their chieftain’s wife or cast aspersion on my father’s daughter! Bethink thee, good my Leif, if this much be not owing to the house of Rafn?”

Leif considered her impassioned plea in grave silence, perplexed and sorely disillusioned, for he had thought their problems at an end. In the optimistic manner of lovers the world over, he had imagined now she was come that all must speedily right itself and joy and happiness unhindered have their way. He did not doubt her sincerity, but, none the less, in his sudden fall from glamorous hope he did incline to judge her scruples unimportant—the whim of a supersensitive nature. Nor was he at all reconciled to such highhanded disposal of Thorgils’ rights. But swift on the heels of his momentary resentment came the thought of all she had suffered and endured for his sake, and the heart melted within him. What mattered anything but that she could smile again and the marks of sorrow and pain be wiped forever from her sweet face? In a passion of protective tenderness he drew her into his arms, vowing, as once before he had done, ever to love and cherish her; never to doubt or distress her; never consciously to cause her a moment’s grief. And then, man fashion, he at once proceeded to break his golden promise. “Thou art wise and good, my heart’s dearest,” he murmured into the soft meshes of her golden hair, “and yet ’tis foreign to my taste to

follow thy suggestion. My thoughts are of the morrow. In after years the child will judge us harshly—nay, will despise us if now, to salve an upish pride, we thus deprive him of a noble birthright. Reflect, my sweet, upon the injustice of it . . . if there be others, are they. . .?”

“Aye, my lord,” she interrupted him quickly. “It seemeth best to me. Yet whosoever be first in honors, none else will be so greatly loved; none else have preference in my heart. None else, my lord, but thee!”

What could he say to that? What befitting answer find save in those soft and gentle words which ever have made music to the harp of Love? He was not satisfied; he would have liked to play a generous part, to share something of her sacrifice by drawing down upon him the very condemnation she wished to spare him. But for the moment her dear presence thrust out all other thoughts. And after the long dread years it was sweet for both to forget duty, and pride of place, and all things grave and dignified; good to live again howsoever briefly in a paradise of fond and tried devotion; ineffably good to beguile themselves that security and happiness were theirs at last!

CHAPTER XVII

Thorgunna's fame spread rapidly. The ladies of the colony, despite wind and weather, managed to visit Brattalid to welcome the fair Hebridene, and, if truth must be told, to examine her much-lauded wardrobe. They found enough to admire; much more, indeed, than was pleasing to the dames of an isolated and an ill-conditioned island. The Hebridene was fair enough, they admitted with some truthfulness, but it was indubitably clear that their admiration was blended with jealous envy.

Freydis, at the time lying in to a daughter, nursed her natural curiosity in fretful impatience and drove her husband near to madness with her alternating fits of rage and sickly peevishness.

"Ah, thou art a blind fool!" she stormed one night, as he came to inquire after her health; "thou givest ear to all this chatter of the Hebridene and art nowhat moved!"

Thorvald shrugged his shoulders philosophically and for the moment studied the lacing of his footwear intently. The barest hint of a smile flitted across his face ere he drawled slowly, "The tales are scarce distressing, my love, nor of concern to me."

"Thou art both a fool and a stupid!" his love assured him emphatically; "thou knowest the lord Leif is as ignorant of woman's guile as thou art of wisdom, and yet it concerns thee not if he be gobbled up by this crafty stranger. Devil take her! Thou heardest dame Thora tell me that 'tis whispered my foolish brother hath eyes and ears for the Hebridene only—thou knowest this, yet sittest at meat in comfort and chidest me for a sister's true affection."

Thorvald attempted another feeble smile and again took refuge in a shrug and the ornaments of his buckles. "Love is a malady which runs its course, good wife."

"Speak not the word, thou grinning idiot! Wert half a man thou wouldst warn thy brother-in-law against the adventuress. But thou art content to sit quiet and see her and her brat installed at Brattalid."

Even Thorvald's sluggish spleen rose at this. "Hold thy tongue, woman! Much have I tolerated in thee for sake of peace—yet, despite the knowledge that virtue no less than wool is but a shoddy thing if largely mixed. Why shouldst I, who paid too dearly for so small a part of Eric's blood, be overly concerned about the breed?"

Owing to her weak condition Freydis was utterly incapable of exercising that control of temper which generally characterised her action when her purpose was serious. “Knave thou art!” she shrilled at him fiercely; “knave and coward to attack a feeble woman. But what matter? Of thee I think no less than formerly! And yet, dullard or no, hearken when I avow that Eric’s baseborn daughter means yet to be a power in this land. And, fool though thou art, thou knowest that if the lord Leif dies without issue, Brattalid must pass to mine own Eric—yea, Brattalid and Brattalid’s authority!”

Thorvald was no stranger to his wife’s greed of power and riches; nevertheless this shameless confession shocked him. He laughed mirthlessly. “In truth, good Freydis, thou art as fond a sister as a wife! But let me hear no more of this; Leif Ericson is a man, with a man’s right to honor—which honor is his son.”

“Fie!” she derided him mockingly, “ah, fie! Thou hast forgot thine own sire’s misfortunes—ah, honor in sons indeed!”

“Woman, thou art a very devil!” cried poor driven Thorvald, and fled ingloriously into the peace of the outer court.

But if Freydis was troubled previous to meeting the fair Hebridene, words fail to express her chagrin and jealous fear upon beholding the lady in person. Such grace and beauty in another woman amounted to gross impertinence! It was utterly intolerable to find at the very first glance her worst suspicions confirmed, and not only Leif gone mad about the smiling adventuress, but all Brattalid as well! Yes, the entire household was fallen under the spell of Thorgunna’s golden beauty and was rejoicing in such luxurious celebration and brilliant gaiety as might have satisfied even the captious Eric.

Thorgunna had brought along considerable treasure. Ancient tapestries that once had charmed the eyes of dusky Andalusians now decked the walls of Eric’s rude hall. Fine linens made sweet the bed-places, and on the groaning tables many a curious urn and glittering platter wakened fresh envy in the avaricious Freydis. But most galling of all was the sight of the lady herself as she glided about the hall with all the glad confidence of a mistress, or sat at the right hand of dame Thorhild, quite as though another more worthy of the honor were not near! Indignity of indignities! And then the Hebridene’s lavish attire was of itself an effrontery. Gudrid had created envy enough with her fine Iceland stuffs and her sunny beauty, but Gudrid at her best would have been a simple foil to the Hebridene.

Worse was to follow. That very evening Thorhild guilelessly urged the fair visitor to show her wondrous jewels to the worthy mistress of Gardar. Incomparably wondrous they were, and in her heartsick envy Freydis felt that to possess such gorgeous, scintillating treasure no sacrifice was too great, no crime too desperate. With her hate of Thorgunna trebled, she studiously affected a fonder manner. Her flattery was honeyed, and yet as she fondled a circlet of priceless emeralds, reluctant to let the lovely thing go, she could not restrain the sardonic exclamation which burst like a volcano from her cunning lips, "Ah, lady, how great must be thy grief for the loss of an husband whose generosity is so eloquently reflected! To replace so fond a lord is not within the bounds of possibility."

Thorgunna dropped her eyes and smiled her slow, inscrutable smile. "Aye, my lord hath a permanent place in my heart," said she quietly, and then, to avoid further discussion of a delicate subject, she stepped to a door at the back of the bower and, calling softly into the shadows of a small adjoining chamber, bade her little son to attend her.

Freydis literally jumped at the sight of the child as he came skipping joyously into the circle of light cast by the friendly fire. He seemed curiously familiar, that merry bit of boyhood, with his sunny hair tied back from a broad white brow, his bright blue eyes and the good chin already hinting at firmness. Altogether too familiar he seemed for the mistress of Gardar's comfort. Greatly perplexed, she scanned the boy's face. What was there about those childish features to so disturb her? Where had she seen his like? —what was memory striving to recall? And in that instant she remembered. It was the mouth which told the tale; aye, that tempting scarlet bow resting so snugly on its firm lower lip, it told the tale! Hateful realization of a thrice hateful and tormenting fact! Irrelevant or no, in years gone by the young Leif had been pestered ceaselessly by the gay serving-wench for possessing just such another kissable mouth!

Fascinated, she stared at the child as if he were some monstrous curiosity never seen before nor likely to be seen again. Dazed and at loss to explain so confounding a mystery, she regarded the little boy banefully in chilly silence. That he was her brother's child she never doubted, but what had induced Leif to enter upon such a misalliance? The troublesome thought cropped up that possibly Thorgunna was no Hebridene, but a faithless lady from the court of Olaf, and to be rid of her machinations might not be so simple as it had seemed, nor without grave consequence. But whatever the explanation, she understood the need for discretion; innocence and ignorance must veil her every thought and action. Not without effort she

managed a dry smile and a perfunctory caress for the little boy gravely waiting her dismissal. "Ah, sweet child, thou art no doubt a comfort to thy bereaved mother," she said derisively, and, turning to the lady Thorgunna, she added: "He is very like thee, lady, and must resemble his noble sire but little."

Thorgunna was not indifferent to the implied sarcasm, but she laughed softly. "There are those who see no such resemblance. Deplorable blindness! As thou sayest, madam, the child is altogether like me."

"Aye, to the very finger-tips," Freydis agreed firmly; and to herself concluded, "Thou art a pretty liar, my lady, but in that art I am quite prepared to match thee!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Freydis was not long in discovering the potent changes in her brother, and before his rekindled confidence and sense of power she felt for the first time quite helpless. To mention the hateful Hebridene would not only be foolhardy, but fatal, for even the blindest could not mistake his attitude toward the fair so-called widow. It was very obvious that for the time being things must remain as they were. Having so reconciled herself, Freydis waxed exceedingly friendly and attentive, to everyone's deception save that of the lady for whose benefit the effort was affected.

But, troubled or not, Freydis had an eye for business and was therefore much attracted to the Norwegian merchant. Nor was she alone in her admiration; other ladies found the trader and his light-hearted crew well worth their interest, and before the excitement abated three buxom maids, daughters of Leif's vassals, had found themselves likely husbands from amongst them.

Finbogi, like the Iceland merchant before him, fell prey to the lure of Vineland and lent a ready ear to every tale of that far country. And Freydis, busy with her eternal plotting, made a point of adding fuel to the fire of his interest. She was half convinced that if she ever intended to drive a stake in the new world beyond the seas, no better opportunity would be available; Finbogi could be made to serve her and serve her well. But the thought of leaving Thorgunna to further enslave her brother tormented her.

Finally, determined to sound him out on the question, she hunted him up one fine morning for that express purpose. He was superintending the welding of tools in his smithy, and was himself putting an edge to his longsword. Freydis confessed her errand and intention in her customary brisk fashion; she had important matters weighing upon her mind and needed his advice. Leif responded by immediately putting aside his weapon and leading her into the dim seclusion of the arsenal beyond, away from inquisitive ears and prying eyes. She came to the point at once. "What thinkest thou of mine intent to join Finbogi on a Vineland expedition? Thorvald hath a sound tub which it pleaseth him to call a ship, and though 'tis scarce fit to enter upon a long cruise alone, it may serve us well enough in company of the great Norwegian vessel."

Nothing else could so effectively have eradicated from Leif's mind the growing suspicion that Freydis was unfriendly disposed to the lady Thorgunna. Evidently he had been mistaken; her interest was more keenly

centred elsewhere, and his fear of disagreeable opposition to his contemplated marriage was quite unfounded. Thus deluded, he replied eagerly: "Good sister, thou knowest well my enthusiasm for Vineland and what faith I have reposed in that remarkable country. 'Tis mine earnest belief it hath a mighty destiny, and that whoso helpeth to interpret its latent greatness will acquire eternal honor."

Freydis shrugged her shoulders at this. "Honor is well enough," she said, "yet I am more determined upon timber since my lord's Hall is sadly in need of refurnishing. But one thought above others restrains me: thou hast been a generous brother, and 'twould grieve me to be absent from Brattalid at the time of thy wedding. Dear brother, 'twould sadden me to miss the joy of paying honor to thy sweet lady."

Not until this speech of Freydis' filled him with pleasant relief, almost amounting to gratitude, did Leif acknowledge to himself how much he had feared her mischief-making propensities. He was delighted and at the same time ashamed of his suspicions and uncharitable thoughts. With native and impetuous gallantry he cried: "Now, indeed, thy speech proclaims thee a true daughter of Eric! As to thy good intention, let me assure thee 'twill find fulfilment. Aye, sister, put that worry from thy mind, for thou shall do my lady honor at the betrothal before thou leavest. And I am certain of thy return in time to see us wed, for 'tis my firm intent to complete the main highway before that happy hour."

Thus reassured, Freydis proceeded with her plans and before long had satisfactorily convinced both Thorvald and the Norwegian merchant of the mutual advantages of a joint expedition to Vineland. This settled, the resourceful lady entered into the pleasant preparations for Leif's betrothal with such enthusiasm that even Thorgunna began to waver in her suspicions. But the day before the proposal ceremony the poor lady was suddenly stricken with violent pain. Many guests were already assembled, and to the superstitious amongst them the unfortunate circumstance appeared ominous and a sign of Divine displeasure. Freydis, who might have interpreted the phenomenon better, chose to make the most of the doleful supposition. From one to another of the gloomy croakers she passed, wringing her hands and bemoaning the sad mishap, the cruel disappointment, "'Tis woeful, truly, but it may be that my lord Leif is appointed of God to the service of his people," she murmured piously. "Aye, possibly 'tis not his portion to share the common joys of humanity. But, alas, he loveth the lady so devotedly! In truth, my heart bleeds for him, and to mortal scheming it seemeth a goodly match."

Freydis' words had the desired effect. Old women reminded their hearers of Leif's pledge to the dead Eric. Would he not forget his duty to race and country once he was bound to this stranger, shrouded as she was in mystery? Would she not woo him from all serious purpose with her seductive wiles and extravagances? Ah, they thought so! Thought too, that a sensible daughter of Greenland would make their chieftain a more comfortable wife. And the priests, desperately in need of Leif's undisputed support, and already plotting to build a monastery on one of his estates, were as zealously determined that the wrath of God should be the acknowledged cause of the unhappy situation.

With this generous purpose in mind they approached their lord with solemn expressions of pious solicitude, as he stood lost in helpless despair beside the beautiful sufferer. When they had sufficiently captured his attention to be certain that he really heard them—experience having taught them this precaution—they confessed their grave belief; but, terrified at the look Leif cast upon them, they hastened to conclude that quite possibly the lady's life would be spared if for the time being he renounced all thought of a marriage which, obviously, was odious in the eyes of a loving God.

Leif's mother and sister were upon their knees beside the sick woman, both apparently deep in prayer, but Freydis broke off to join the priests in their plea. "Oh, my dear brother, be guided by these faithful servants of the Truth. Think only upon the poor lady's recovery; no sacrifice is too great to win that favor. And be enheartened to reflect that mayhap in a future hour thy desire will be granted thee."

Thorhild staggered to her feet like one burdened with a heavy load, and, impelled by a new and terrifying conviction, she drew the dazed and sorely perplexed Leif aside. "My son," she whispered, "perchance 'tis thy testing. Forget not thy grievous sin, but show thy willingness to abide by the Heavenly will and mayhap thy judgment will be lighter. Oh, I implore thee, let not thy selfish desire rob so sweet a lady of life. 'Tis enough, surely, to have robbed her of home and kindred!"

That bitter shaft struck home. Once again Leif pledged himself to selfless duty, renouncing all that redeemed life of its barrenness and toil.

