SINGOALLA

A ROMANCE WRITTEN IN SWEDISH BY VIKTOR RYDBERG AND NOW TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

BY

AXEL JOSEPHSSON

Illustrated by Carl Larsson

"Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten!
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt."—Goethe.

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DEDICATION

To Sweden, the land of my birth, the land where the pines whisper and the brooks murmur, where the midnight sun sheds its mystic glow over mountains and forests, the land of Erland's and Singoalla's tragic love, and to its venerable monarch, Oscar II, this work is respectfully dedicated.

AXEL JOSEPHSSON.

PREFACE

In presenting the English version of Viktor Rydberg's famous romance, "Singoälla," I am actuated by a desire to acquaint the English reading world with one of the most weird and romantic stories ever written in the Swedish language. Viktor Rydberg was one of the greatest writers and philosophers Sweden produced during the last century, and as "Singoalla" has often been pronounced his masterpiece I felt that the work ought to be translated into English.

Viktor Rydberg wrote in unusually pure and poetical Swedish, which, of course, gives special charm to the reading of a work like "Singoalla" in the original, but this also made the translation of the work into English such a difficult undertaking that it has never been attempted until now, though the book has been published in several other languages.

As several of Viktor Rydberg's works have been published in English and as they have contained prefaces with reviews of Viktor Rydberg's place in the world's literature, I shall not repeat them here, but will only say a few words by way of introduction.

Preface

In presenting the English [illegible]
Rydberg's famous romance [illegible]
actuated by a desire [illegible]
reading world with [illegible]
romantic stories [illegible]
language. Viktor Rydberg [illegible]
greatest writers and [illegible]
duced during the [illegible]
has often been [illegible]
felt that the work [illegible]
English.

Viktor Rydberg was born in the Province of Småland, Sweden. "Singoalla" was his first great work and he laid the action of the story in the forests, lakes and cliffs, the grand nature of which had made an indelible impression upon his mind, surrounded as he had been by them from his earliest childhood. That he had put his whole soul into the beautiful descriptions of nature which he pictures in this work is shown by a few lines which he penned a year before his death. He wrote to a friend: "Singoalla is the daughter of my youth, and in spite of all self-criticism I am unable to feel indifferent towards her."

And Professor Karl Warburg, Rydberg's literary administrator, once wrote of "Singoalla": "This story from the middle ages and from the time of the Black Death is among Rydberg's prose the one that gives the most poetical expression of one of the sides of his nature, the pure romantic feature and its longing toward eternity; besides it is filled with the particularly attractive mysticism of his own personality."

I trust that the English reading public will bear in mind the difficulties in my path in the translation of a work like "Singoalla" and will kindly overlook the many imperfections in the work.

AXEL JOSEPHSSON.

New York, November, 1903.

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PART ONE

SINGOALLA

CHAPTER I

THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST

LONG ago there stood a castle upon an island in one of the lakes of Småland * that had belonged to the Månesköld † family generation after generation. It consisted of a composite of quaint houses of oak-timber, built together about a tower of large granite blocks. The monotony of the tower walls was occassionally relieved by arched windows and doors with trimmings of sandstone.

Evidently several generations had taken timber to the small island and added structure to structure according to the tastes and tendencies of their respective times.

In the twelfth century the castle formed an extensive complex, but with a roof revealing higher and lower ridges and with conflicting lines on walls that met at various angles and which, though deficient in windows, seemed all the more

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* A province in Sweden.

† Moon-shield.

abundantly provided with balustrades, parapets and symbolic iron-forgings and carvings in wood. Upon the finely carved posts of the portal appeared figures of Unaman, Sunaman and Vinaman, the three martyrs—with severe and awe-inspiring aspect. Their uplifted hands seemed to invoke the blessings of heaven upon Ekö * Castle.

The little island was surrounded by a pallisade at the water's edge, and joined to the mainland by a draw-bridge.

Wear, tear and time had imparted a hue of gray and brown to the walls and roof of the castle.

It looked as if within might be concealed secrets of the past and of the future. The silence that prevailed was felt to enjoin silence, and to constrain one not to disturb pondering over memories and forebodings.

The lake reflected fir-clad granite crags and precipices. The dark pine-woods extended far around. At one point the shore sloped down toward the water. There, through birches in the dale, could be caught a glimpse of the stepped gable of a monastery.

This structure's stone foundation is still to be seen. I sat there one day, late in the fall, beneath a drooping, melancholy sky, while moist winds

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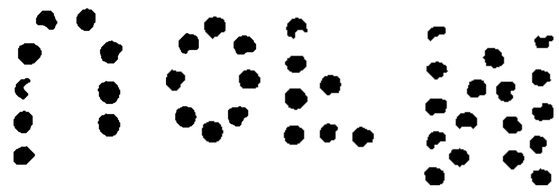
* Oaken Island.

THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST



was placed at the feet of the Virgin Mary, and thus sanctified. If anyone questioned Riddar Bengt about the wonderful tale, he made a gesture of disapproval; or he would make the sign of the cross, and answer only: "That was in pagan days." But the old family servant, Rasmus Skytt*, was more disposed to give a fuller account of what had happened.

The people in the neighbourhood knew why silence reigned over Ekö and its family.

When the messengers of Christianity—the trio whose figures adorn the posts of the portal, moving pious beholders to raise their hands and eyes toward heaven—first appeared in Småland and began to preach from its barrows about the Sinless Christ and the Holy Father at Rome, the Månesköld then in power ranted against them; gathered the people on the templed hills and in the sacred groves and exhorted them to be faithful to the unfathomable Odin, Balder, The Good, and the Mighty Thor. To honour these gods, it is said, he sang to the music of harps forceful, magical songs in which, the people imagined, all voices in creation blended and harmonised. In this way their hearts were hardened against the Gospel, and its preachers were driven away.