Freydis could have shouted with laughter. The hypocritical priests, the superstitious Thorhild, and Leif's helpless perplexity, all were equally amusing, and in her heart she despised them for so many gullible fools. Nevertheless she managed to weep copiously into the coverlet at Thorgunna's feet, while the priests prayed with renewed fervor now that

their ambitious plans were no longer threatened, and in a burst of gratitude vowed to make the unfortunate lady patron of a future nunnery. Thorhild alone was sincere, believing that Leif was being called upon to atone for an odious sin, and in her sincerity prayed from a full and contrite heart.

Thorgunna moaned, and the pitiful sound cut Leif to the heart. "God be thanked! she is reviving." Thorhild exclaimed in excited hopefulness. But he gave no sign of having heard her. He was thinking that in reality life was more cruel than death. In death Thorgunna would have been his to dream of in all her grace and beauty; in life he must look upon her no more with love.

The priests began chanting a Gloria and the sound was singularly painful to Leif. It seemed to him that each measure was deliberately intended to crush something joyous and beautiful out of existence forever, deliberately intended to substitute colorless death for life. All eyes were bent upon the poor tortured Thorgunna, tossing and turning in her bed of pain. "Oh, she thirsteth," said Freydis suddenly, and snatching up a goblet, hurried out, reappearing a moment later with a curious cooling draught, which the patient drank eagerly and, sighing heavily, sank back upon her pillows.

Had Leif been less distraught he might have wondered at his sister's sudden and curious anxiety, for now Freydis watched the sick woman like a hawk; not a sound, not a movement escaping her. From time to time she leaned forward to pass analytical fingers over her patient's satiny skin or to take count of the racing pulse. Slowly, but unmistakably, Thorgunna's breathing grew lighter and more regular, and finally, to the immeasurable relief of those around her, she drifted into normal sleep.

Freydis turned her black, inscrutable eyes upon her brother. "My lord," said she, "take heart, for the evil is passing from her. See, dear brother, her skin is all dewy wet."

CHAPTER XIX

What transpired between the lovers after this no one ever knew. Leif offered no explanations to his guests save only that the betrothal was postponed owing to his lady's illness. This information, given curtly enough, was all the garrulous got to enlarge upon.

Thorgunna's recovery was slow. When the Vineland expedition sailed away she was still a captive to her bed, a pathetic gold-crowned shadow of her former self. She made no impatient complaint, and refused to discuss her illness or the unhappy ending of an event long dreamed and desired. But after the departure of Freydis' party she summoned Leif. She smiled upon his gloom with maternal tenderness, for in his rebellious misery he reminded her very much of little Thorgils storming at the great sea wall.

"My lord," she began softly, "many strange thoughts have entertained me these idle days, and much that the heart rejected reason hath accepted. 'Tis plain and undeniable that our lives are curiously interlinked, yet plainer still we are not destined to enjoy the common privilege of humanity. Nay, do not interrupt me nor frown upon my poor reasoning, which, meseems, is no stranger than our love and meeting. And to what purpose, since purpose there must be in everything? Oh, Leif, thou camest from the great unknown to teach my heart patience and devotion. Nay, more, in loving thee the quality of love itself hath changed for me. Thou knowest that our people have not connected love with honor and duty. To them 'tis but the meaner emotion; to me it now seemeth that duty, lacking love, is harsh, and honor but a travesty. 'Tis wondrous hard to make my meaning clear! Such strange thoughts arise within me; such deep emotions—dim longings, dim visions of some far place and time, when such as we may live unhindered, to pursue their destiny with love alone to lead them. Thou, my lord, wert singled out to find a great new country. Oh, Leif, perchance thy Vineland will welcome Love as ruler and Freedom as its God!

"Nay, lord, think not all this a sick-bed fancy, for 'tis the one thing makes all disappointment bearable. Dare to love, poor heart, dare to dream—thus have I consoled my fainting spirit. Others will follow and one day reap the harvest of thy daring. Thou, my lord, dreaming of freedom for thy people, risking thy life to win it, and I dreaming of love as no Norse maid hath dreamed heretofore, are we not types, mayhap, foreshadowing a new and gentler dispensation? To me it seemeth so, and now am I content to let the Fates do with us what they will."

Leif found her philosophy a strangely uplifting and comforting solace. But in one respect he was determined to be firm; neither friendly counsel nor supernatural warning should be permitted to affect his purpose. When his first project for the good of his country was completed he was resolved to proclaim before the world the true parentage of Thorgils. "For," said he, "we may rightly be deprived of our mortal privileges, but the child must live after us as befits his station." And having at last arrived at an agreement in this particular at least, he left Thorgunna in the affectionate care of his old mother, and with grim determination returned to the heavy task before him.

Thereafter time passed uneventfully for Leif, though his work progressed successfully and rapidly, far more rapidly than he once would have deemed possible. A hard taskmaster, now he drove his men over seemingly impossible obstacles by the very force of his will power. Yet what was a miracle to the colony at large never quite satisfied him. But if he drove his men he drove himself no less, for only in feverish activity could he win momentary oblivion from oppressing memory. And because of his impartiality and personal diligence his men forgave him much which they otherwise would most certainly have resented and condemned. Then, too, the superstitious amongst them were inclined to blame the Hebridene for all which displeased them in their master. His former reticence and occasional harsh measures were quite forgotten and his every foible held to be the effects of the fair widow's influence.

Very much to the support and strengthening of vicious rumors concerning Thorgunna came the unhappy news that the fisheries were failing. God's grace was being withheld for some strange reason, so said some. Others announced boldly that it was all the work of the strange woman. "She hath cast a spell upon our waters to show her displeasure; 'twere well to be rid of her," they repeated amongst themselves with angry vehemence. Then, seemingly to further inflate their superstitious fears, an even more damning bit of evidence followed. Freydis' infant daughter, left in foster at Brattalid, had died one day in the bath. "Ah, ha!" cried the croakers, "'tis plan the Hebridene witch hath heated the bathstones with her malice and laid low the innocent." And they began to frown upon Leif and to chafe under his colossal indifference to so obvious a truth. Why did he not send the disturber of peace and prosperity out of the country? "She hath bewitched him as well," said some, and proved the theory by a string of grievances. "Aye," agreed the freedman, "he uses us all like thralls, nor feeds us better, and mayhap while we toil here in the hills the accursed witch worketh her evil upon our guileless wives and children."

What this ferment might have produced it is now impossible to imagine, for shortly thereafter one of Leif's thralls, whilst tunneling around a certain ridge, came upon a peculiar deposit, which upon examination proved to be silver ore. In the excitement of so unparalleled a discovery all doubt and grumbling was for the time being forgotten, and in the madness of exaggerated expectations they were all for abandoning their present mundane labors.

Leif was not to be so foolishly persuaded. "'Tis not my intention to return to Brattalid this coming winter," said he, "but to repair to Gardar, whither our highway must be extended. That much done, ye shall be free to enter these hills at will, each man with permission to mine for himself what he can while the weather permits."

This put an end to dissensions, and since it was obviously to their own advantage, the work sped on so swiftly that Leif began calling the men his silver-souled Berserks. Needless to say, the highway was completed in record time, and long before the duties of the Fall Thing claimed Leif, his hirelings were back amongst the promising hills.

Except for the hopeful reports they brought with them on their return—reports which kept gossip lively and gloomy brows cheerful—the winter now closing in upon the isolated colonists dragged on monotonously. But with the hope of unexpected wealth before them, even a Greenland winter lost much of its dreariness, proving less harsh than usual and giving way to milder airs with better grace. Almost over night the young grass sprang up triumphant, showing miraculously green along the fiords in glad contrast to the snow-capped ridges above. And almost over night the sound of newly released streams thundering gaily to the sea mingled with the sound of pick and axe and the twinkling cavalcade of Leif's horses, as in one merry universal spring glee. Joy seemed the keynote of everything—of everything but Leif's heart. He alone could not respond to Nature's fervor. For him there remained only duty, the grim-visaged and the gallant hope to be worthy when the hour of release should find him.

The brief Arctic summer was at its hottest, drowsy with its own brilliance and jewel-like beauty, when Leif's men struck a rich and seemingly inexhaustible vein of silver. As a result the camp went almost mad with wild and savage rejoicing; not a man there but imagined himself already possessed of a wealth equalling King Olaf's! And to cap the climax, hard on the heels of this extraordinary good fortune came news from Brattalid telling of Freydis' return from Vineland laden with the richest treasures.

That was temptation of a kind not to be resisted. In a body Leif's laborers demanded a holiday, for they were burning to test the magic of their silver ore upon the Norwegian merchant and the lady Freydis. "We would buy us the Vineland wine so greatly lauded, and a glossy pelt against the coming cold," they told their chieftain in rough good humor; "aye, and a weight of sweet grapes to barter for yet sweeter kisses!"

Leif recognized the wisdom of giving way to the boisterous wishes of his men, since, denied an innocent outlet, their frenzied excitement would surely result in serious rebellion. Knowing this he wisely contented himself with their decision and, somewhat reluctantly, prepared to follow them to Brattalid.

CHAPTER XX

Leif was not prepared for the surprises awaiting him at Brattalid. Finbogi's Norwegian trading-vessel lay in the fiord, but the merchant himself had not returned, nor a quarter of his men; whilst the few who were come home from their far adventure greeted him with sullen speech and furtive glances. Thorvald, too, was changed, his phlegmatic indifference having given way to nervous irritability. Little noises set him a-tremble, and he seemed, literally, to be looking for condemnation in every utterance. Naturally, everything displeased him, from the sagaman's chanting to Thorhild's innocent queries as to the cause of his indisposition.

Freydis ignored her husband's condition and with exuberant enthusiasm delineated their adventures and the fortunes they had won. So elated was she, in fact, that the news of her small daughter's death appeared in nowise to affect her. Indeed, to Thorhild's indignation, she replied to her kindly sympathy that sons were much to be preferred and a feeble woman-child small loss in a difficult world.

Leif was disturbed by her hectic manner no less than by Thorvald's nervous gloom and Finbogi's absence, though this last, it must be owned, troubled him the more. Thorvald and Freydis might have been indulging in one of their many stormy quarrels, but the Norwegian merchant had serious business impending in his native country. "How comes it, sister, that Finbogi remained behind after pledging his honor to pursue the Norwegian-Greenland trade?" he at last demanded of his enthusiastic sister. "'Tis beyond credence, for unless memory fails me 'twas his purpose to sail for Norway this summer."

Freydis laughed lightly. "Ah, ho! good brother, thou art at times a simple! The honorable merchant is wedded to yon golden clime. None but the saints could induce him forth! Aye, my good Leif, the man found the place too charming and the wife of a comrade too kind. 'Twas quite his pleasure to sell thy sister his ship. Is it not so, my Thorvald?" she appealed to her moody husband. "Was there aught in Finbogi's behavior to suggest displeasure in being rid of us?"

"Nay," snapped Thorvald curtly, "but thou art the best judge and most fitted to tell the tale."

Freydis shrugged and smiled quizzically. "My lord Leif hath heard enough of tales. 'Tis certain our clarity and truth hath convinced him."

Leif let the question drop just then, since obviously to pursue the subject was useless. Freydis had been too glib and he suspected her of mischief—just what, he scarcely knew. Something had gone wrong, and the suspicion that evil had befallen the trader nagged him with the tenacity of a guilty conscience. Nevertheless, under the spell of Thorgunna's lovely presence he found himself more and more envious of this rash seaman who, if Freydis spoke the truth, had dared to choose what pleased him in preference to duty. And, despite its futility, he began dreaming anew of a Vineland wakened to flourishing life; of a Norse colony where liberty and love might prevail. Into these longings stole the sudden appeasing conviction that Thorgils would effect the miracle of his release. When the child had reached a man's estate he would assume the burden of his father's pledge along with the chieftainship of Brattalid. Then would he, Leif Ericson, the much-fettered, be free at last to return to the open seas and his *Silver Dragon*! This pleasant conviction so fired him with hope that in turn even Thorgunna's calm fatalism was swept away and she, too, snatched at this rainbow of promise. And this new aspect of the child's possible destiny at last won her consent to Leif's long deferred desire to publicly acknowledge his son.

Consequently, what had been unalloyed success and triumphant rejoicing suddenly turned to gall and wormwood for the lady Freydis, and had her glances been as potent as certain brews whereof she was an adept the beautiful Hebridene had not survived the day.

But Thorgunna suffered enough. Much as she gloried in Leif's generous conduct, the thought of becoming the helpless target of every curious and unfriendly eye was actual torture. She was familiar with the code of her people and knew the manner of their reasoning. Stripped of her pitiful subterfuge, she was become something of a monstrosity. How else might they judge her, a Norsewoman, nobly born, who had listened to words of love and given like a thrall what she might have sold for the enrichment of family and fortune?

In truth it was not that the lady Thorgunna's deplorable action appeared exactly sinful to these rationalists of the North, but rather that so curious a weakness seemed singularly unnatural. The unromantic colonists deemed her not so much a wicked woman as a spiritual cripple, an offence to be removed from sight as their forbears had removed the physical cripple from the paths of a world indifferent to and intolerant of such disagreeable unfortunates.

But whatever men thought of the lady, they thought better of her paramour for accepting the child as a man of honor should, and they cheered

the little prospective lord of Brattalid whole-heartedly and drained him many a brimming horn with unqualified relish.

Freydis' humiliation and fury were so intense that she actually suffered agonies in restraining the primitive impulses to howl and shriek aloud her maledictions upon the innocent cause of her distress. Consequently, her pallor rivalled that of the abashed Hebridene, whose great eyes burned in the white mask of her face with an unearthly lustre, eclipsing the gleaming gems on her tortured bosom. Freydis was indeed well-nigh sick with disappointment and reviled herself bitterly for a silly fool not to have foreseen and forestalled some such possibility as this. She realized with disturbing conviction how futile had been the binding of Leif; howsoever many fetters might be heaped upon him, the menace to her ambition still remained. Thorgunna's son was the real obstacle! Well, to the determined an obstacle was no more than an impetus to achievement, so she reasoned ruthlessly. Yes, and whatsoever blocked the path to power must and should be swept away, without compunction and without regret! On that her mind was fixed and irrevocably set. Such conscientious scruples as formerly had somewhat tempered her malevolence were by now effectively silenced, deeply buried under a weight of ignominious treachery as black as her own vicious nature. Having plunged so deep, staked so much on Fortune's wheel, she was prepared to risk her very life, if need be, in the pursuit and fulfilment of her unswerving and colossal ambition.

So now, despite the natural inclination to storm and abuse, Freydis struggled with her tempestuous emotions, conquered her suffocating rage, quieted her twitching nerves, and managed with commendable tact and presence of mind to infuse comfort and gaiety into the considerably dampened festivities. She did more. With graceful courtesy she congratulated the fainting Thorgunna upon her son's future, and presented the little boy with a pair of valuable shoulder pins in honor of the occasion. Even then she was not satisfied, fearing lest she had not sufficiently veiled her mortified anger, and so with fresh wickedness in her heart and a saccharine smile on her lips, she announced in Leif's hearing that it was her fondest desire to banquet his heir in becoming fashion, and that she was determined to carry the desire into effect when the colonists should gather at Gardar for the Fall Thing. Yes, in the autumn she was resolved to prove to all men her love and goodwill towards her noble brother and the promising future chieftain of Brattalid.

Book III

CHAPTER I

Whilst Leif labored in the hills with his men, and Thorgunna lightened the duties of the ageing mistress of Brattalid, Freydis, contrary to her former habit, assiduously encouraged the visits of the good wives of the neighborhood. Their entertainment became of a sudden a passion with her, and having gained their faith and confidence, she began with premeditated caution and cleverness to poison their minds against the already much-maligned Hebridene.

“How comes it?” she asked on one occasion, “that my lord Leif withheld his recognition of his supposed son this long while? Think, dear friends, for something is sure amiss! Think, I pray, think, think! Did anyone perceive the chieftain’s likeness to the child beforehand? Nay! Is there likeness save likeness of coloring, and are not most infants fair? Oh, that black magic should enter this Christian land! But again I ask ye to reflect—is it not truth of the holy fathers that Satan guilefully sendeth his evil emissaries wheresoever the Cross hath been planted?”

Seeing that many a face blanched at her words, she pressed her advantage and hurried on. “Give thought, I beg, to mine own grief, which in truth hath occasioned these ponderings. Think upon my woe now that my heart tells me the pearl of my bosom, my sweet daughter, was foully dispatched. Nay, ’twere cruel to ask good friends to dwell upon it! Think not too long on what in reason’s light ye might discover to have taken place that hateful hour in the bath. Consider only this: ’Tis since mine infant perished that this Hebridene’s child assumed a likeness to Eric’s blood!”

Consternation followed. Such a babble of voices surely never before reverberated through those cheerful bowers. Everybody talked at once, though no one had more than hearsay to go by, and those who lacked opportunity or imagination to contribute some spicy morsel to the general criticism prayed piously for protection against this vile creature come amongst them. Freydis chuckled to herself at so amusing a betrayal of fear and cowardly superstition. They were so foolish, these little women, so easily played upon, that she almost loved them in their simplicity. “Good wives,” she purred sweetly, “be not disturbed nor inclined to hasty judgment. I would do none an injustice. Yet, methinks, ’tis righteous to seek an explanation, to test the lady and ourselves. If so be we have misjudged her ’twill but increase our cheerful amends. Truth, good friends, such purpose alone prompted my planning a feast in the busy time of Thing; but ’tis my firm intention to have the lady watched in order that we may

ascertain the better whether her actions be above reproach and if her presence causeth good or evil.”

Thus, little by little, Freydis endeavored to color the thoughts of her neighbors with her dark mischief and by subtle flattery and persistent friendliness to win them to her favor. At the same time, being what she was, her vindictive nature must find an outlet somewhere; hence there were those of her own household who found her care less tender and her hand all too heavy. Indeed, the lady of Gardar was at best a hard taskmistress, nor sparing of the lash when a thrall displeased her.

Curiously enough, it was the lashing of one such simple creature that led to Freydis’ final abasement and the failure of her most cherished scheme.

An erstwhile thrall, lately freed by Thorvald and since then inclined to over-ride his fellows, tripped on his way to the wine table one fateful evening and spilled the bowl of precious vintage he was to serve to Freydis’ guests. The insignificant accident sent his mistress into a tantrum. “By the saints, thou shalt be whipped for this!” she shrieked, pale with passion. “Fool and sluggard, thou shalt be taught a sounder course and habit, thou shalt indeed!”

The poor fellow mumbled a nervous apology, not heard above the din of laughter occasioned by his mishap. Freydis ignored his plea and, calling her lackey, a huge shock-headed fellow, great in body but simple in mind, she commanded him to give the miscreant thirty lashes. The unfortunate thrall cried out in protest that he was no longer her property, but a freedman, and as such could bring her to justice for an act of violence. Freydis smiled ironically. “Muzzle thy tongue, fellow, lest we be compelled to find efficient means to silence thee. Since thou art so full of wisdom, think upon my words whilst the lash teaches thee better deportment; ’twill be good solace for thee.” Turning to her halfwitted lackey, she nodded sharply. “Take him away, Haki,” she commanded, “whither his howls won’t trouble us, and thrash him soundly.”

That night the poor thrall fled to the hills, his one thought to seek his chieftain and to cast himself upon his mercy. When he eventually reached his destination he was a pitiful spectacle, more dead than alive, for his tattered rags and swollen wounds bore testimony not alone to Freydis’ harshness, but to the vented resentment of his jealous fellow thralls over whom he had foolishly lorded in his new and uncertain freedom.

Leif, naturally, knew nothing of this; all he recognized in the misery of the man before him was an astounding proof of his sister’s cruelty. His

words, however, betrayed no hint of what he felt. "Thou shalt remain with me," he said with quiet decision, "and at the Thing I shall enter thy complaint against thy mistress." Thus encouraged, the wretched man found hatred surmounting fear. "My lord," he stammered, "my lord," and then plunged on: "God's truth, my lord, there is somewhat thou oughtest to know. 'Twas vile treachery—'twas murder . . . aye, lord, 'tis of Finbogi. . ."

"What sayest thou? Beware lest resentment tempt thee to lying! Of liars I think no better than dame Freydis of clumsy wine-bearers."

"My lord, I speak but truth! God curse me if 'tis lying! Finbogi and the most of his men were foully murdered, whilst the women. . ."

He got no further, for Leif caught him roughly by the shoulders and shook him till he moaned with sudden fright and pain. "Justice! justice!" he wailed, "justice, in the name of God!"

Disgusted with his own impatience as much as with the cringing thrall, Leif let him go. "Speak, then!" he commanded, "and if thou liest I myself will hang thee with delight!"

CHAPTER II

Leif did not reveal to anyone what had been the nature of the thrall's confidence, but when he emerged from the tent where they had been closeted together his face was as a black thunder-cloud, and the lightning of his eyes intimidating enough to extract unquestioning obedience from the men he hastily summoned to his counsel. Without explanation, he dispatched two of his ablest guardsmen to Gardar on what seemed to them a strange and suspicious errand. They were to take a gift of silver ore to the acquisitive Freydis and in return must, by strategy or force, bring back with them no less than three of her sailors. A seeming paradox, this—they were to bestow gifts of courtesy and at the same time exercise the rights of piracy in the lady's household.

Threatened on the one hand by Leif's anger if they failed, and on the other by Freydis' vitriolic hatred if they succeeded in the face of opposition from her, it was natural that their procedure should be cautious. Fortunately, they found the mistress of Gardar in a happy frame of mind and, therefore, an easier prey to their guileful flattery. The silver delighted her, and their assurance that Leif had averred that she was to receive an even greater share in future demanded of her pride some formal recognition. Was there something she could do for her dear brother's comfort? Something he lacked in food or clothing? She feared he was too prone to neglect himself!

Now that she had walked into their trap, Leif's messengers appeared to hesitate and ponder. No, they thought their lord was very well supplied with the daily necessities, but he was short of laborers—a fact he had lamented sorely when sending them away with his gift of silver. The gift had been greater had his laborers not been so few. Freydis pricked up her ears at this. How fortunate, she thought, that she should be enabled to please her princely brother without undue cost to herself! Eagerly she confessed to having a dozen idle fellows about the place, all of whom she would gladly send to Leif if that sufficed him. Her crafty visitors assured her that nothing so magnanimous was necessary or indeed acceptable, for at the outside their chieftain would receive no more than three able men from any one household. Thus persuaded, she proceeded to further play into their hands by selecting from amongst her retainers the men whose presence was grown the most distasteful and of whom she wished devoutly to be rid.

The journey across the hills consumed several days, for the way was both difficult and dangerous, but to Freydis' sailors the arduous passage was a welcome diversion. It was spiritually refreshing to them to be away from

her eternal vigilance and espionage; to be once again in the company of honest men whose hearts were light and whose conscience untroubled. It was enheartening to them just to laugh in the teeth of the mountain wind and to blurt out carelessly what came to mind without forethought and crafty consideration. So healing was the pleasant respite afforded them in the bleak wilderness, that at the journey's end they were quite recovered of their former melancholy and in the best of spirits when they presented themselves to their chieftain.

Leif received them with grave courtesy. There was nothing tangible in his speech or manner to have incited distrust, yet almost immediately their primitive instincts were roused to a sense of impending danger. A huge fellow, brown as a nut and sound as Norway timber, had constituted himself as spokesman for his comrades. Making a clumsy deference to the great chieftain, he began: "My lord, 'tis said thou art in need of our poor services, and if it so enpleasure thee, it hath been agreed amongst us that I make bargain for us all."

"'Tis pleasing enough to me," Leif answered shortly, in a voice which struck his hearers as singularly clearcut and cold. "Aye, it pleaseth me well; but more so, perhaps, if we make settlement man to man, safe from interference and interruption, for oftentimes even friends make the best bargain to seem bitter. But come, since thou art the wit of the party, it pleaseth me to interview thee first. 'Tis certain thou wilt agree with me that what appeareth difficult is best done quickly. Grim, follow me."

No alternative being offered, Grim was forced to comply, despite a very pronounced reluctance and an altogether incomprehensible desire to escape. Leif led the way to his tent, pitched some distance away—a great red-striped pyramid standing out against a jutting wall of solid grey rock. The massive tent was dark within, and where it backed against the rocky wall there yawned a black abyss, evidently the entrance to a natural cave. Grippled by sudden fear, Grim cast a suspicious glance at his chieftain, who immediately upon entering had seated himself by a rough table littered with samples of rock and broken weapons, and on which a clumsy grease-burner spluttered patiently, though not so much, it seemed, for the purpose of giving lights as of enhancing the dismal shadows round about.

Grim stood in hypnotic silence staring at the stern figure looming so large and terribly impressive in that cheerless light, and for the first time he was forced to recognize the mysterious and invincible powers of a great and magnetic personality. Though his life had been at stake he could not have stirred a muscle in self-defence! Leif's steel-blue eyes, hard and cold as that

flashing metal held him subdued and captive. Long and dreadful seemed the scrutiny to which he was subjected, an altogether intolerable experience. But no sooner was he somewhat recovered of his seemingly unwarranted fears than fresh doubts assailed him, for, now that his eyes were becoming adjusted to the murky light, he saw to his amazement that the outer shadows had yielded up a circle of mailed warriors.

Grim was no craven. If he blanched it was not so much in terror of that formidable and threatening force as at the thought of being himself unarmed. Yet, disadvantaged as he was, the very sight of armor dispelled the disagreeable uncertainty which had most tormented him. War was his element and all its accoutrements were enheartening. Born on the battlefield—his mother having, perhaps, been the last prophetess of war to cry her encouragement in the North—he was truly bred to battle and bloodshed. So now, more like his callous self, he laughed derisively, and in his roisterous way burst out: “Devil take it! These fellows of thine gave me a nasty turn, my lord. ’Tis over much like black magic to call a ring of fighters from the very shadows. Art planning a raid, mayhap, and wouldst number me amongst thy legion? If so, know me thy man and right willing!”

“Truth only do I ask of thee,” came the quick reply, each word clipped off sharply, “truth concerning thy deeds in Vineland.”

Grim was far too intelligent to attempt evasion. Someone had betrayed his evil mistress, that was obvious. Nevertheless he was resolved to defend his own word, whatever the cost. “’Tis said I honor truth but little,” he retorted; “it were better to find a nobler advocate, my lord.”

“’Tis thine to tell me what occurred in Vineland, and mine the sorting of truth from fiction. For truth thou shalt be rewarded; for fiction, also—in stripes!” the chieftain countered in cryptic fashion. To outward seeming he was as unmoved and coldly detached as his native hills, though, in truth, distaste of the task before him burned in him like a consuming flame. Immobile, adamant, he stared at the burly Grim, and none could have suspected that for once Leif would have welcomed weakness in a Norseman. “Consider thy answer and its consequence,” he urged his prisoner. “Again I ask thee, wilt speak or must a thrall’s lash loosen thy tongue?”

Grim betrayed no hint of the physical revolt and revulsion sweeping his healthy body in a sickly tide at thought of the torture to come. He met the chieftain’s hard eyes unflinching and undismayed. “It hath been said of thee, my lord, that thou art given to pledges. Yet it seems, thy condemnation falls on lesser men who may, perhaps, but ape their nobler leaders. ’Tis not a

soldier's duty to correct his chieftain, but, right or wrong, know this, my lord, that even a soulless wretch may deem his word inviolate and above the lash."

"'Tis well spoken and true," Leif responded bitterly, by no means insensible to the man's courage and the justice of his appeal. But a stern duty called for stern measures. With a frown Leif hurried on. "'Tis true, but with reservations. Leif Ericson encourages fidelity to honor only. Pledges begotten in dishonor to cloak a coward's act have no power to bind an honest man to secrecy. What hath been vowed in fear may well be disavowed at liberty. 'Tis not a question of self-righteousness, but of righteousness itself, for what bringeth ill to many cannot be an honor to a conscientious heart."

Grim glowered sullenly, blind to the chieftain's meaning, determined to be true to what he understood as honor. "What I have pledged I have pledged," he muttered grimly, "nor will I speak whilst there be strength in me to hold my tongue."

Leif considered him a long moment in heavy silence, and to his guard he seemed unmoved and unaffected, though in truth his whole heart went out in unalloyed admiration to the staunch-hearted seaman. Had it been at all possible he would have spared him, for he loathed the part he had to play. Yet his command rang out, cold, immutable, steel on steel: "Men, take him within and loose his tongue!"

One after another Freydis' unfortunate sailors met the same fate, and each one confessed his part in the Vineland tragedy when the whips bit deep enough; though none found an exacted oath so binding on honor as sturdy Grim, nor the betrayal of an evil mistress so distasteful. But when the sorry business was at an end Leif had ample proof of Freydis' villainy and her husband's cowardice. In every essential the three testimonies agreed; beyond a shadow of doubt the half-crazed thrall had told him the truth!

CHAPTER III

The Story of the Confession

Thorvald was taken ill toward the end of a rough voyage, on which account, when land was sighted southwest of Markland, his wife commanded that the ships make in to shore. It proved a goodly spot, rich in timber, fish and fruits, and to Freydis it seemed a happier arrangement to remain in a place where full rights of discovery were theirs than to proceed to Leif's post to be restricted and supervised by the masterful Karlsefni.

The argument appealed to Finbogi, who had no intention of supporting a Vineland settlement and was only concerned with immediate gain. Hence, but for the sharp dissensions broken out amongst the men of the two crews, the work of throwing together some sort of rude shelter for the company would have proceeded cheerfully. As it was, the dissension grew more vitriolic from day to day, very much to the discomfort of all concerned save Freydis, who was the real instigator of it. Whilst at sea she had sown the seed destined to bear such bitter fruit. In the rough way of seafaring men, Finbogi's sailors had taunted her crew good-naturedly for manning such a tub as Thorvald's ship; which badinage they had accepted in good part until she, already busy with her evil plotting, began to interpret the sport maliciously. Soon what had been harmless humor to lighten weary labor became a bitter insult, and the angry men set to bandying lampoons—that sardonic mischief most deadly to Norse hearts—and by the time land was reached enmity and hatred were but thinly masked.

This enmity Freydis nurtured assiduously by malevolent hints and dark insinuations. Mischief and mishap ruled the day. In some mysterious fashion Finbogi's traps were tampered with; a set of drying logs tumbled down the hillside and thundered into the sea; pelts had a curious way of disappearing from one camp or the other. A thousand petty irritations cropped up to set the short-tempered sailors quarreling. At length Finbogi sensibly withdrew to another part of the island whereon they were encamped and conditions improved for a time.

Yet what eventually fired Freydis' jealousy to its wicked resolve was the news that Finbogi's men had penetrated the mainland and had located a grove of giant hardwoods, and were, in addition, growing rich in fox pelts.