This was the reason why silence reigned at Ekö and upon its rulers. But this silence was no

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* Shot or Huntsman.

longer mingled with remorse, as formerly. Seven pious generations had striven to blot out the trespasses of the pagan singer. This had unburdened the family conscience.

It was said that no Månesköld of the Christian faith had been able or willing to sing in the open air—none before Erland, Riddar Bengt's young son.

It was with astonishment that the people heard his voice now and then from the dim forest where he loved to rove, armed with bow and spear.

He sang strange music, fierce, yet beautiful, especially when the firs and pines seemed solemn. He went alone when not wishing to be accompanied by Rasmus Skytt.

Rasmus was an able forester, familiar with the ways of wild animals, and very well informed regarding everything that concerned witches, goblins and ghosts. But Erland oftentime found more congenial company in his two dogs, large and shaggy animals with bloodshot eyes and jaws firmly armed with sharp teeth. They were named Käck and Grip*, viewed with disfavour by neighbours, eyed by wolves with hunger and fierce dread.

Erland used to throw himself into the water from the highest cliff that hung over the lake. He best enjoyed swimming when the wind lashed

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* Bold and Catch.

the water into foaming waves. The people thought there was something restless and wild in this boy; some pagan remnant in his nature, that had not absorbed a single drop of holy water.

Had the old heathen, that Månesköld who would not even allow a priestly blessing to be pronounced over him, and who on his deathbed had raved about Valkyries and the mead of Valhalla—had this heathen returned to earth in the person of Erland? This was a question repeated time and again in the cottages of the peasants. But the domestics in Ekö gave assurance that Erland devoutly made the sign of the cross and said his prayers with his hands folded; that he was obedient to his parents and showed reverence for his teacher, Father Henrik; that he was good-natured though rash; generous as all Månesköld's, and anxious to be just, though he did not always succeed. Rasmus Skytt, who thought he knew Erland best, confirmed all this, but in doing so he ominously shook his head.

Riddar Bengt did not make existence at Ekö any livelier than his ancestors; and the mistress of his house, the blonde Elfrida, of stately and slender form, who carried Christ's sermon on the Mount in her eyes and the light from Mount Tabor on her brow, looked after her many duties with quiet dignity.

Twice a year there was a feast at Ekö, to which kinsmen and friends came from near and afar.

These feasts were gorgeous. Gold-embroidered tapestries covered the walls of the hall on such occasions, precious dishes the tables, and the cellars contributed the costliest of wines. Although hilarity was not suppressed, it was always kept within certain bounds. The guests did not know why, but they experienced a feeling of solemnity even when, slightly intoxicated, they were led to their bed-rooms. Even Herr Gudmund Ulfsax, the nearest neighbour, who used to shout rather than speak, and curse more than bless when he had imbibed wine and beer—even he was decent in demeanour, moderate and ceremonious in his speech and gestures, when at Ekö and, after he had been put to bed, would make commendable attempt to appear pious. He would even mumble the Latin evening prayer—to himself wholly incomprehensible—which had been taught him in his childhood; or he would at times unwittingly substitute the morning prayer.

Riddar Bengt was a man of wide experience. He had fought under Mats Kettilmundson for the cause of the unfortunate dukes, and in Skåne* against the knights from Holstein. Now, old and gray, he reigned over his dependents with a wise and fatherly spirit.

During the long winter days he spent most of his time in the sloyd-room in company with Olof

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* A province in Sweden.

Hallstenson, the yeoman, who had carved the altar in the village church. There the taciturn men worked with diligence, and from under their hands there appeared, carved in wood, angels, apostles, and saints; Holy Marys and Saint Catherines; the Heavenly Gabriel with a lily in his hand; Saint Peter with the key; Saint Paul with a sword; Saint Sigfrid with a staff; Saint George in armour, and Saint Sebastian, with a body pierced with arrows. The real worker was Olof Hallstenson. But the knight performed not alone the rough work; he also cleverly carved the folds of the mantles and put on the colours. Many a winter Riddar Bengt had spent in this way. It seemed as though he could not get enough of holy images. The chapel in the castle, and the one in the monastery, had gotten their quotas. The hall and the bed-rooms had theirs also.

Even in the long, dark corridors saints peeped out of every nook and corner, and on the balustrades of the staircases they appeared as if in humble meditation. In that part of the castle which, according to tradition, was built in pagan times, St. Sigfrid had been placed, and before him knelt that heathen who had preferred Balder to Christ and Odin to the Holy Trinity. From the expression on the carved face one could plainly see that he repented of that great sin, and that he earnestly prayed that coming generations might not be punished on his account. A harp

—that of pagan song—lay broken at his feet. Many a night when Riddar Bengt awoke he thought of that poor soul who was languishing in purgatory, but he consoled himself with the reflection that masses and good deeds of his descendants would alleviate the pain and make deliverance a possibility.

Father Henrik, Erland's teacher, had travelled extensively over the world before he settled as prior in a monastery located in the depths of the forests of Småland. His monks said that his reputation as a divine and as a man of learning was great in foreign lands, and it was known that King Magnus had bowed his head as low to this prior as to the archbishop in Uppsala. And seldom a year passed during which travelers from afar did not come, bringing him letters written by the Pope himself in Avignon, or by some of the most learned men at the University of Paris.

High dignities had been offered him. But he enjoyed in his cloister just what he had coveted in this world: Time for meditation and study; time to imprint on parchment his hopes of the Kingdom of God on earth. He loved to read the old Roman poems, notwithstanding their writers had been pagans, and the line from Virgil: *Magnus ab integro seclorum nœscitur ordo* (a new order of ages will come to the world) had to his ears a prophetic sound. He also read books written in strange letters about which the other monks said:

"*Græca sunt, non legentur;* it is Greek, such we do not read." But Father Henrik had lived several years in the Imperial City of Greece.

Hardly a week passed during which he did not spend at least an evening in the most comfortable arm-chair in Ekö Castle, with Lady Elfrida on one side and Riddar Bengt on the other. The knight was chary of words, but he often lifted his goblet to drink to the health of the prior, while the regard that accompanied the toast told of veneration, friendship and delight.

Lady Elfrida was the questioner, the monk, the answerer and narrator. And O! The many things he had to relate? He had seen the world that then was, and had learned from books about the world that had been. He did not use any superfluous words. But what pictures he drew in those he uttered! Lady Elfrida saw to it that Erland was present on such occasions. And the boy was pleased to be there. He listened attentively. "Such adventures I must take part in, and more than these," thought the boy as he listened.

It sometimes happened, though, that his attention wandered. If it was a moonlight night he could hardly listen to the prior's words. With his mind's eye he saw the moon rise, blood-red, over the tops of the trees; he saw it floating like a silver boat in the cool blue; he saw it peep in through the windows in the bed-room; he saw

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it throw a silver crescent through the atmosphere to his pagan ancestor; he saw the girl Bil and the boy Hjuke carried away in the moon-boat and made happy; he saw the moon-beams glitter on Lady Elfrida's dress. Such phantoms would then chase one another in his mind.

Was Erland in any way related to the moon?

Neither was it easy for him to follow the prior's words when the waves of the lake roared around the island and the wind wailed among the pines. Then Erland would hear voices urging him to come out that they might tell him of inconceivable truths. He imagined himself a harp as large as the world, adorned with twinkling stars and reaching out infinitely in the blue sky—the strings vibrating under sun-moved fingers or struck by awful, tempestuous masses of clouds and the sharpest of lightning's bolts. And from this harp Erland's thoughts flew to the pagan harp at the feet of St. Sigfrid. Why? He knew not, nor did he care.

* * *

At the time this story begins Erland was seventeen years old, a strong, beautiful youth, skilful in many sports, also well versed in books; often joyful, sometimes dreaming, easily angered, as easily appeased, manly in some things, childish in others.

Herr Gudmund Ulfsax was a widower and had a blue-eyed daughter, Helena. Riddar Bengt

and Herr Gudmund had designed the two young people for each other. Each had only one child and their estates lay side by side. And, as Lady Elfrida was of the same opinion, the fathers agreed that Erland and Helena should become man and wife in a few years. The young people were still bashful in each others company. But everything has its time, and so has love.

CHAPTER II

SINGOALLA

ONE summer day Erland was returning from a hunt.

On a hilltop in the forest grew a fir, young and slender, but higher than all the surrounding trees. Its crown could be seen from the windows in the castle, towering over the neighbouring forest, and when its silhouette stood out against a red evening sky, it was as if it looked out longingly over the world and wished itself away in the land of palms.

Below the hill a brook rippled over sand and pebbles on its way to the lake. Further in the forest the brook had a difficult path amongst moss-covered stones and fullgrown roots, but here it widened its shores on grassy land where grew flowers of many hues. Often Erland sat there enjoying the rustling of the firs and the solitude; and, followed by his dogs, he now turned thither for a drink of the fresh water.

When he reached the top of the hill he stopped wonderingly; below he saw something unusual. A girl sat there by the brook. He did not see her face, for she did not look his way, but he saw

jet-black curls, falling over bare shoulders and a dark dress adorned with ribbons of many colours. The girl dipped first one then the other of her naked feet into the brook. She apparently delighted in the coolness of the water and in the bubbles that were created by this play. Now she began singing with a clear melodious voice, that echoed far in the forest.

Who was she? A daughter of the country she was not, that Erland observed from her demeanour, her dress and her song, which sounded different from the ditties sung by the girls of the neighbourhood, when they were searching for strayed cattle. Who, then, could she be? Perhaps a fairy or an enchanted princess! Silent and admiring, Erland stood on the hill and felt in his heart something mystical, unaccountable, dreadful, but still enchanting.

Käck and Grip fixed their glaring eyes on the girl and barked snappishly. And while Erland stood absorbed by the view and his thoughts, Grip rushed down the hill as if wishing to tear the unknown girl to pieces.

Then Erland perceived her danger and called the dog. But even before that was done the girl had turned swiftly as lightning and risen to her feet, and just as the dog fastened his sharp teeth in her dress she thrust a dagger into his neck. With a piece of the garment between his teeth Grip fell at her feet.

Erland's eyes flashed with anger as he witnessed the killing of his faithful dog, and rushing forward he cried:

"Who art thou, that darest do this?"

But the girl looked with big, black, flashing eyes upon the blond noble youth. Her brown cheeks were coloured with a deep blush, her lips quivered and she brandished her blood-stained dagger so vigourously that the strings of red beads around her naked arms rattled quite audibly.

"Perhaps thou wilt kill me?" she said in a sharp voice with a strange accent.

And saying this she lifted her dagger to defend herself against the other dog, that stood ready to rush at her.

Erland ordered Käck to lie down, and when he failed to immediately obey the master's voice, the latter struck the brute with his bow, at which it withdrew howling.

The eyes of the boy and those of the girl met. Both had a defiant look. But in spite of that, a smile slowly wreathed itself about the girl's lips.

"I am not afraid of thee," she said, and threw her dagger swiftly through the air, burying the point in a tree.

Erland's anger changed to wonder and curiosity.

"Thou art a strange girl—but woe to me if in manly sports I could not hold my own with a woman."

So saying he drew his hunting-knife from its sheath and threw it at the same tree. The knife struck close to the dagger, and so deep that half the blade disappeared in the bark and bast. Then, running to the tree, he withdrew the weapons, washed the dagger in the brook and returned it to its mistress.

"Thou art a beautiful girl," said he, "but very odd. . . Is it thy wish," he added deliberately, "that I kill the other dog, inasmuch as he also snapped at thee?"