Shortly thereafter Freydis' fertile brain conceived a fiendish plan, one which the most hardened offender might have paused to execute, but which with that despotic rashness which similarly characterizes the mad actions of

tyrannical rulers and vicious women, she proceeded without a qualm to put into effect. In the dead of night she slipped from her warm bed and, in the scantiest clothing and naked feet, fled through the bitter cold of early winter to the merchant's cabin. Finbogi, startled from dreamless sleep by her frozen touch and pathetic tears, doubted his reason for the moment. She gave him no time for reflection. Conscience troubled her, and she was come like a penitent to sue for pardon in the hopes of re-establishing friendly relations between their crews—so she confessed, adding humbly that she was desirous and prepared to make ample amends for past mischief.

Finbogi was completely mystified. What could he say under the circumstances? To spurn this tearful penitent would be ungallant indeed; besides, there was nothing to be gained by further estrangement, whereas much of mutual benefit might be derived through restoration of peace and friendliness. Hence, in his awkward way, he endeavored to soothe the lady's distress and to assure her of his willingness to assist her in such measure as he could.

Having won thus far, Freydis stayed her tears and, with a seemingly guileless preamble of irrelevant nothings, introduced another subject. She complained of indisposition; homesickness was undermining her health, and she had not the hardihood to endure the terrible isolation of the island any longer. This being so, she had come with fear and trembling to cast herself upon his mercy; she proposed to lease his vessel for the journey to Greenland.

So, thought Finbogi, the real purpose of her visit was at last clear! Amazed and indignant, he stared at her, entirely at loss for words to grapple with so impertinent a request. Freydis smiled at him benevolently, ignoring his apparent displeasure. "Nay, good friend," she hurried on softly, "be not amazed, though I offer thee good gold for the pleasure of toiling homeward in thy vessel. 'Tis extravagant, mayhap, but my heart hungers for the sight of my precious son and the homely comforts of Gardar. Thorvald's tub"—she emphasised the word significantly—"will bear thee safely to Karlsefni's camps, and in his company will see thee to Greenland, where I vow thou shalt find thine own vessel waiting for thee, recaulked, repainted and impatient for its Norway cruise. Think, my friend, 'tis not often that gold is thus lightly to be gained."

Finbogi had his suspicions, but, knowing the lady for what she was, he understood the futility of protest. Moreover, the prospect of being rid of her for good and all was worth any sacrifice; and, as she had said, in the

company of Karlsefni he could reach home in safety. Why, then, should he not choose peace and gold in preference to bickerings and chance?

Freydis understood perfectly what was passing in the trader's mind. To encourage his decision she cunningly produced from the secret folds of her habit a tantalizing handful of gold, which she strewed on his rough pallet, telling him in laughing persuasion that the coffers whence it had come contained much more of its kind. The glittering metal won the day. Finbogi could not resist its shining appeal, and, just as his temptress had calculated, he silenced his doubts by arguing that such an action on her part must presage the sincerity and goodwill of her intentions. How else was he to interpret the reason why so money-loving a lady should cheerfully part with her gold? No, all in all, it seemed ridiculous not to accept her offer, for, as she had cunningly hinted, gold was not always easily won.

After some little further argument, flattering compliments and still more flattering promises, Freydis parted with the gullible trader in the most amiable fashion and hastened away to perfect her devilish scheme. Finbogi, unfortunately for him, gathered up his gold with caressing fingers, thrust it under his rude pillow, and with a satisfied grunt resumed his interrupted slumbers.

Now, upon reaching her own camp, Freydis broke into loud lamentations as she staggered to her bed, waking Thorvald from his ale-drugged repose by falling across his bosom in a moaning, pitiful heap. His emotions were indescribable; alarm, curiosity, mystified amazement, each in turn raced through his disturbed mind in a nerve-wracking flood. What unearthly cataclysm had befallen? What untoward thing, good or evil, could so have affected the iron-hearted Freydis? He shivered at the thought, and, blinking foolishly, peered into the face of his wife as if to reassure himself that this weeping female clinging to him like a frightened child was indeed she. It seemed beyond belief that the masterful woman he was unhappily resigned to acknowledge as his consort should be wailing and sobbing into his rumpled bosom, quite like any other fond and feeble creature. Freydis shivered convulsively and uttered a hollow groan, which proofs of terrifying misery roused the dazed Thorvald to more husbandly compassion. In clumsy solicitude he proceeded to help his exhausted lady to bed; whereupon, to his increased amazement, he discovered that her feet were bruised and bleeding, her garments disordered and torn; that, in fact, her whole appearance testified to some scandalous ordeal.

For all her simulated weakness Freydis' explanation was emphatic enough. This was Finbogi's doing, she told him. She had gone to the trader,

prompted by a Christian impulse, on an errand of peace, and he had received her with insolence and insults. . . . Sobs choked her utterance, but she managed to insinuate what decent modesty forbade utterance. No matter! She had courage, thank God, and strength! More tears followed, more pitiful sobbing and groaning. “Oh, that my lord Eric were yet alive!” she cried in sudden passion, “alive to avenge a poor daughter’s insult. But alas, ’tis useless to lament a dead falcon’s glory. Mated as I am, ’tis mine to bear this humiliation in silence, and the blessed saints alone know what more is to come!”

Thorvald’s vanity, if not his heart, was touched. Devil or not, she was his wife and as such she must be respected. No one might thus cruelly offend Thorvald’s lady and not learn to rue his folly! In a weak man’s savage frenzy, he flung into his garments and rushed out to summon his men to avenge the unpardonable insult done his name and station. Freydis had not anticipated quite so drastic a response to her prodding—certainly not such rapid action on the part of her phlegmatic husband. However, now the thing was done and out of her hands, she dismissed the thought of possible complication and defeat with a careless and indifferent shrug.

Meanwhile Thorvald poured his wrath into avid ears; his audience was more than ready to listen to and believe him. As a matter of fact, not a man in the crew cared a particle what had befallen their mistress, but they literally jumped at so excellent an excuse for punishing their own tormentors.

When, armed to the teeth and whipped into fury by a supposedly righteous indignation, they dashed down upon Finbogi’s camp, it was to find a sleeping bivouac. But borne on, as they were, by a storm of long withheld anger, no thought of pity restrained them. Their unearthly howls of rage and vengeance were the only warning given their poor doomed victims. Consequently, the ensuing fight degenerated rapidly into merciless slaughter. Yet, despite the overwhelming odds, Finbogi and his hapless crew sold their lives dearly, fighting with true berserk fury against the mailed demons who hacked and pierced in ruthless frenzy. But flesh cannot prevail against steel. The dreadful carnage was soon over, and the few who had miraculously escaped with minor injuries were quickly reduced to submission and made to renounce their rights and properties in favor of Thorvald and his victorious crew.

As might be expected, Freydis could not for long remain away. Her fierce nature hungered for the fray; her evil eyes ached to behold the humiliation and sufferings of her victims. Stealthily and unobserved, she had

stolen up to the encampment, arriving just in time to witness the surrender of Finbogi's ablest fighters. Their sad abasement brought sheerest joy to her wicked heart, but her unnatural and evil gloating was interrupted by wild, piercing shrieks, ending in violent babbling, and she beheld a few paces off what to a softer heart had constituted high tragedy. In the shelter of a cabin wall huddled one of the pretty brides of the winter past; wild-eyed and frenzied with grief, swaying to and fro, clasping to her agonized breast the fair head of her expiring husband. Scarcely more than a stripling he was, lithe and slender, with the love of life like a welling spring within him; young and strong, with all his deeds undone. The unfortunate bride was a daughter of Brattalid's oldest retainer, a man loved of Eric and respected by his son. Reared in the atmosphere of freedom and justice prevailing at Eric's Hall, she found courage in the midst of her madness to decry the woman whose wiles she now understood to be the cause of all the hideous carnage and useless misery.

"Thou hast done this, mistress!" she shrieked; "out of the blackness of thy vile heart thou hast perpetrated this crime! But think not the dead shall go unavenged. I call upon the soul of the righteous Eric to hear me and to curse thee with a father's curse for the shame thou hast done his memory! May the blood of these innocent men be upon thee and thy breed forever and ever—a walking terror by night and a haunting misery by day!"

Freydis was not so free from superstitious dread as she boasted. She shivered on hearing this curse flung out upon her across the body of that fair young thing, dead because of her baseness. She shivered, but her dark face remained a mask of cold, defiant ambition. "Silence her babbling!" she commanded sharply to a warrior standing near and gloomily regarding the spectacle before him. He appeared not to hear her. "Put an end to the maddened creature," she reiterated fiercely, and again met only an icy stare and determined indifference. The killing of women was never a Norseman's sport.

It was maddening enough to the tyrannic Freydis to find herself completely ignored in the finale of her big act, as it were, without any additional prod; yet the prod was forthcoming. On hearing their unhappy friend's wild invectives, the other young brides crept from their hiding to support her bitter cause. Like three avenging Furies they confronted Freydis, raining down upon her their hate and bitterness as only women could.

The mistress of Gardar lost all control over her savage passions; her whole body twitched and trembled in the unholy storm sweeping her

headlong into the bottomless pit of ignominy and shame whence she was never again to rise.

“What?” she shrieked, “wilt leave their crazy tongues wagging to our undoing? Fools! Wilt suffer these serving-wenchs to sing aloud their silly story to the ends of the earth? Oh, wisdom of men! to slay the master and leave the thrall and concubine to be the accusers!”

Now, at last, poor Thorvald understood what a dupe he had been in playing into the tricky hands of his crafty wife. For once he defied her with unmistakable fortitude. Pale with shame and disgust, he whirled upon his men, forbidding them henceforth to raise a single weapon in her behest. The command was superfluous just then. They had had enough of bloodshed; their madness was spent, and already the reaction, half remorse, half amazement at their deed, was setting in. Even if Freydis spoke the truth they had no stomach to rid themselves of the wretched women whose misery must forever accuse them.

Freydis glared at their downcast faces witheringly, whilst whatever of woman's nature she possessed gave way to inhuman passion. “Oh, fools and weak of heart,” she taunted them, “observe how a woman may and dares to employ arms!” And before her act could be intercepted, or was even fully comprehended by the dazed and fagged crew, she had snatched up a battle-axe and with all the skill of a practiced warrior had struck down the terrified young wife whose righteous reproaches had justly stung her. So swift was Freydis' action that another trembling victim had fallen by her hand before the spellbound crew recovered from the stupor of their outraged emotions. But the last unhappy bride was too quick for the terrible woman. With a heart-rending shriek she fled away in the direction of a distant headland, a great grey rock rising proudly from the sea, where for one spectacular moment her billowing robes and flowing yellow hair were flung in moving relief against a dark and gloomy sky. Then, swift as a bird, she plunged into the icy depths below.

Dreadful was the calm which followed. Inured as they were to battle and its cruel consequences, not a man there but looked upon Freydis with actual horror and physical revulsion. She no longer seemed to them a woman, but a fiend, the personification of raging passions terrifying and foreign to humanity. And to their simple reasoning it appeared singular to a degree that an extreme of physical courage, always coupled with honor in men, should so obviously be quite the reverse in women.

Thus ran the tale of the Vineland tragedy, dreadful to relate and dreadful to contemplate. And, as in the case of most evil actions, Freydis had found the aftermath much more harassing than the deed itself. Indifferent she might be to others' opinions, yet to live in close proximity with men who hated and despised her, who could no longer be deluded as to her innate character, grew increasingly irksome. Then, too, even her iron nerve quailed at the sound of the wind wailing through the hardwood copse and moaning like a lost soul round that lone grey headland. Even her robust sleep was invaded by haunting and horrid terrors!

This restlessness increased, keeping step with Thorvald's growing despondency. He was sick with shame, she with nervous fears; and since her ultimate safety depended upon the faith of her crew, she had not hesitated to bribe and to threaten. But, as she was soon to learn, even gold loses much of its appeal when the giver is too exacting and too well versed in trickery.

CHAPTER IV

To Leif the tale was a gruesome record of infamies directed against God and man—a record of unspeakable crimes, the enormity of which seemed past redemption. And Freydis, a woman of his blood, had perpetrated this cowardly and unpardonable thing! His sister had spilled that innocent blood in Vineland, the land he believed to be set apart for righteousness! Wretched deed, calculated to rend the eternal quiet of that virgin country and to fill its peaceful solitude with wild alarms and hateful memories! Most wretched thus to be immortalized! “Curious,” thought he, “that the same beautiful land which stole away mine affection, tempting me to dreams of happiness and love, should steal away my sister’s honor, tempting her to violence and bloodshed.” Disheartening and terrible intelligence! It seemed to him that an eternity would not suffice to solve the wretched problem. However, after giving detailed orders for the care and comfort of the poor fellows whose confessions were so shattering to his peace of mind, Leif shut himself away with his thoughts. A bitter vigil it was, with pride of family and place contending against a common people’s rights and the demands of justice. The struggle left him weary and embittered at a fate which continually thrust upon his shoulders the cares and crimes of others. However, once his course was clear, he made his way to the tent where Grim and his companions sprawled upon pallets of straw, cursing or groaning according to their natures and dispositions. Passing directly to Grim, whose ghastly condition gave bitter proof of his dogged courage, Leif stooped and with sincere humility took the man’s nerveless fingers in a close and sympathetic hand-clasp.

“Thou art a noble fellow,” he said, with characteristic fervor, “and I honor thine integrity; would there were more like thee in Greenland!”

Grim forced open his swollen eyes and met the steel-blue gaze focused upon him in such kindly concern. He had felt his life-blood freeze under the cold scrutiny of that intense gaze, but now he was to sound the other extreme of his chieftain’s fiery nature. What Grim read in the marvelous eyes now bent upon him in brotherly kindness made him forever a slave to their possessor. He did his best to summon a brave smile.

“My lord, ’twas but thy duty,” broke from him in hoarse effort, for nothing mattered now but his master’s comfort.

“A wretched act, no less,” his lord returned emphatically, and then with one of his flashing smiles he resumed: “Good friend, regrets have never yet

embettered man; 'tis best, then, to be done with idle speeches. My purpose is to acquaint thee and thy comrades that henceforth ye are under my protection; thy cause is my cause, and whosoever offends thee offends Leif Ericson. This also applies to thy fellows, and such is mine intention to declare at the Thing. Until then ye abide with me as honored guests, for I would that no malice be nursed between us."

They were very like impetuous children, those mighty fighting men of the North, quick to anger but equally quick to forgive. So far as they were concerned the matter was ended and all rancor wiped away. And when they were recovered of their harsh usage they became forthwith the most diligent of Leif's guards; so faithfully attentive, in fact, that Leif was in time to be affectionately known as the man of many shadows.

Whilst Leif maintained peace and harmony in the hills, keeping his own counsel as to the course he meant to pursue at the coming Thing, Freydis was no less absorbed in her eternal scheming, and entertaining no anxious thoughts of her brother's enterprise. True, she missed her erstwhile thrall, but on hearing of his employ in Leif's camps she laughingly agreed that so clumsy a fellow was better suited to breaking rock than serving wine to a lordly company. Moreover, she had reasons for wishing to maintain peace with the lord of Brattalid, for the time being at least. Above all, she wished to avoid the circulation of doubtful rumors; Leif's ready suspicions must on no account be aroused.

But howsoever isolated men may be, idle gossip wings its way to them. One night, shortly before Leif broke camp for the season, Grim was tramping about, as was his restless habit, when of a sudden he came upon two of his master's men deep in what appeared to be secret conspiracy. It was dark and chilly, so the two had built themselves a fire and, as Grim observed on creeping closer, were just finishing their evening rations. Grim decided his wisest course was to make certain of their innocence, so, hiding behind an accommodating boulder, he listened expectantly.

"'Tis said the cattle are dying at Brattalid and the mistress grows more feeble day by day," announced the first gossip, a grizzled old greybeard who should have been better employed.

"Ho, then, she's no lambkin," said his companion indifferently, brushing the remains of his meal from a curly brown beard.