"No," answered the girl, returning the dagger to its cover, which she carried in her belt, "the dog is innocent, because those animals are as their masters wish them to be. But thou thyself must be a cruel and wicked boy."

And the unknown girl called Käck, who, at his master's nod, approached her in a crouching attitude. The girl caressed his shaggy head, and both soon became friends.

"Forgive me," said Erland; "thou art right; I am cruel and wicked, but do not believe that I set the dogs upon thee. I meant thee no harm."

"I will believe thee," she replied, with a searching look at Erland's face. "Dost thou live in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes."

"Fare thee well," said the girl. "We surely shall not meet again."

She was already prepared to run back into the

CHAPTER III

LONGING

THE next day Erland returned to the hill and the brook. He carried his bow in his hand and Käck went along with him, but of hunting thought he not. He thought of Singoalla, the dark-featured girl. In the night he had dreamed of Singoalla, that she took his hand in hers and pressed it, and that he pressed hers; that they looked deep into each others eyes and felt indescribably happy. Such a dream Erland never had before, though he had dreamt of battles with the thick-skinned inhabitants of the forest, of tournaments, of Saracen turbans split in twain, and many other daring deeds.

He came to the brook, but Singoalla was not there. Perhaps she will come, thought he; and he sat on the grass where the girl had rested, and listened to the murmuring of the water. But Singoalla did not come. Then it was as if the brook had whispered to him:

"Go, look there in the forest, there whence I came!" And Erland rose and followed the brook into the forest. He wandered in the shade of the pines, climbed over moss-covered stones and rocks. Finally he came to a spot cleared by the wood-

cutter, but still unoccupied. Only a brush-wood cabin, such an one as charcoal-burners build, stood there by the remnants of a kiln; heather, mushrooms and brakes grew all about. Here poles had been driven in the ground, and, while he wondered what purpose they had served, he saw Rasmus Skytt coming across the clearing. Ras mus related to the young knight how a band of strange people—men, women and children, having a dark complexion with black hair and eyes, oddly dressed and talking in a foreign tongue; having horses, wagons and a large pack-train—had pitched their tents on the clearing, rested there for a day and then resumed their journey north-ward.

That was all Rasmus knew, but he pointed out the ruts made by their wagon wheels while wending their way between the trees. And while Erland looked at the tracks and thought that Singoalla must be one of these poeple, he found a red bead on the ground, like the ones which adorned the maiden's wrists and ankles the day before. That bead he picked up and concealed it next to his heart, which whispered: "She is gone; ye will never meet again." Then said Rasmus, perceiving that Erland was gloomy: "I just now met a man in the forest who was carrying Grip's collar to Ekö. Grip's lies in the forest partly devoured by the wolves. Dost thou mourn for thy good hound?"

It was true. During the night the wolves had found the carcass of Grip near the brook; they had dragged it far into the forest, and made a good meal out of their old enemy's flesh.

To Rasmus's remark Erland replied briefly that hounds were plentiful, but few there were as fine as Grip. He bade Rasmus farewell, and returned to the castle while Rasmus went further.

Every day he came again to the hill by the brook. Did he believe that Singoalla would return? But the summer passed, the autumn came and the many-hued flowers by the brook drooped, as did Erland's wild nature; the oaks, that stood here and there amongst the pines, turned yellow and dropped their acorns to the ground; the days became shorter and the sky more cloudy; the migrating birds flew southward; the rain fell in torrents; the brook flooded the spot where Singoalla once sat and where Erland so many times had rested.

But still, even though the hill had become covered with snow, Erland came to the brook accompanied by Käck; he did not, however, come so often. Nor did he expect to find Singoalla, but he loved the spot, he sang his own songs and listened to the echo because it repeated Singoalla's name.

Riddar Bengt wondered over the changed disposition of his son and asked many a time if all the wolves and foxes in the forest were dead, or

if all birds of prey were gone to unknown parts, as Erland's hunt now always failed. "Though," said he, "my shepherds speak otherwise; and too often they report that fur-covered robbers have killed my cattle." To such talk Erland would answer but little. Lady Elfrida rejoiced at the behaviour of her son, who now was gentler than before; though at times she thought him melancholy and asked if anything grieved him. But Erland answered in the negative and looked through the window to the high fir that grew on the hill.

During the winter Erland proved a more diligent pupil of Father Henrik than formerly. Daily he went to the monastery. The gatekeeper, Brother Johannes, who recognised him by the way he pulled the bell, would put out his tonsured head through the hole in the gate, greet the swain and open for him. Through an archway between the monks' cells Erland went to the library, where the prior usually waited for him.

It was an ordinarily large room with arched ceiling and one high-arched leaded casement window the glass of which was strongly coloured by the sun's rays, so that when the birches on the outside fluttered in the wind they looked like green shadows. The walls were covered with bookcases, embellished with carvings; the books, bound in calfskin, were fastened to the walls with chains and padlocks, the keys of which were kept

by the prior. This precautionary measure served the twofold purpose of protecting the invaluable works against thieves, and also of preventing the monks from taking down and reading books without the permission of the prior, because, as he said, many of these works were written by Roman pagans and were dangerous for untried minds.

The pupil grew in favour with his teacher day by day. Hence it happened that, one winter evening, when Erland sat by his side in the library, the prior closed the old volume they had been reading, and, with a significant expression, went to the book-case, released another book from its prison and put it before his pupil.

"He is no longer a child," the prior muttered to himself; "his mind ripens perceptibly; I do not hesitate to allow him to read this book under my guidance. It is a dangerous one. But it is just such a danger as awaits his age and can be made less dangerous by an elder friend."

It was Ovid's "Metamorphoses." The prior carefully made the selections he considered suitable to read.

In this way they read of Hero's and Leander's love, and Erland gave to Hero Singoalla's features; they read of Pyramus' and Thisbe's love, and Erland gave Thisbe Singoalla's flashing eyes, dark complexion and ruby lips.

He learned the sad end of their love, no not of

their love, but of their lives, and the story moved him to tears.

Like Lady Elfrida, Father Henrik rejoiced at Erland's changed demeanour. Often he would sit with the boy's hands in his and relate something from the vast experience of his life. Often reflection would overspread his brow, and he looked inquiringly at Erland. It seemed as if he wished to tell him something, but still hesitated. Grand thoughts moved in the prior's soul, but he doubted whether Erland's mind was yet the proper soil for the seeds he desired to sow.

One winter evening toward spring it happened that, after the teacher and his pupil had finished their studies, the old man laid his hands on the youth's shoulders and his eyes beamed with the fire of enthusiasm. In a half whisper, that sounded solemn and mysterious under the arched ceiling dimly lighted by a faintly burning lamp, he spoke of the soul's mastery over the body; of the power of the invisible word over sinewy arms and obstinate minds, over kings and lords, over all the world's legions, even though they were as innumerable as the sands of the sea.

"A great house is being erected, whose foundation is the earth; whose steeple will reach to heaven"—he added—"and when it is completed the earth shall no longer be the earth, but an earthly heaven, a reflex of the upper heaven. The foundations are laid, the pillars are rising,

some already point toward the sky; but evil giants, who foresee that this house is to be for them a prison, where they will be chained throughout eternity, have grasped the pillars to overthrow them; yet finished the work shall be, because the power of good is stronger than that of evil, inasmuch as God is mightier than Satan. But here below God dwells only in the heart of the pure man, and every such heart as opens to Him is a reinforcement of His power in eternity.

"Wilt thou," continued the old man, "be an ally of God? Wilt thou carry a stone to this edifice? It is not easy, for it requires more than manliness, more than courage; it requires renunciation of all wordly things. Hast thou strength to sacrifice the rose of life to God and keep its thorn for thyself?—At this time I cannot say more."

Thus Father Henrik spoke, and Erland, though not quite understanding those words, was touched in his heart and expressed his willingness to be the ally of God. Then the old man laid his hand on the boy's head and blessed him.

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horses and wagons on the other side. They arrange themselves in a semi-circle, the men fetch forth fifes and stringed instruments from under their cloaks; the young girls, black-eyed and black-haired, with beads around their naked arms and clad in dresses of scarlet and black decked with tinsel and variegated ribbons, step out from the crowd of women; the fifes and stringed instruments sound a signal, and the girls perform strange dances. Wild as the sparks from crackling flames, light as zephyrs over green meadows, they whirl around one another to the cadence of the shrill music, until fifes and strings are hushed. As the dance stops the girls run back to the older women.

Now Father Henrik appears on the drawbridge; he comes from the monastery, which the strangers have just visited. One of them, a tall man, dressed more richly than the others, walks toward him and bows reverently. The prior motions to him to follow. They approach the castle-stairs, on which Riddar Bengt has descended to learn who the strangers are and what they wish.

The tall man bows humbly to the master of Ekö and puts his hands to his forehead. His long hair is black; the wavy beard around his lips blue-black. He is grave and proud, yet timorous is the glance he casts at the knight.

But he remains silent, and Father Henrik speaks in his stead.

"These people ask for your grace, noble master, and for permission to pitch their tents in your forest, as they wish to stay here for a few days, then to resume their journey. You may know, noble lord, that they come from a people to which God denies peace or rest, since He has doomed them, generation after generation, to wander from land to land. Remarkable is their fate, and wonderful to contemplate, since it bears witness to God's omnipotence, strict righteousness, and the everlasting truth of our Holy Faith.

"The fathers of these wandering people lived—as this man, a chieftain among them, has told me—in the land of Egypt more than thirteen hundred and fifty years ago. They were a respected people of the tribe of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar. They owned fixed places of habitation in a fruitful land, a land unexcelled by Goshen in fertility.

"It happened that one day there came to their boundaries a wanderer, accompanied by a woman, who carried a babe in her arms. The wanderer asked for shelter from night and storm under their roof for himself and his family. All refused and sent him from one place to another. But the strangers whom they turned away from their thresholds were the Saintly Joseph, the Virgin Mary and the world's infant Saviour. And as a punishment for this sin God sentenced them and their children to wander about homeless for two

thousand years, without any other provision for their livelihood than the charity of strangers. More than half of their wearisome wandering is now over, but there still remain twenty-three generations (counting three generations to the century), to die during what time yet remains before they reach the haven for which they long—their native country and their reconciliation to God. Gracious master, these poor people, who now beg your hospitality for a few days, have traversed many countries and have, not without success, implored many kings for the same favour. They must be considered as penitent pilgrims, scorned, despised and persecuted in many places, because the cup of suffering is put in their hands; notwithstanding this, the ruler of the Roman Empire has given them a letter of safe conduct, and they have also been allowed to show themselves before our Holy Father at Rome."

At these words the chief took from his pocket a parchment twined with many ribbons, untied it and handed it to Riddar Bengt, again bowing quite low.

The knight was hardly able to read the words which were written on the parchment, but from the large wax-seal impressed with the coat-of-arms of the Roman Empire, he understood that this was the pass-port of which the prior had spoken.

Riddar Bengt perused the parchment respect-

fully, returned it to the chieftain, and, interrupting the prior, who evidently wished to continue his speech, he addressed the chief pilgrim thus:

"Strange things, indeed, are those I have just heard about you; and it seems to me that I should commit a sin not unlike the one for which you now do penance if I did not permit you to rest a few days on my domain. You will neither hunger nor thirst during that time. You, Chief, and your nearest friends, I invite to share with me my own house."