The old man frowned darkly and wagged a rebuking finger. "Tush, careless youth, thou knowest how the Hebridene bewitched our master into

taking her brat to son. 'Tis all of a piece, meseems, and a strange enough madness."

"Age hath thee sure enow! What's strange in Eric's son finding a pretty wench desirable? Hath forgotten Eric's folly?"

"Nay, thou wag, but 'twas a different story," the greybeard retorted sharply. "Maid Thea was a pretty wench, and beauty, thou knowest, was not dame Thorhild's chiefest asset. Aye, well I mind the black sparkle of Thea's eyes. Poor wench, if she mispaid her lady 'twas but a little drop in comparison to the wrongs she suffered. 'Tis said she was taken in a Celtic raid, a little lass then, and given to our Thorhild, then a babe in arms, in tooth fee. In after years the good dame freed her."

"And well she repaid the charity," roared the younger man, slapping his companion's back with a huge and hairy paw. "Oh, hola! a good return our mistress got for all her kindness in that hell-cat Freydis."

"Fool!" hissed the old man, "wilt thou have us hung? Knowest not her men are 'mongst us? The fiend take her! Yet for all her villainy mayhap she speaks truth of the Hebridene. For, as thou knowest, 'tis said she murdered the babe. . ." Here he lowered his voice cautiously to a husky whisper more difficult for Grim to follow, but by straining forward dangerously the latter managed to make out the man's words. "Thou knowest," the gossip resumed, "I went home to my daughter's farmstead this past moon to look at the wee one—a hardy babe, by the gods, and like his grandfather, they wisely say—aye, a forward babe, who shall have a silver horn in tooth fee!—and my Raghild told me how the lady Freydis in circulating the dreadful truth of her little one's death, that its blood was transmitted to the Hebridene's son by means of black magic. 'Tis an ugly tale which none fancy to think upon now that the priests assure all magic is of the Devil."

"Tush! 'tis all of a piece and foolish," barked the youthful wag with cocksure vehemence. "Hath the mistress of Gardar no plot in mind? 'Tis said she hath a mind for intrigue and commands more than the house-keys."

His comrade nodded solemnly. "Aye, more's the pity. I have it for truth she means to subject the Hebridene to some bitter test this coming feast. Thanks be, my lot is cast in lowly places!"

Grim had heard quite enough to make him realize the danger hovering over the ill-fated Thorgunna. As fast as his feet could carry him, he sped to his chieftain. Leif listened in silence to Grim's jumbled and panting utterances, but the terrible icy calm, characteristic of Leif in an emotional crisis, boded ill for whosoever had roused the dark mood in him. When the

tale was finished he sat still, silent and terrible, his eyes flashing fire from the granite mask of his countenance. At last he spoke, slowly, precisely, like an avenging oracle. "Not to a woman and my sister can I mete out the punishment she deserves, but one thing is certain, no good will be her portion, now nor ever. The blood spilled in Vineland cries out shame upon her, and souls yet unborn will shudder at her perfidy. So be it! And now, good friend, 'tis plain my plans must somewhat be altered. He that once draweth the sword seldom sheathes it! Make ready, then, to uphold me, for we must reach Gardar ere my lady mother and her company arrive at the plotter's feast."

CHAPTER V

Thus it came about that Leif and his retainers arrived at Gardar some little while before they were expected, much to Freydis' amazement, who knew the precision of her brother's habits. He offered no explanations, however, and immediately upon arrival repaired to the Plains of Justice to dress his booths. This task completed, he left them and his personal effects in the care of those of his men whom Freydis would not have properly received. But ten of his guards, picked and able warriors, he took with him to Thorvald's Hall.

There a scene of happy festal activity seemed to belie his dark forebodings. Nowhere could a merrier atmosphere have been created nor a less likely stage set for a dire tragedy. The place rang with sounds of joyous labor and shone in its gala-day dress. The best tapestries hung in their places; maids strewed fresh rushes on the floor and draped the benches with glossy skins; the cookhouse sent its smoke in jolly curling plumes up through the great hole in the blackened roof, and over the hearthstones pots simmered and hissed and groaned under their weight of toothsome meats.

Freydis was affability incarnate, coming to meet her brother and his men with open arms and voluble protestations of pleasure. Mindful of their comforts, she at once sent a thrall to heat the stones for the bath, and almost in the same breath offered her guests to set a maid polishing their buckles and weapons—"for a rusted sword maketh an ill appearance at a feast and detracts from the glory of even the greatest warrior," she explained with gracious whimsicality.

"Aye, as ill as a corroded conscience," mused Leif bitterly, as he declined the offer and turned his way to the steaming bathhouse.

And now, in ever-increasing numbers, the people began arriving for the Thing, until at last the broad plains seemed a great hive of gaily-colored creatures milling round in endless procession. At the height of the excitement, whilst friend was greeting friend, lovers slyly managing a stolen rendezvous, and none had settled down to the serious business of preparing charges for the law-makers, Thorhild and her company rode up to Gardar; and a very presentable company it was in its holiday colors of scarlet and blue and gold. Even the little horses were gaily decked and held their heads high in conscious pride.

Leif sped to meet his Thorgunna. She was very pale, he thought, and her eyes had a look of secret anguish about them, though her smile was still

radiant.

“Thou art well, my lord,” she whispered, as he helped her to dismount, “which blessing is all I ask.”

“And thou art beautiful,” he whispered back, “with a beauty which creeps deeper and deeper into my heart, into my every dream, though I see thee but seldom.”

Then he must greet his aged mother, who had the child Thorgils pillioned behind her on an ancient horse; a much too gentle and wise a creature to please the little lad, whose tastes were turning to a dashing mount. Leif thrilled at the sight of his young son. Bright and spirited, proudly alert, he seemed curiously like himself, and yet, somehow, endowed with the grace of his lovely mother. Leif thrilled at the sheer beauty of him and at the renewed conviction that in Thorgils he had a liberator as well as a son.

That night they made merry at the Hall. After the tables were carried away Freydis called upon a man famous for his chanting to entertain the company with his art. He complied with a vim, chanting tale after tale in the true Norseland style, and finally, to the huge enjoyment of his hearers, concluded with an impromptu saga, exaggerating in whimsical fashion the characteristics of the assembled guests. This mirth-provoking exhibition ended, Freydis poured wine for the friendship-cup, and then, together with her women guests, left the banquet chamber for the softer comforts of her bower.

Thereafter Leif lost interest in the assembly, for fear clutched his heart despite the sure knowledge that his spies were planted everywhere. And, as may be imagined, his abstraction was not lost upon the company. Many a head wagged and many a shoulder was shrugged in silent disapproval; whilst not a few of the nobles, ripened in suspicion through the gossip of their wives, thought it further proof of the Hebridene's black art.

But the night passed quietly and another day dawned crisp and clear, and Leif found the beloved Thorgunna and his son in smiling good health waiting upon Thorhild in her bed-place. Thorgunna was plaiting the old lady's still luxuriant hair when Leif interrupted them, and little Thorgils was dutifully brushing his granddame's silk-embroidered slippers.

Leif was so immeasurably relieved to find his dear ones safe from all unpleasantness and harm that, quite unlike his reserved self, he swept them into an eager and rapturous embrace. And if his arms were too impetuous and fiercely passionate, his tumbled words were no less so. Thorhild was

scandalized and indignant, or at least affected proper dismay. "My son," she gasped in breathless disapproval, "what aileth thee? Hast been drinking thus early in the day to the undoing of thy proper wits and dignity? Shame to thee, Leif Ericson, capering like a kitchen wench!" she chided the handsome chieftain, who stood laughing down upon her in fondest humor from his splendid height. "Ridiculous mortal! I charge thee let not thy son witness such foolishness! Dignity is rooted in restraint, and, if it so please thee, lord chieftain, restraint is power."

But what cared Leif just then for dignity or power? Thorgunna, like an exquisite flower drooped upon his bosom, her lovely face up-tilted, was smiling at him with love and understanding; all her brave loyalty of soul and unchangeable devotion revealed to him in the soft radiance of her eyes; and that was worth a kingdom of empty dignities!

The child, watching his elders with bright appraising eyes, suddenly laughed aloud, amazed, no doubt, at the behavior of adult beings, who never could quite understand the great essentials as a little boy could. Ah, he could have told them of the foolishness of dignity, for had he not seen his stately grandmother weep in the shelter of her wimple? He could have told them that joy was never captured, yet never lost, for he had learned its secret at grim Dun David. He knew that life was a glad adventure, for the sea had told him so! He could have told them many things, but they would not have understood him any more than poor old Elspeth understood him—poor Elspeth, who prayed so much and wept so often! Ho, they were very laughable, his beautiful dear ones, but he loved them none the less! Peals of laughter rippled from his merry lips, elfin silver-toned laughter, like the lilt of tumbling waters. Leif thought he had never heard a sweeter sound, and, curiously, in the same instant was reminded of the ecstatic cry of the scarlet-winged singer of Vineland.

"Tut, tut," dame Thorhild checked the infectious mirth; "tut, child, thou art worse than a seamew with thy noises."

Leif, still smiling, captured his mother's admonishing hands in his. "Poor lady, a stormy lot of men thou wert doomed to mother," he fondly consoled her.

"Aye, 'tis true," she chuckled, "stormy and petulant as the sea. Aye, all too true, but I ask thee, who of Norse blood loveth not the sea?"

CHAPTER VI

It was at morning-meat that Freydis made her first move. Amicable and smiling, she announced to her assembled guests that she had a pleasant surprise in store for them. There was to be a christening in the Hall at high noon! She went on to explain that two of her serving-maids had lately borne children, and because of their loyalty and excellent deportment it was her intention to honor their little ones with a bowl of Vineland wine and a special requiem for long life and prosperity. She hoped her guests would appreciate the spirit prompting her action, for not only was she extremely fond of the mothers, but the babes were in themselves worthy of charitable notice and admiration.

No appeal could have won a heartier response, for Norse nature, denied an emotional outlet in glamorous romance, directed its love and tenderness to childhood. Freydis' announcement evoked roars of eager applause, and a dozen burly greybeards at once volunteered as sponsors and pronounced themselves ready to assume the duties of foster-fathers if need be. No other proposal could have induced livelier interest; no other diversion could have pleased the people more.

In due course, when the sacred rites of baptism were over, when the priests had sung their requiem and the guests had drained their toasts to the rosy babes, Freydis took the infants, one upon each arm, and, smiling benignantly, passed from bench to bench that the ladies might praise the little beings to their hearts' content, and incidentally, if it pleased them, might present some trifling gift to increase the pride and happiness of the humble mothers waiting shyly at the back of the Hall.

When Freydis finally reached Thorgunna, sitting beside Thorhild in the place of honor, she was momentarily disconcerted and abashed by the contempt she read in the beautiful eyes meeting hers so fearlessly. Thorgunna was calm and collected, but a slight pallor and an occasional nervous twitching of her delicate eyelids betrayed her inner distress, for to her intuitive nature it was clear that some mischief was brewing. Nor was she insensible of Freydis' hatred and the likelihood that she herself would be the chosen victim. But, quiet and undismayed, she fixed her searching gaze on the dark face before her, and though she made no move, nor spoke a word, an inexplicable quality of soul shone from her eyes, accusing, and for the moment, striking terror to Freydis' evil heart.

But even amidst her confusion Freydis shrewdly reflected that if her hesitation and dismay had been noticed it would but strengthen her tale of witchcraft. She broke into smiles. "My lady, thou with thy repute for love of the fair and innocent wilt, I know, find the babes adorable. Oh, see how their little round eyes open wide in wonder at thy beauty; 'tis evident they find thee no less lovely than thou must find them adorable!" she began, ingratiatingly.

Thorgunna nodded, paler now, for an ugly suspicion had crossed her mind. Oh, wretched and depraved heart, would nothing avail against its cruelty? She wondered. Would nothing alter so vile a purpose? Jealousy and greed, these two were the implacable handmaids of the dark-browed woman confronting her with such unspeakable purpose written large in her face. But, ugly attributes though they were, they might yet be made to serve a goodly purpose! Thus reasoned the charitable Thorgunna in the short respite given her. "Aye, adorable they are," she answered softly, never taking her solemn eyes from the treacherous, smiling countenance before her. "Too adorable, I trow, for mishap or ill fate." Thinking to purchase mercy, if not grace, she unpinned a rare jewel from her breast and extended it graciously to her malicious hostess. "Accept this, mistress, for the babes; may it bring them good fortune . . . and thy favor," she concluded, stressing the last words of her appeal.

Freydis colored angrily, interpreting the plea as satire aimed at her doubtful generosity, but she accepted the jewel with alacrity. "Ah, sweet lady," she sparred, "for so rich a gift my little retainers must pledge thee eternal faith. Grant us thy hand, I pray thee. Grant us thy hand and the patronage of a beneficent liege."

For some instinctive reason Thorgunna hesitated, reluctant to comply with an apparently innocent request; hesitated nervously, and to those watching her the least movement was significant of untold possibilities. And then, in a graceful sweeping gesture, jealously marked by every woman present, she presented her shapely hand, adorned by a single curious green gem, for the pretty courtesies so playfully offered.

Sinister and sly was the smile playing about Freydis' lips as she manoeuvred to have the tiny courtiers kiss their liege lady's hand. "See how willingly the little men pledge thee their lives, how reluctant they are to be severed from thee. 'Tis quite as though they were become one with thee, bound by some hidden influence drugging and sweet. See how enamoured they are; how they droop, swooning with love, against their lady's knee!" she exclaimed in feigned delight to the amused and merry spectators. And

then, with many a jest and laughing quip, she passed down the Hall amidst noisy cheers and loud hurrahs and surrendered the glowing infants into the keeping of their proud and grateful mothers.

The guests now turned their attention to other matters of prevailing interest. The men discussed the case to be brought up for trial at the Thing; then turned to the year's fisheries, trade, the mining prospects, and the possibilities of a Vineland colony. The women, on the other hand, discussed with equal animation their household affairs, the duels which had been fought, and the likelihood of alliances between this and that family through monied settlement or marriage.

Into this peaceful atmosphere piercing and terrified shrieks tore like forked lightning through a placid sky. Every voice was instantly hushed, and unconsciously the men reached behind them, where, according to custom, their shields were hung upon the wall, and more than one bright weapon flashed from its scabbard. Leif, seated in the throne chair opposite Thorvald, leaped to his feet and stood with drawn sword, ready for any emergency.

CHAPTER VII

The horrible spectacle which now greeted the eyes of the startled company so far exceeded their worst expectations in gruesomeness, that its effect was paralysing. No rebel thrall, no drunken brawler bent on mischief, burst in upon them, nor any horde of savages; but in tumbled the young mothers, half crazed and terrified, screaming aloud that their babes, so short a while ago their joy and pride, were cruelly murdered. It was too true; not only were the little creatures rigid in death, but, as was painfully clear, had died a violent and tortuous death.

“Mistress! mistress!” the poor maddened mothers shrieked, as they fell at Freydis’ feet, “’twas the accursed jewel! ’Twas the witch-woman! ’Twas the Hebridene spirited their lives away!”

Once again Freydis found her plot running wild with the bit in its teeth. She had not anticipated quite this situation; she had planned a more subtle and less dangerous accusation. “Hush, hush, good souls!” she implored the wretched women grovelling before her, “ye must beware of rash judgment. Have patience, the holy priests must guide us.”

But the mischief was done. A young noblewoman, recently delivered of her firstborn, shrieked wildly to her lord, “Slay her! Slay her ere she be our ruin!—ere she murder all our innocent children!”