The chieftain expressed his gratitude in humble words, but declared that a vow binding all generations from father to son compelled him, and his people as well, never to rest in a house either of stone or timber until their time of chastisement is at an end. He gave as a reason for his request for a few days' hospitality that he had made an appointment to meet in this neighbourhood a band of his people who, some time ago, separated from him to visit other parts and were now to rejoin him.

A few more words were exchanged between the knight and the chieftain of the wandering people, and the strange wanderers wended their way to the clearing in the forest, where they once before had pitched their tents, and thither Riddar Bengt ordered his people to carry provisions and liquors in abundance, so that their needs

might in every way be supplied for one week at least.

But among the girls with raven locks who danced in the yard to the shrill tones of fifes and strings, Erland discovered Singoalla. It was she who led the dance, as she was the chief's daughter and the fairest of the fair.

The prior stayed over night in the castle to talk with Riddar Bengt about the remarkable guests, and to impart to him the additional information he had gotten from the chief, when the latter called upon him at the monastery and asked for his intercession with the knight.

CHAPTER V

ERLAND AND SINGOALLA

AT first Erland listened to the prior's story, which seemed interesting and had to do with the people to which Singoalla belonged; but soon restlessness drove him out of the hall. He paced from room to room, ran up the cockle-stairs to the highest chamber in the tower, looked out over the lake and the forest, and listened to the tinkling sounds of bells that came from the horses of the strange people; then he ran down the stairs and out into the castle-garden, which, though well taken care of, was very small. It was surrounded by stone-walls, and was situated on the south side of the castle, where the setting sun now covered Lady Elfrida's flowers and vegetables with a glaring lustre. He did not linger long, but hastened to the maids' chamber, where he seldom went. In this room Lady Elfrida kept her son's holiday clothes in a polished wardrobe, and there was also a mirror of highly polished steel, in which the maids loved to see their faces reflected. Erland opened the wardrobe, brought forth the costly clothes of foreign fabrics covered with silver ornaments,

and arrayed himself in the costliest of them all. He combed his light brown hair so that the ringlets fell in waves over his shoulders. For whom he thus adorned himself he knew, but nobody else. When dressed he slung his bow over his shoulder, called Käck, saddled his horse and rode over the draw-bridge toward the forest. Lady Elfrida and the maids followed him with their eyes, for he looked magnificently on his prancing horse, that was caparizoned with a gold-brocaded cloth.

Lady Elfrida entered the hall and announced to the knight that Erland had ridden away, and was scarcely to be expected home until the next day, as surely he must have gone to Ulfåsa, the home of Herr Gudmund Ulfsax, else for whom would he have thus adorned himself except for the beautiful Helena, his intended bride?

Although there could not be found in all Virdaland a maiden with fairer cheeks or eyes more blue, the one to whom Erland's thoughts were now turned was not Helena Ulfsax. The face that Erland thought of was brown; the eyes his soul delighted in were dark-brown and the charmer for whom he had adorned himself was not named Helena, but Singoalla.

Lady Elfrida's guess was proven incorrect when Erland was seen on the bridge returning shortly after sunset. He had ridden hither and thither in the forest, and had been in the vicinity

brook. It was beautiful and lonely on the brink of the brook at the foot of the hill. The firs whispered, the silvery stream murmured as it flowed, the anemones and the violets peeped from the waving grass. Erland seated himself in his usual place at the water's edge; Käck laid his head on his knee. Then appeared on the other shore—as if they might have agreed to meet—Singoalla. The wind fluttered in the folds of her dress. Her step was nimble, and she did not stop on perceiving the richly dressed swain. No, she smiled familiarly, nodded joyfully, lifted first one foot and then the other to take off her shoes, waded across the brook and came straight up to Erland. The brook was shallow, and only a few silver-like pearls splashed up to the red gems around the maiden's ankles.

Her appearance did not cause Erland to feel embarrassed, but rather delighted. It was a joyful feeling, though not conventional, for he did not even rise to greet Singoalla, as he had been taught to salute other girls. But his heart felt deep joy, when Singoalla, reaching the shore, laid her hands on his shoulder, saying:

"My prophecy, after all, has not proven true. We do meet again. Thou hast a kind father, who extends hospitality to my father. Therefore, we also shall be friends."

"So we shall! Dost thou know, Singoalla? I have longed for thee ever since we first met here.

I have also dreamed of thee many a time, and, if dreams do not mislead, in thine own heart thou hast no anger for me."

"No," replied Singoalla, seating herself on the bank near Erland. "When I parted from thee I no longer felt angry toward thee, on the contrary, I thought thou wast the handsomest boy I had ever seen. Even in thine anger wast thou handsome. In all our band there is none as fair as thou. Assim, who says he wants me for his wife, is not to be compared with thee."

"Who is Assim?"

"He is the son of the man who was chieftain before my father . . ."

"And Assim wants thee for his wife?"

"Yes. But let us not talk any more about Assim. Thou hast told of thy dreams of me. I dreamed that I would find thee here. Therefore I came. My dreams come truer than my prophecies. That is rather embarrassing, as the reputation of our women-folks depends upon being able to read fortunes correctly. But the art of divination does not really come to one until one gets old. Yet thou must allow me to read the lines in thine hand . . . but no! I will not see them . . . If thy fate be an unfortunate one it would torment me. Ah! how fair is thy hair!" said Singoalla, passing her fingers through Erland's curls—"It is not black as is mine and my people's."

Thus she chatted, her mind flitting from one

thing to another. She related the journeys of her people, and told of the joy she felt when it was agreed between her father and his men that the rendez-vous should be on the domains of Erland's father. It was really Assim who had proposed, it in the men's council, and he had done so because Singoalla had urged him to do it. But he did not suspect that Singoalla desired this for the sake of Erland. Had he known the real reason, he certainly would not have complied with her wish.

While she related this she fondled Käck, who now was very friendly. The night previous, when he was in the camp, Singoalla had divided her meal with him, and it was she who had put the wreath around his neck, though it is doubtful whether he appreciated the decoration.

Erland now showed Singoalla a red bead and a withered flower; the bead, he said, he found in the clearing, where her people now had pitched their tents, the flower he had rescued from the brook, which had gotten it from Singoalla.

But the girl snatched the withered flower from him and threw it once more into the water.

"I shall give thee fresh flowers," she said, "let us see who can gather the most."

Erland consented to the play, and, with vieing ardour, they picked flowers along the brook's edge.

Then they compared to see who had the most, and it was found that Erland's collection was the larger, as he had pulled them by the handful and without selecting; but Singoalla's was the more beautiful.

Both now sat down on the bank to arrange the flowers and to bind them with grass into nose-gays. To Erland this was hard and slow work, but Singoalla had a way of her own of disposing of the various colours so as to make them contrast beautifully. No one had taught her that art, but she knew it, and well. When the nose-gays were finished Erland and Singoalla exchanged their respective products, and the girl did not appear dissatisfied with Erland's, though they were uneven, loose and badly tied up.

At last Singoalla said that she must return to the camp, otherwise her father, Assim and the women would wonder where she was and might look for her. And that she did not want.

To this Erland answered:

"Thou mayest go, Singoalla, but I wish thee to come here every day, that I may see thee."

Singoalla thought for a moment and replied:

"Yes, we will meet every day, but we had better meet after sundown. It is a custom amongst us that the young girls walk alone for a while in the evening, as thus they get the prophetic spirit. To-morrow evening I shall say to

my father: 'I will go out into the forest and learn to read the future.' Then he will reply: 'Go' . . . and I shall steal hither. As thou knowest, the twilight is also better because, if Assim, or the women, should happen to be in the neighbourhood they would not see us. Assim likes to follow me."

"Is Assim big and strong?" asked Erland.

"Yes, he is bigger than thou and hath beard, which thou hast not, and he is the most agile of our young men. Generally he is good-natured, but easy to anger; and when he gets angry everybody avoids him. More than once his knife has trickled with blood."

"If Assim cometh here I shall teach him to avoid thy tracks. Look at my arms, Singoalla!" replied Erland as he rolled up the sleeves of his coat. "I am only seventeen, but dost thou not think that my hug would crush Assim? Let him come! I'll hurl him to the ground and bury my heel in his breast."

"Thou shalt not! Why dost thou speak of Assim in that harsh tone? What harm hath he done thee? If thou threatenest thus I shall never meet thee."

"I cannot bear him. Still, I hope he will not come here while we meet. This place is far away and the forest is large. Why should he come just here?

"Singoalla I promise thee not to fight with

Assim or even say an angry word to him, if he doth not provoke me. Art thou satisfied now? and dost thou promise to come to-morrow when the sun hath set behind the cliffs around the lake?"

"Yes, I promise. Thou dost not know how I love to see thy face. To-night thou canst come to look at our camp. My father expects that the knight's son will visit him, if not from kindness, then from curiosity."

"I shall come, but I prefer to meet thee alone, Singoalla."

Now Singoalla extended her hands to Erland and bade him good-by until the morrow.

For a long while they held each others hands and looked into each others eyes; they found delight in that. Finally they exclaimed, as if of one accord: "To-morrow?—Yes, to-morrow!" And both nodded happily and ran in different directions. But ere Erland reached the hill-top and Singoalla disappeared in the forest they both turned, and once more waved good-by and *au revoir*.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE TWILIGHT BY THE BROOK

THE sun sets behind the cliffs; the tree-tops bathe in the sky's purple; the birds have carolled themselves to sleep; the vesper bells, which call the monks to prayer, ring through the stillness; Erland leaves the castle and hastens to the tryst.

Thus he meets Singoalla night after night under the tall fir on the hill-top, while the twilight glints between the trunks of the trees. At first, like children, they talk much and play on the green shore.

"There is no other beautiful girl in this world than thou," remarks Erland to Singoalla, and she replies: "Ah, dost thou so think? Ere coming here I looked at myself in a spring, to see if thou wouldest find me charming."

In time they gradually become silent. They love to look into each others eyes rather than speak. This they are able to do in spite of the twilight, for they are near to each other and clasped in fond embrace. When eyes meet thus, lips soon yearn to mate in love's truest tokens—kisses; kisses, that are at once warm and cool—

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forest and learn to read the future," and he had replied: "Go!" And she had taken a long, pathless, round-about way in order to delude Assim, and lead him to seek her elsewhere than on the hill by the brook, should he be watching her movements. Eight times had Erland and Singoalla met on the hill, where no one but the faithful Käck witnessed their happiness, for it seldom happened that a hunter came to this spot, especially at vesper time; while the strange women went for water and bathed their children away from this hill, and where the brook flowed nearer their camping place.

But during these days Singoalla changed more and more. She trembled when she stole away to these trysts. Yet she could not desist, for her heart ached when she did not see the knight's proud son. In her sleep she dreamed of him, all day she thought of him, but never felt perfectly happy except in the presence of the slender youth. Still she was timid and knew not why. Her soul cried out in silent anguish when he approached her. She could hardly speak when they sat close to each other; for anxiety and desire alternately preyed upon her; she could no longer look into Erland's eyes. It felt as if their fire consumed her own. She would look downward, toward the water, or, veiling her eyes with her long lashes, would gaze at the silent stars while Erland looked at her again and again.

And still, in the depth of her soul, she felt that this gaze produced a delightful pain.

One evening as they sat with their heads together, his light hair mixed with her black locks, Erland said:

"Sing, Singoalla! Sing one of the songs of thy people!"

But Singoalla replied in words hardly audible:

"I can sing no more."

"But I heard thee sing the first time we saw each other, when Grip tried to bite thee and I was angry at thee. Why wilt thou not sing now? Art thou distressed?"