“Life for life! ’Tis the law!” a man’s voice responded angrily. “Fling her brat in the bath as she did our lady’s precious daughter! Aye, make way with the witch-woman’s son,” screamed the poor bereaved mothers with the violence and maddened frenzy of twin furies.

Like a thunderbolt Leif hurled himself in front of Thorgunna’s bench. Sword aloft, eyes flashing, he faced the hysterical crowd, contempt and scorn and hot anger playing like lurid beacons across the granite hardness of his face.

“Silence!” he thundered, “silence! Is it sanity to be stampeded like sheep by the shrieks of silly women? Citizens of Greenland, are ye Norsemen or are ye fools?”

“Attend him not!” shouted the noble whose wife had started the hubbub, “he is himself bewitched!”

Leif brought down his sword upon the table before him so fiercely that the sharp song of biting steel reverberated throughout the entire hall. “Call

me what ye will, it matters nothing. The sword of Eric Red shall speak a language comprehensible to stupid and stubborn skulls! Ye fools and simple, is there not a Thing for the settlement of disputes? Are ye not assembled for that express purpose? Will ye murder a woman cold-bloodedly without trial and suffer the shame forever? Men of Greenland, I call upon ye not to shame our common heritage of justice and honor, and I pledge the good faith of Eric's blood that this woman shall be tried in public hearing this coming Thing. But first ye shall attend me in what I have to divulge."

Leif's bodyguard had followed and surrounded him, forming a circle of threatening steel which not even the bravest were ambitious to break. The angry din subsided gradually, and after considerable whisperings and shame-faced consultations, the men announced their willingness to abide by the Thing. "We will await the public judgment," they cried in chorus, "and if thou hast aught to confide in us we will attend thee."

Under cover of his shield Leif whispered an anxious question to the youngest guard, hovering close to his chieftain like a fierce-eyed guardian angel.

"Aye, my lord," the youthful warrior whispered back, "Grim hath already departed with the young Thorgils."

Immeasurably relieved, almost light of heart, Leif drew himself up proudly and addressed his people. "Good friends and countrymen, be seated, for that which duty compels me to say cannot be said briefly."

When quiet and order were again restored he made his way to Freydis' seat, walking with deliberate slowness, a grim smile transforming his pleasant features into a mask of determined cruelty. For the first time in her life Freydis was now at the point of swooning, and would have given all her coveted gold to avoid the impending clash between them. Her brother's terrible eyes seemed to prod and rend her like poisoned daggers.

"Mistress!" his cold, metallic command pierced through the paralyzing fear, benumbing her faculties and recalling her to the vital necessity of sharp defence. "Mistress Freydis, do me the honor to join me at thy House Pillars."

There was no escape for her. Quaking with terror and a thousand nameless fears, Freydis suffered herself to be led to the "undvei," the place of honor, where, making the four corners of a square, stood the sacred pillars of her house.

Leif turned his scathing glance upon her, and to save herself she could not restrain the impulse to hide her guilty face in her evil hands. He made her a contemptuous obeisance.

“Behold a noble hostess!” he cried, in a voice as merciless as his longsword. “A noble hostess, friends, who entertains her guests with strategy and murder!”

Thorvald, blustering weakly, attempted to rise in her defence, but Leif waved him aside with the curt and cutting truth, “Thou art compromised enough, my lord Thorvald; ’tis no greater shame to thee to acknowledge a base match than for Leif Ericson to own so foul a kinswoman.”

In desperation Freydis made her final effort. “Ah, my people, my dear and noble friends, ’tis the fair Hebridene’s witchery hath made him mad. . .”

Leif whirled around sharply, ashen with anger. “Silence, woman! Silence, or ’twill be upon thine own head what wrath may suffer me to do!” he thundered. “Observe how like to innocence is the lady’s demeanor,” he taunted bitterly, “how guileless her countenance, how pure and serene her glances! Oh, men, in whom the light of truth yet burns, I ask ye, is it thus that honest womanhood deports itself? Look well and long, good people, that ye may never forget the shameful sight; for there before ye stands a woman whom courage hath perverted and ambition deadened to every charitable impulse.”

And there in her own Hall, where she had plotted to destroy forever the good name of Thorgunna, Freydis was forced to listen in cowed silence to the revelation of her shameful Vineland treachery. When Leif had finished deathlike silence reigned in the Hall. Not a man could doubt the horrid tale, and, indeed, the half-fainting Freydis was her own most damning accuser.

“The holy faith hath destroyed our ancient gods,” Leif’s cold, determined voice resumed, each carefully chosen word falling like devastating hail in the painful silence. “But though these gods be relegated to the limbo of forgotten memories, there still remain the pillars of our Halls —poor wooden effigies of something strong and eternal, immutable and peerless, which uphold and sustain the habitations of honor. Oh, sacred Honor, whose tenets are the law and the keeping of the law, miserable is that house whence thou art departed!” He paused a moment, even his stern justice quailing at the thing he meant to do; then, grimly determined, hurried on. “Mark my words, they are not chosen idly. To this Hall, to this line, honor is henceforth dead!” And before anyone might even suspect his intention, quick and terrible in vengeance, he had leveled a blow at the noble

carven pillar which so long had typified the valor and the glory of Thorvald's ancient clan. When the battle-axe came away an ugly gash marred the dark, polished surface of the splendid column, jagged and deep and sinister, like a fatal wound in a venerable countenance. "Thy mistress struck a death-blow no less severe to the greatness of thine house," the terrible accuser went on mercilessly. "'Tis rightly fitting, then, thus to record her shameful deed, that it may stand an irrefutable reproach so long as her unhappy blood survive. So much for treachery and treason! And now, good countrymen, consider well my word and promise. Retribution shall be made to one and all, to high and low alike, such retribution as lies in human power. Aye, I swear it, though its fulfilment reduce the House of Eric to utter ruin."

Having thundered forth this awful charge and uncompromising judgment, Leif turned his back upon the horrified guests and, leaving Freydis in a shivering heap by the ruined pillar of her dishonored house, re-threaded his way with quick impatient step to his mother and the long-suffering Thorgunna. The venerable mistress of Brattalid sat very straight in her tapestried seat, very straight indeed, with her grey head proudly lifted and on her face an expression hardly compatible with a religion of submission and humility. Proud and determined as her son, the old lady stared out upon the uneasy company like a queen watching with indifferent interest the emotional reaction of a carnival crowd. Thorgunna, on the contrary, drooped against Thorhild's shoulder, a pale madonna of shattered hope and joy, for, curiously enough, in this fateful hour, when seemingly her trials were being ended and her good name firmly reestablished, she had experienced one of those trance-like moments, to which she was often subject, wherein she saw visions of the future.

Leif's voice was very gentle as he addressed them, and his eyes spoke for him what his lips dared not profess. "Make haste to leave this place, for I would not have ye another hour under this hateful roof. Horses will be waiting when ye are attired, and a company of trusted men will see ye home to Brattalid. When the Thing is over ye may safely look for my return. Take heart, then, good my ladies, and speedily make ready for the journey."

With a proud gesture of ineffable devotion and confidence Thorhild touched her son's shield as she arose. "My son," she said, "'tis borne home to me at last that pride may be as virtuous as humility and a strong arm as righteous as a praying palm."

So saying, the old dame accepted her fair companion's proffered arm and, without so much as a glance at the dumbfounded company, the two

women swept from the room. Nor was one word raised against their going.

CHAPTER VIII

Leif opened the Thing on the morrow with all his customary pomp and precision, and no one would have guessed from his bearing how painful was the ordeal before him. Quite as though the ugliest crime ever tried in a Norse Thing were not the all-absorbing interest of the day, he proceeded with minor offences and impending judgments. And not until all these lesser affairs were satisfactorily settled and men's minds grown calmer did he take up the vital issue. Even then he moved with exasperating composure. He was dressed for the occasion in magnificent armor, and when, cool and self-possessed, he eventually took his place on the Mount of Laws, he was truly as knightly a figure as ever delivered oration to an impressed and admiring people. As always, his purpose was unwaveringly declared; he made no compromise with the offender. Freydis was to relinquish all her Vineland spoils, and this not inconsiderable wealth was to be divided evenly amongst the relatives of the murdered women. She was to forfeit her vessel and forever to release from her service the sailors she had sworn to secrecy. The vessel was to be entirely refitted, made ready for a Vineland cruise, and stocked with food sufficient for thirty men before it would be accepted from her hands. For their part in the crime Leif exiled her sailors for a term of five years, with the injunction that their energies were to be expended upon building a Vineland colony. In Vineland they were to exercise all the rights of freedmen, excepting only that their industry was to be subject to inspection at whatsoever time Leif might think fit to enforce that right.

Lastly, Freydis was in actuality to be a prisoner on her own estate, subject to vigilance, and punishable by death should she ever attempt to set foot on shipboard again.

Freydis had neither courage nor inclination just then to attempt further conflict with her powerful brother, and Thorvald was so dazed by the suddenness of the calamity fallen upon his household that he lacked sufficient energy even to suggest that his friends intercede in his behalf. Consequently, Leif's judgment was accepted without so much as one dissenting voice. It would seem that Freydis' power was broken, her cunning tongue effectively silenced; it seemed so to the older nobles, reared as they were in the sterner creeds of their fathers. They knew not how healing to pride and healthful to ambition the retirement of a confessed and forgiven heart may be! But at least the penance of the lady of Gardar brought peace to her household and fewer lashings to her thralls.

Nothing of moment transpired during the winter. Leif kept a closed house, save to those who were in need of help, and his friends respected his desire for seclusion. But though to the seeming of pleasure-loving Norsemen this was a quiet and lonely season, it was, nevertheless, the happiest time of Leif's life. Throughout the long evenings, whilst Thorgunna and Thorhild sat at their spinning or weaving, he instructed his young son in the duties of a noble and in the history of his warlike race. Before spring dawned Thorgils had learned to wrestle, to fence commendably with a miniature jeweled sword, and to sing in his eager treble any number of rollicking ditties.

In truth, happiness and peace reigned at Brattalid for the first time in its turbulent history. And this peace seemed to extend throughout the entire colony. Judging by rumor, it appeared that even Freydis was reduced to passivity and, either through change of heart or a broken spirit, had at last renounced her mischievous activities. But Leif was shortly to learn that a sleeping serpent is not necessarily a harmless one; Freydis' venom was far from spent.

It was well on into spring, and while all Brattalid was in a ferment of excitement over the impending departure of the exiled sailors and their families, that Freydis struck her next blow. As might be expected, this time her intended victim was the hated young heir of Brattalid. How patiently she had watched and waited her opportunity is apparent by the very nature of the incident in question, for Leif saw to it that the child was never unattended, never out of the care of some faithful retainer. And because of his attachment to the little boy, Grim was more often than not the vigilant shadow and watchful eye hovering over the budding chieftain.

On this particular day, destined to bring such strange and eventful changes to young Thorgils, the pale spring sunshine glimmered tantalizingly on heath and hill, calling, tempting, teasing the restless vagabond in his little heart. It was unbearable not to ride into the golden patches of light quivering on the uplands like pools of magic waters! Besides, he had by now a lively dapple grey pony of whom he was immensely proud, and whose bold little hooves itched, he knew, to follow the glinting trails. By pretty artifice and patient wheedling he at last won permission from his father to go a-questing in the distant hills, with the understanding that he should dutifully remain within the bounds of the estate. But young Thorgils, exulting in a delicious sense of freedom after the long winter's confinement, speedily forgot the exacting and tiresome promise, and, with a peal of mischievous laughter, gave the half-wild animal its head. On and on the little madcap tore, giving

no heed to Grim's threatening bellow, revelling in the chase he was leading his solemn protector.

Then it was, when the little rider dashed down a green coulee, that Grim, topping the ragged hill, saw three ruffians spring from behind a cliff and fling themselves directly in the animal's path. With a bellow of rage Grim whipped up his mount and tore down the hillside, wanting nothing so much as to give these ill-conditioned creatures a taste of his iron fists.

But for all his tender youth, little Thorgils possessed his full measure of pluck and hardihood. Startled though he was, he kept his head, and having instantly grasped the danger of the situation, he responded with as defiant and fierce a yell as he could muster, struck his horse a cutting blow, and, kicking his heels viciously into its sides, dashed right through the human barrier before him. Then, with a level-headedness far beyond his years, the boy wheeled sharply and pounded back over the hills to Brattalid, leaving Grim to settle with the spies. They had no stomach for an encounter with so formidable an antagonist, and to Grim's mortifying disappointment and disgust, they picked up their heels and incontinently fled.

Leif looked upon the episode in the light of a serious warning, and after long debating with himself he came to the bitter conclusion that neither the child nor its mother was safe in Greenland. Despite his love and watchfulness, Freydis' patient malice would one day strike them down. There was only one thing to be done, and though it meant the end of all human happiness for him, he was determined to do it. Thorgunna, most unfortunate though best-beloved of women, must take their son to Vineland! Aye, in Vineland, that far mysterious country, whose charms still held his heart in bondage, these two who were his life and love would find that peace and safety which might not be his to enjoy.

When at length, half fearfully, he bared his mind to Thorgunna, she smiled her slow, endearing smile, so expressive of untold love and quiet understanding. "Ah, Leif," she chided him, "what a blind boy thou art, in truth! Blind and trustful, and addicted to roseate dreams. Leif, my lover and my lord . . ." it was a cry from the depths of her tortured soul, and the sudden passion of it startled them both. She tried to laugh, but failing miserably, fled for one solacing moment to the comfort and shelter of his lonely arms. Her cheek against his sorely troubled heart, she found strength to say—"Dear, my lord, I have long foreseen this hour and separation."

Leif's arms closed round her jealously. "'Tis but for a time," he replied sharply, as though by the fierceness of his denial he might dismiss the doubt

assailing him. “A little while, beloved, for when my duties to God and country are accomplished a way will be opened for our lasting happiness.”

“Aye, my lord, a way will be opened in God’s good time. Grieve not for us, then, whose chiefest joy is thy well-being, whose strength dependeth on thy good fortitude. With no sore exile heart would I betake me to thy Vineland! Nay, nay, let gladness buoy my spirit and sustain my fainting flesh, because that I, first among women, may plant the seeds of faith and love and charity in so fair a country!”

Two weeks later the confiscated vessel with its little band of exiles was ready to sail. Then only did Leif reveal to those outside his immediate confidence the unbelievable fact that his son and the inimitable Hebridene were to be included amongst the future colonists of Vineland. Just before the ship unfurled its bold, red sail, he lifted his little son to a huge stone that, altar-like, faced the sea, and, unbuckling his sword and shield, laid them at the boy’s feet. “Thorgils,” Leif addressed the child in solemn affection, “behold, I lay at thy feet the honor and glory of Eric’s House; take them to thy heart; lift them to lasting renown; build them into the woof of a new nation’s destiny. My little son, keep clean thine heart, and hold thy spirit proud and free. Fail not the good faith reposed in thee. Look up, child; hold high thine head, for by right of discovery and the grace of God I pronounce thee chieftain of Vineland, first lord of that wondrous country for which I would so gladly live and die.”

A moment later—but how long that moment was, with its brave farewells and still braver smiles that twisted the heart and choked the passionate word—and the great ship unfurled her sails and headed proudly out to sea. On her gleaming poop two figures stood apart in proud isolation —Thorgunna, beautiful as some sea-goddess in her green and gold habit; and little Thorgils, valiantly staggering under the great shield which covered him from chin to toe. A sob caught at Thorgunna’s throat as the shore receded, and despite her brave effort a little cry escaped her. Thorgils, tossing back his yellow hair, regarded her gravely over the rim of Leif’s stainless shield. “Nay,” said he, in loving rebuke, “grieve not, dear mother; there’s naught to endanger thee, for now thou hast a man to keep thee and to make thy fortune.” Thus fond and gallant, the little chieftain sailed away to claim his fair possession and to enact his strange and colorful destiny.

CHAPTER IX

Work, work, work—remorseless, never-ending work—this was all that remained to Leif. And as lesser men fling themselves into revelry when the fates have gone against them, so Leif threw himself into ceaseless activities, caring nothing who should triumph, seeking only to wear out the dreary hours stretching ahead into a meaningless eternity. Analytical and exacting by nature, he drifted little by little into the habit of cryptic, unrelieved criticism. Unsparing with himself, he saw no reason for sparing others, for what he did was invariably for the good of the greatest number rather than for himself or the favored nobles, a practice never popular nor inductive to personal safety. However, for a time his laborers were willing and eager to serve him, because their hands itched for his silver, and also, perhaps, because of a certain deep-rooted respect and sympathy. But when the mysterious vein of ore on which their hopes of easy fortune were passionately fixed suddenly gave out, grumblings, dissensions and bitter complaints broke out amongst them.

Freydis was not slow in taking advantage of the circumstance. Her cunning mind had not lain fallow for nothing, nor had her piety throughout the past months been purposeless. She had taken to good deeds, not that a sense of their virtue impelled her, but rather that in them she recognized a sure means to a desired end.

Consequently, when Leif uncompromisingly dismissed his rebellious workers and they returned in sullen resentment to their homes, she made certain they should find a well-stocked house and a good wife loudly praising the generosity of the redeemed mistress of Gardar.

Slowly, persistently, she wormed her way into the confidence of the ignorant and credulous—not because, as they supposed, her new humility made her anxious to associate with “God’s lowly little ones,” but because she meant to twist them to her ultimate purpose. Day by day, month in and month out, she dispelled her subtle, poisonous mischief, ten times more deadly in that it bore the semblance of godliness and charity.

“How comes it,” she sighed one day to her steward, in the hearing of her thralls, “that where a short while back these Greenland hills were ribbed with silver, they are now no more than useless, gloomy rock? ’Tis strange, yet no stranger, mayhap, than much else. Nay, ’tis nowhat stranger, good steward, to find these rugged hills deprived of their precious metal than my once gentle brother of all tolerance and pity.”

Unfortunately and unwisely, Leif permitted his contempt of the clever mischief-maker to cloud his judgment. Forgetful of the inconstancy and gullibility of human nature, he refused to believe that any serious account would be taken of her work or action. Her assumed piety amused him no less than her former vanity. Ludicrous in her endless insincerities, as he saw her to be, so he imagined she must appear to all others. Unrestrained and unhindered, therefore, Freydis assiduously fanned the rising resentment amongst the superstitious and the envious.

Whether for good or evil, an immediate clash was averted by the timely arrival of Karlsefni and Gudrid after a four years' sojourn in Vineland. Dissension and gloom faded into the background during the joyous days that followed, for all the countryside assembled at Brattalid to interview the distinguished visitors. Karlsefni had astonishing tales to tell of a savage, red-skinned people with whom he had driven a thriving trade despite serious doubts of their friendliness and reliability. They had become madly enamoured of the scarlet cloth of the Norsemen, and for that commodity had willingly bartered their richest treasures.

Aye, Vineland had pleased the valiant Karlsefni, charming him with its eternal sunshine and balmy airs, but duty to a noble family called him back to Iceland. Yet, though he might not take further part in colonizing the heaven-favored country, it had rejoiced him exceedingly, so he maintained, to welcome the lonely band of exiles and to see them comfortably settled on the broad and fertile banks of a beautiful river.

For the first time in long weary months Leif cast care and worry to the winds and with all his former wit and sparkle entered into the joys of his people. Assured of the safety of his loved ones and the prosperous beginnings of the settlement he had dreamed of, he felt there was indeed cause for thankfulness and hearty celebration. He would his happy gratitude might flow out to all his people, for none was so glad of heart as he, unless, perhaps, the gentle Gudrid, proud mother now of a sturdy boy of three. Gudrid The Fair was, as her friends laughingly told her, fair and gentle still, but with the added dignity of proud and beaming motherhood. "And who would not be proud to mother the first white child born in Vineland?" Thorhild asked defensively; "aye, who indeed, although the youngling were not a tenth so beautiful as my Gudrid's Snorri!"

By which remarks it may be rightly seen that of all Karlsefni's wealth dame Thorhild deemed his infant son the dearest and the best. In truth, the old lady's heart had well-nigh broken on parting with young Thorgils, and Gudrid's tawny-headed little son assuaged with his baby prattle the aching

void in her heart and the lonely memories engendered by that cruel separation.

The intervening years had not altered Gudrid perceptibly; her first concern was still for the happiness of others. Seeing how devoted her old friend was—nay, jealously steeped in little Snorri's baby wiles—and how greatly aged and sorely infirm, she begged her lord to remain throughout the winter season at Brattalid that she might with her loving presence encourage and coax the failing old lady back to health and vigor.

Thorhild delighted in the arrangement, and for several reasons, the first and foremost of which she kept to herself since it would certainly cause unnecessary grief. The truth was that the woman whom Eric had chosen above all others knew how to hide a grievous malady as would a warrior his fatal wound. Her vigorous mind was busy with the plans of a new church, and it was her one passion to see the child Snorri baptized in this sacred edifice. It was a passion which quickly grew into an obsession. She could think of nothing else, speak of nothing else, plan for nothing else, and, like her son, she urged her workmen into speeding their work.

The edifice was completed at last, and, like a great queen, satisfied and proud on viewing the fruits of her enterprise, she attended the dedication of her church and saw the little Snorri accepted into the covenant of her God. It was the last spectacular event in her long and colorful life. One morning, shortly after Karlsefni's ship had sailed away, they found her, a little withered old lady, wrapped in a scarlet cloak that once was Eric's, nestled down in the great Honor Seat, her pallid cheek against the falconhead where oft her lord's hand had rested, her fearless eyes closed forever in the last dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER X

With his mother's death all tenderness passed out of Leif's existence, and with the years he retired more and more into a shell of impenetrable, chilling dignity. Just he always was, but with a justice so untempered by outward show of mercy that men grew to fear rather than to love him despite all his efforts to foster better living amongst them. And steadily, like a slow poison, Freydis' insidious propaganda against him began to bear fruit.

With the mysterious acumen peculiar to evil women, she realized after her fall from power that she must depend in the future upon Thorvald to a degree that she had never expected. Little by little her attitude changed from the shrewish to the fawning. She began by praising the father to the son and by deferring to Thorvald in the presence of company. It was "my lord this," and "my lord that," until eventually all of Thorvald's latent vanity was revived and he began to see himself as the wisest and most sagacious of men. Incidentally, when the yearly ships arrived from Vineland laden with ever-increasing treasures, his lady did not fail to make a point of reminding him that but for Leif's tyrannical decree such wealth might be all theirs.

Thorvald was only too easily converted to the belief that he was in this respect a much abused man. But for the iron dominance of Brattalid's chieftain his worth and valor had long been known and appreciated. Thus he reasoned gloomily, disregarding the fact that Leif's tireless labors had benefited him more than any other man in Greenland. Yet, despite the ever-increasing number of those who sympathised with Thorvald and fell a ready prey to her clever deceptions, Freydis was wise enough to move cautiously, realizing that the oldest nobles and their families were still faithful to Eric's son, and that her brother's forceful personality still dominated the mind and will of the multitude. With infinite patience she waited her opportunity, knowing that her final effort must either bring absolute success or complete disaster; and, with her son rapidly growing into young manhood, she did not intend to fail.

Freydis' opportunity came after seven long years of waiting; came sponsored in the person of Orme, a quarrelsome duelist exiled from Norway. This vainglorious cock-of-the-sword was a cousin of Thorvald's and had ambitious visions of turning the relationship to good account; consequently, he was not long in finding cause for resentment in Leif's rigid administration. He had learned all too soon that it was impossible to pick a quarrel in this ridiculous colony of insignificant nobles without having to pay the penalty of injuries inflicted. And how might a swordsman win the

adulation of the crowd under such a despotic regime? Better to run the gamut of the law and face his enemies in Norway than to bow to an enslaving master in petty Greenland! Thus he stormed, and pleased his host by the storming.

Freydis found in him the man of her heart. She liked his swagger, the glittering accoutrements of his murderous trade, and his fluent speeches. She admired his youthful figure, for he was light and agile as a cat, and his abundant locks and graceful manner were an agreeable change after the daily contemplation of Thorvald's bald pate and porcine corpulence. Orme, in turn, thought the lady's flashing black eyes captivating and beautiful, and said so with lover-like persistence and reiteration. True it was, also, that he liked the look of Gardar with its rich storehouses and many retainers, and, being an optimist as well as an opportunist, he did not consider it without the bounds of possibility that by happy accident the lively mistress might be liberated from her foolish lord. If he disliked anything at Gardar it was the insolent young Eric, but this unhappy taste he naturally hid from his indulgent hostess.

Now began a time of plots and counterplots. Freydis increased her play upon Thorvald's vanity, aided and abetted by Orme, who generally found occasion to lament most sorrowfully and amazedly that a kinsman of his should be under the heel of a despot such as Leif Ericson. With his own plan to hatch, Orme likewise pretended a growing fondness for the young Eric, preferring his companionship to that of any other on his rambles around the countryside. And always, to the immense gratification of Freydis and the enlarging of her son's conceit, he referred to him as "My future lord of Greenland." Freydis saw to it that young Eric should have coins in plenty to scatter amongst the poor and needy at such times, and that his personal adornments and general dress should be dazzling and impressive. In addition, she generally sent her skald along with them that wheresoever they lodged or paused to rest he might reward their host by song and story—songs of glamorous days, thrice glamorous when visioned through the mist of intervening years and in the cheerless atmosphere of Greenland. By these and countless other devices she fed the lightly sleeping flames of ancient desires and restive ambitions in the hearts of the credulous people, waking within them at last all the olden predatory spirit, the hot and restless desire for sudden, unearned wealth and swifter glory; recalling to their fickle minds a glamorous phase of life in striking contrast to the tedious treadmill existence of beneficent peace. The longer the colonists listened to the laudation of their sea-roving forebears the more they hated Leif and the quiet comforts he had brought them.

Fortune favored the plotters that winter, for at the beginning of the season Leif suffered an injury which closely confined him to Brattalid. It seemed a golden opportunity, and Freydis made the most of it by keeping open house and encouraging every form of licentiousness and excess. When some conscientious soul was recovered sufficiently of his revels to feel a pang of shame, a feast of repentance was dutifully spread by the wily hostess, whereat gold and Greenland frieze and personal trinkets might be offered to the Holy Church in return for blessed pardon and a clean conscience. These moments of submissive humility naturally greatly enhanced the pleasure of the debaucheries which invariably followed.

Under the influence of strong ale and oily oratory the merry-makers were the more easily incensed against their chieftain, and before the return of spring plans for an insurrection were well under way. Greenland must be freed of her miserable tyrant and liberty and happiness restored to the land. Such was the cry which called forth many a bumper and vow of allegiance.

There were four nobles of whom Freydis stood in awe, knowing them incorruptibly loyal to the house of Eric. They must on no account get word of what was brewing. Against these men and their household Freydis warned the conspirators over and over again; but she had forgotten that in the humble keeper of one of his outlying warehouses Leif had as devoted and loyal a subject as she an unrelenting foe. To this vigorous freedman, as to every other in the mountain district, Orme eventually revealed his purpose, and, finding in him an exceptionally rapt and appreciative listener, left little to the imagination. But no sooner were Orme and his escort departed from the warehouse, where they had lodged over night, then the faithful keeper rode straightway to Brattalid and bared the entire scheme to his unsuspecting master.

Amazed that any people, and more especially his people, could be so gullible, so utterly foolish and so ungrateful, Leif naturally listened with a measure of incredulity. "My good young man," he asked at length, a strange smile crinkling the corners of his probing eyes, "how comes it thou desirest to see me warned? Thou, too, art crushed beneath the despot's heel!"

"My lord, say not so!" cried the freedman, with an earnestness unmistakably genuine; and, drawing from the folds of his cloak a stout battle-axe, he laid it at the feet of his master as one lays a priceless treasure upon the altar of one's faith. "See, my lord, 'tis a good blade and true, forged in the smithy of a great and honorable chieftain, and destined for a stout defence." The man spoke in a strained and impassioned voice, and something in its tones strangely stirred Leif's heart. "Yea, a great and wise

chieftain,” the man resumed more slowly, “and none other than the noble Eric. Oh, reflect, my lord; recall to mind the dreadful days of pestilence and famine which urged thy valiant spirit to unheard of enterprises! ’Twas then I came with my sainted sister, a beggar, to Eric’s hall. . . Our father lay dead; ’twas for his honor we went a-begging. . . As thou wilt remember, the generosity of Eric saved us from shame and death. But not content with what a less hardly pressed lord had counted ample, thy noble sire gave into my boyish hands this splendid weapon, healing thereby my humbled vanity and saying in his great-hearted way, ‘Mayhap thou wilt some day strike a blow for Eric’s House.’ And that, my lord, is mine intention, to strike a blow for Eric’s House and give my life if need be.”

Leif was touched to the heart. “Doubtless I am all unworthy,” he returned sadly, “but since great natures must ever give greatly, I accept thy offer, friend. And now mayhap ’twere wise to see to the condition of our weapons and the defences of mine Hall.”

CHAPTER XI

Leif had just sufficient time to strengthen the barricades of Brattalid and to lay in a considerable store of rocks, an ammunition both effective and greatly feared, in those days, before the old steward, keeping watch on the roof, sighted Orme's band of rebels. They were flanking the right shoulder of the frowning hills, and with their gleaming armor and flashing swords, and battle-axes, presented a resplendent and formidable sight in that grim, grey setting.

Leif called a council of his men—they were but few, for time had not permitted the summoning of retainers from his distant estates—and, putting his question fairly, asked that they abide by their own judgment and inclination. Being shut off from their friends, and hemmed round by a larger body of men than he had deemed possible for Orme and Thorvald to assemble, they were pitted against overwhelming odds. Hence Leif insisted that any man not willing to fight a losing battle cheerfully and unto death should at once walk out and join the enemy; nor for the doing of this would he condemn them!

"My lord!" cried Swen, the freedman whose warning had been so timely, "speak not thus to Norsemen, who welcome any death in preference to the company of turncoats! Thine we are, Leif Ericson, to command now and ever."

A shower of blows on the door interrupted Swen. "Open, open without delay!" roared a voice without. "Open in the name of justice, else we tear limb from limb every last mortal in the Hall!"

Leif laughed at the threat as he ordered his men into their places. "At least their wills are set on happy pleasures," he said; "but 'twill take more than brave words to batter in the walls of Brattalid."

"God be praised, 'tis all of stone! The ancient custom of burning will not avail them," remarked the steward unctuously, as he lugged a pot of boiling water to the roof holes. "Ah, ha! my fine fellows, ye stand ill the fiery baptism!" he shouted in exultation as the terrific yells of the enemy followed on the scalding water showered down upon their heads and shoulders. Similar cries from the other side of the building proved that there the defence had been alike successful, though the defenders in that case were women and the old and enfeebled men.

It was evident from the calm which followed that the rebels had retreated to take counsel amongst themselves. They had been too certain of taking their chieftain unawares, and of capturing the stout old Hall by sudden storm. Now they retired in confusion, not knowing how many defenders Leif might have gathered, or what his plans might be. But when the first shock of angry surprise had passed, Orme and Thorvald came to the conclusion that at the most Leif's guard were but a third of their force, and besides, were virtually no better than prisoners within their own walls. And prisoners they should remain; on this they were resolved.

Leif understood their purpose, and it dismayed him despite the knowledge that Brattalid could sustain a lengthy siege. He could defy the vigilant rebels for weeks and months to come, but to what purpose? With his habit of unimpassioned reflection Leif recognized the utter futility of it. In the end Thorvald would triumph. What mattered, then a lengthening of days? Where the benefit though death should stay its hand a fraction of time?

The old steward disagreed with him. He proposed that they send forth a runner to recall the retainers from the east estate and enlist the help of their friends to the north. Unless the rabble had already slain these loyal men, he doubted not their willing and instant response. Seeing that the guard approved the plan, Leif dispatched a young thrall, trained as a runner, on the difficult mission. In the dead of night he was cautiously smuggled out of the Hall by way of an underground passage, and thus unseen escaped into the hills.

But the wisest schemes full often came to naught! Long before the fleet-footed messenger could possibly have reached his destination, an event occurred which changed forever the destiny of Brattalid. It was on an early morning of what promised to be a peerless day that the inmates of the Hall were startled by an outburst of pitiful wails and terrified shrieks. Glancing out of the peepholes Leif beheld a pitiful sight. In the clutches of Thorvald's drunken men writhed a poor disheveled crone, whom he recognized as a hanger-on of his house; a simple creature who rewarded her keep by gathering mountain moss and medicinal herbs. "God help us!" gasped the steward at Leif's elbow, "the fiends will torture her till she reveal the passage from the barns. 'Tis known to her, for there she oft hath slept upon a chilly evening!"

But Leif was not thinking of his own danger. His face was blanched with fury, for he had seen the despicable Orme display his skill at arms by

grazing the poor old woman's ears, one after the other, in the pretended act of severing her hoary head.

“’Tis enough!” he cried. “Men, suffer not yon old mother to betray us whilst we shiver like foxes in a hole! Better to die in the defence of weakness than live the prey of varlets and a crazed rabble. Is our manhood to be riven from us that we stand aloof and see a feeble woman tortured to forswear her fealty? Nay, nay! better to perish outright than to forsake so far the valor of true Norsemen! Up, my men, to Eric’s standard! Out, Swen, to strike thy blow for Eric’s House!”

Wide burst the ancient doors and out poured the valiant defenders to meet the fury of the howling rebels. They were fewer in number, but their cause was just and their hearts stout and true. Back to back as much as might be, they thrust and parried, hacked and hewed, blow on blow. And it is doubtful whether Thorvald’s greater number had triumphed that day had not Leif been foully stabbed in the back whilst defending himself against two master swordsmen. With their leader mortally wounded, the faithful guard manoeuvred a cautious retreat, and managed by dint of strenuous fighting to get him back to the safety of the Hall. With the fatalism characteristic of Norsemen, they accepted their defeat as a destined fate. If they were troubled it was more especially on their great chieftain’s account, whom they had rather seen dead than waiting the mercy of Thorvald.

Brattalid was staunchly built; her stone walls and iron-studded doors were as impregnable to the arrows and volleys of rock hurled against them as the grim mountain that frowned in jealous disapproval upon her stubborn strength. Brattalid would not be taken. Invincible as the spirit which had conceived her, she defied the noisome enemy. Let them wait, the old Hall seemed to mutter, nor think to batter in my hospitable doors! Let them wait until they open from within!

On his couch, listening to the hailstorm of hate, Leif thought of many things—of the strangeness of existence, a troubled passage ’twixt dawn and dark, launched none knew where, bound none knew whither; and of the stronger fallacies of human thought and ambition. Mysterious and inscrutable life! He could not escape the curious belief that somewhere the genius of it sat and laughed at human vanity. For who was man, wallowing in his brother’s blood, to think himself the one precious charge of mighty Nature? Colossal conceit! Thus it seemed to Leif as he tossed restlessly on his bed of pain. Softly, beneficently, like the breath of mountain breezes, came the healing conviction that out of chaos Nature had brought forth beauty; out of agony a perfect peace. Why, then, out of the volcanic conceits

of man might not surpassing glories of intellect proceed? And, finally, he saw, with the eyes of understanding, undimmed by clamorous, insistent self-desire, that individual effort, even to the sacrifice of life, was but a step in the ladder of Eternal Progress by which the race mounted to nobler heights. The more he mused upon it the more certain he grew that now at last his duty to the Colony was accomplished, his trust was incontestably fulfilled. Greenland was firmly established, and the Vineland vessels never failed to bring fresh cargoes of appreciable wealth. The Vineland settlement was no longer a dream, every year the magic country drew to her bosom a lively quota of adventurous Norsemen. Aye, where he had dreamed to build a city like to Olaf's Nidaros, the seedling of such a city already flourished. What use, then, to hunger after life? Life had no further use for him! He might not again add another rung to her imperial ladder; no more by his efforts might his brothers rise to heights of broader vision. Life, nor his fellow-man, no longer had need of him!

The old steward, watching his beloved master with a devotion amounting to worship, shook his head despairingly at these musings, and when Leif at last confided the trend of his thoughts he heard him in pained and troubled silence. "My lord," he hazarded eventually, "human ingratitude is as old as the world. But 'tis not for the falcon to despair of the plover's incapacity to fan the clouds! True, it is, thy duty hath been well and nobly done, and now, meseems, thy long reward draweth near."

Leif turned impatiently upon his couch. "Old man, speak not of future rewards as though the son of Eric feareth to die without a gilded promise to make his going tolerable!"

"My lord, I speak not of future estates. Hath it not occurred to thee that thou art now released from all restraining promises? No man may serve the land which turns to rend him, and, my lord, thou hast no more the strength to serve. Frown not upon me, 'tis thine own oath I but recall. Son of Eric, thou art free at last!"

"Aye, good friend, but to what purpose?"

The steward glanced around him cautiously, and, assured that no eavesdropper could catch his whispered words, replied: "The *Silver Dragon* hath been recaulked this year as always, and waits, my lord, for a master hand at the helm and the sweep of the blue inspiring waters."

Leif shot bolt upright, so affected was he by the whispered insinuation, thereby giving himself great agony and the fond old steward a terrible fright. "If it might be done! If I might but sail to sweet oblivion, away from

cackling knaves and a land of living death, in that peerless vessel, an hundred treacheries were little price to pay!" he cried in passionate ecstasy.

"She lies in the upper narrows, and thou knowest how runs the tickle; how hidden from the plains, how open to the sea. Thou knowest, too, how few are acquainted with the secret passage winding to the tickle."

"'Tis true, old man, 'tis true! God's blessing on thy wit and wisdom. Call now my sturdy fellows. We must instruct them in thine happy plan."

CHAPTER XII

Whilst Thorvald and Orme enjoined their followers to song and revelry, the inmates of Brattalid were cautiously transferring their necessities to the *Silver Dragon*. It was agreed amongst them that every able-bodied man should accompany the chieftain on his strange voyage, leaving the old men and the women to keep the Hall until the ship was safely out to sea. Then these faithful ones, assuming a less glorious role, were to surrender Brattalid and all its holdings in return for peace of days and perfect pardon.

Leif's wound was not healing, but under the influence of a great and blinding hope he exhibited a hectic energy which alarmed and saddened his faithful comrades. He laughed at their long faces, discounted their concern, and vowed himself as hale as need be. Joy and excitement burned in him like a devastating flame. He could not be still, nor could his hand be stayed from labors too arduous for one so seriously wounded. But at last the day dawned when the bitter farewells had been said and the valiant guard had taken their places aboard the *Silver Dragon*, with Leif, once more in armor, standing at the helm. A solemn hush fell upon them for an appreciable moment—a hallowed moment wherein each heart communed with its God and renounced the things of earth. Then, with a lurch of joy, the glorious ship broke loose from her moorings and swept out through the tickle into the open sea. When the rebels camped on the plains before Brattalid caught sight of the vessel as she skirted Eric's fiord, they were stricken dumb with amazement. A phantom ship they thought her, a forewarning of Leif's death; but a victorious shout from aboard her put to rout this comforting theory. And as the gleaming ship shot past the lonely promontory where Eric's mound was reared, they saw her commander raise his hand in a last farewell. No further cause to doubt, then, that their prey had escaped them!

To Leif these foes no longer existed; their cries of rage and fury affected him no more than the salt spray dashing against the bows of his flying vessel. Once again he saluted the solitary mound on the hill. "Speed us, O spirit of my father!" he softly implored; "speed us, proud soul, to that fair clime where honor findeth refuge and weary hearts a glad retreat."

And true it is that on her final voyage the gallant *Silver Dragon* seemed a magic ship. Winds and weather favored her, and the caressing sunlight touched her gleaming bows and carven figurehead to matchless splendor. Out of the white and silent North she sailed, borne on the wings of the wind toward a virgin continent wrapped in loveliness and mystery. Out from a land of death they sailed unto a land of life abundant!

When the effects of the unexpected release began to wear away, the false strength which had sustained Leif throughout the past days deserted him, and, suffering acutely, he was forced into unwelcome retirement. Thereafter he lay upon the couch prepared for him on the sheltered poop, enduring his agony with silent fortitude. From this retreat he watched the vast expanse of changing sky and rolling water melting into infinities of boundless space, and, despite the pangs and weariness of flesh, experienced a hitherto unknown sense of peace.

At times, when fever wracked his splendid frame he dreamed strange dreams, and in the waking retained somehow a new and better understanding of innumerable things which formerly had teased his fancy. He saw revealed in the light of the spirit the strange emotions which oft had tormented his generous heart and had led him into acts condemned by lesser men. He understood that tenderness and pity were not, as Norsemen formerly had thought, the marks of weakness, but evidences of strength. And, watching his faithful men straining at the oars, cheerfully doing whatsoever was theirs to do, he saw them in a new and clearer light. They were not merely hirelings, these stout fellows laughing in the face of toil and hardship, they were human souls like unto himself, and their willing service was, in truth, the visible manifestation of an active universal power working in and through men for the benefit of all. They loved him, these simple-hearted men, and with no thought of self had followed him, disgraced and exiled, to an unknown fate. And so, hard on the heels of treason, came to Leif the enheartening revelation of an eternal truth: man, and man only, reveals to his brother the ever active and prevailing love of God! Thus thought upon thought flashed across the mirror of Leif's mind as the *Silver Dragon* swept along.

Sometimes the gifts brought by his dreams were argosies of sweet and tender memories, sometimes no more than pale anenomes of past regrets. Came then a pearl grey dawn, a hard day's sailing past the cloudbanks of Markland, when he opened his tired eyes to behold a flock of swirling seagulls screaming their noisy calls and beating the air with swift and tireless wings. Happy birds, unrestrained and free, most fitting harbingers of that fair country whose purple hills and plume-like forests were dimly seen against the far horizon—an etching of ineffable grace flung by a masterhand upon a canvas of amber and roseleaf and cobalt sky!

That very hour, in the little hamlet of Norumbega, in distant Vineland, the lady Thorgunna hastened to waken her son that she might acquaint him

with a dream which greatly stirred her heart and fancy. She had seen an eagle, broad-pinioned and deep-breasted, come sailing from the North, boiling black clouds at its back, a path of golden sunlight before it; swift and sure it had flown, only to fall at last a lifeless captive at her feet. The dream troubled her, dispelling her peace of mind completely. Either the lover of her youth was dead, or else his arduous duties were ended and he was Vineland bound! Thorgils discredited either possibility with all a youth's contempt of dreams and visions. But in the end his mother's sure conviction and quiet certainty half persuaded him; and finally, to ease her mind and rid himself of nagging curiosity, he boarded his pleasure-skiff and followed the lazy Norumbega river on its last glide to the sea.

Just before sunset, when the broad ocean scintillated in reflected glory, he sighted the *Silver Dragon* rounding a distant skerry, cleaving the placid waters with the agility and grace of a swan. Thorgils hastened back to the hamlet to rouse the people that they might be ready to greet the newcomers with becoming ardor. Consequently, when some while later the noble vessel glided to her moorings, the tired crew aboard her were hailed by an excited company of men, women, and children, waving cloaks and hoods and all crying out as in a single breath their joyous and indescribable welcome. In their midst the weary Leif saw his beloved Thorgunna, lovely still in the rich maturity of the ripening years. Swiftly she sped to meet him, one glance at his pallid face having told her love's need.

"Welcome to Vineland and the hearts of thy people!" she greeted him in tremulous sweetness. "Welcome, dear lord, to the land of thy dreams."

Some days later Leif asked that he be dressed in his armor and carried out upon the green that he might watch the glowing course of the sun, for he knew the end was near. When this had been done he sat in silent contemplation, watching the cloud-flecked skies and the nearby waters, where the *Silver Dragon* rocked in the tide. Thorgunna watched beside him, jealous of each precious moment, oblivious to all but her lord, as on that memorable day when they had dreamed their radiant dreams of earthly bliss at Brattalid.

"Dear heart," broke from him at last, "'tis well to be done with fear and fretting, to be done with the fever of life and the futile aches of defeated hopes; 'tis well to have done one's best when the sun goeth down."

"Aye, my lord, for that which goeth down with glory must surely rise again!"

They said no more for a while, but in that ineffable communion of souls, possible only to hearts that have greatly loved and greatly suffered, they continued to watch the golden orb of day as it sank slowly behind the ridge of hills. And there Thorgils found them, these two eternal lovers, bathed in the roseate sunlight, united in the bonds of unalterable affection, triumphant over space and time, confident and fearless in the shadow of death.

“Thorgils!” The dying Leif roused himself to address his son. “Give thyself to Norumbega even as I endeavored to do in a less worthy land. Make it a city never to be forgotten; imbue it with thine own faith, and beautify it with the fruits of the spirit.”

“Dear my lord,” the heartbroken youth responded, “whatsoever may be mine to do shall not be left undone. And now may it please thee to learn that this very day at the council-meeting ’twas decided to build a church on yonder hill to stand in sacred memory of Leif Ericson, the greatest Norseman of his time.”

Leif smiled wearily at the eager, impassioned youth kneeling before him. “Memorials of stone, these perish, my Thorgils,” he said, “but Vineland shall endure. What need have I of proud memorials? But thou knowest best what will ease thine heart to do. Think not thy good intent faileth to give me joy. Grateful and glad am I to find a son so filial in affection. But I would fain lay me down to rest in some quiet spot where only the winds make converse through the trees, and where the sweet singers of the wood swell up their notes of praise to the golden skies above them. Thus would I lie, in some far, calm retreat, and when the unborn races shall tread this happy soil, none shall have cause to say, ‘Behold, this small spot was once beloved of Leif Ericson.’ Nay, lend not thine hand to hallow out some shrine and thus betray thy sire to strange and indifferent generations. Nay, do not so, for Vineland is mine, grafted upon mine heart and soul—Vineland the Good, a mighty continent revealed to me by the grace of God.”

Having promised to be governed by his request, Thorgunna and her son waited in tearless agony for the glorified soul to pass. Once again Leif summoned strength to speak. Making an effort to raise Thorgunna’s hand to his lips, he murmured, “Beloved, in all things thou hast been my light and inspiration. In such great love as thine how greatly blest am I, how favored amongst men to die in the arms of Love and lie in the bosom of Liberty!”

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

The name Leif was misprinted as Lief in approximately 1% of occurrences. These have all been corrected, except for the misprint in the title page image.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Lord of the Silver Dragon: A Romance of Leif the Lucky* by
Laura Goodman Salverson]