"Yes."

"Why art thou distressed? Have I offended thee?"

"Thou? No Erland! I do not know why I am distressed. . . . Though, perhaps, it is because we soon must part. . . ."

"Part!" exclaimed Erland, turning somewhat pale. "Wilt thou not stay here for ever?"

"I would stay with thee for ever, but I must go with my father. Yes, when I think of it. . . . I have not thought of it before . . . . but now I believe I shall die when I must leave thee. I must wander far, far away—farther and farther from thee, Erland. When thou comest here evenings, and Singoalla is no longer here, but elsewhere and longing to come to thee, she will die from such longing. Perhaps thou wilt weep,

Erland, and call her name, but still she cannot come. . ."

Singoalla's great brown eyes filled with tears and her bosom heaved with sobs.

Erland was pale and silent. Till now he had not thought of possible separation. He dropped Singoalla's hand. Tears flooded his eyes, for the mystical love had so united their hearts that their joy and sorrow, and even their pulses were the same. But when Singoalla saw his tears, she tried to smile, and turn his grief to gladness, and said:

"Be not sad! When Singoalla is gone, thou wilt soon forget her and be happy again."

"Forget thee!" exclaimed Erland, as he rose. "No! I shall never forget thee; I shall never leave thee; wherever thou goest there will I also go."

"Wilt thou?" Singoalla asked with sparkling eyes. "Wilt thou leave thy father and mother and thy beautiful castle, and everything else thou lovest, to follow me?"

"Yes," answered the youth.

"Then we shall become man and wife; thou wilt be my master and I thy slave; when wandering I shall carry thy burden; at night I shall bathe thy feet in cool water; when thou restest I shall roast the venison, hand thee the goblet when thou art thirsty, sing for thee when thou art sad and suffer when thou sufferest. That I will do gladly, for I know that thou lovest me."

"No," said Erland, "it will not be thus, for I will carry thy burden, since my shoulders are broader than thine; I will hunt the game and pick the berries thou likest best for our meals; thou must not be my slave, for I wish it not and it behooves thee not. But man and wife we shall be."

"Wilt thou not become mine immediately?" said Singoalla. "I will make thee my husband as it is done among our people."

And Singoalla produced a small flat stone, fastened to a chain, that she carried around her neck. In the stone was carved a crescent—the symbol of her people's god: ALAKO.

This stone she laid in Erland's right hand and asked if he would love her as his only wife until death, and plight his fidelity that the slightest trespass on his part would give her the right to take his earthly life, and with her prayers to close the gates of heaven against him. To this Erland answered "Yes." Then Singoalla took the stone with the crescent in her right hand, swearing the same oath and adding, according to the custom of her people, that she would be her true husband's true slave and suffer everything from his wrath but nothing from his unfaithfulness.

This done, Singoalla said: "Now thou art my husband, Erland, and I am obedient to thee in everything." Saying this she knelt on the grass and, lifting her arms toward the new moon, she

uttered, in a tongue which Erland did not understand, the following words:

"He is mine, the only one I love! Know ye, all women, and look not at him, for he is mine and despises all others. Thanks be unto Thee, Alako, in heaven, that he is mine, the only one I love!"

At any other time Erland would have wondered that Singoalla called him her husband, when no rings had been exchanged, no wedding ceremony had taken place and no blessing had been pronounced upon them by an ordained servant of God. But he did not consider those things now; the oath he had taken was not difficult to keep, for Singoalla was the only desire of his soul; his only thought was to kiss Singoalla's lips, rest his head on her bosom and follow her to the end of the world.

"Sit down beside me," whispered Singoalla, "and listen to a saying that my father's people believe. It is that the man and woman who have drunk of each others blood will feel life's sorrows and joys, health and anxiety simultaneously and in the same manner; that they can speak to each other in thought, even when far apart, and that their hearts will never be torn asunder! Dost thou believe that?"

"I do not know, but I have heard that friends who wished to establish foster-brotherhood mixed each others blood as it flowed from self-inflicted

wounds. Singoalla," continued Erland, "I will drink of thy blood; wilt thou drink of mine?"

"Yes, even more gladly than from a spring in the desert," answered Singoalla.

Erland uncovered his left arm, for the left is nearest to the heart; but when he drew his hunting-knife to open a vein, Singoalla asked to be allowed to make the incision. And Erland consented. The girl drew her dagger, pressed its fine point into her lover's arm and caught with her lips the little drop of youthful blood that came forth.

Then she uncovered her left arm, and with the same weapon she drew forth one drop of the life fluid in her veins, which was eagerly kissed away by Erland; who, in truth, covered her arm with kisses and drew it around his neck.

CHAPTER VII

THE DUEL

BUT whose is the shadow that rises in the dim moonlight, and with a presence threatening the lovers?

Singoalla is startled and cries out: "Assim!"

A hollow, tormenting laugh answers her cry.

Erland flew up, drawing his knife to meet the stranger. Singoalla grasped his armed hand, but he broke away. The dark Assim saw the knife glisten in the moonlight; he threw off his cloak, and, jumping backward, while his hand felt for the knife in his girdle, he exclaimed:

"The chieftain's daughter and the nobleman's son! Poor Singoalla! The women in the camp will scoff at thee and the men will deride thee. . . ."

So saying he hurled his knife at Erland's head. But Assim's aim was not true; anger and the twilight made the clever dagger-thrower fail. Erland sprang at him, knife in hand. Assim made a leap backward, a quick leap; he stretched out his arms, his black eyes watched the movements of the threatening weapon, his fingers

takes his cloak, wraps himself in it and steals away.

"Woe unto me!" cries Singoalla. "He will tell everything in the camp. My father will beat me, the men will scorn me, the women scoff at me."

"No," said Erland, "that will not happen."

"No," repeated Singoalla, "it ought not to happen, for we are man and wife."

"Come," said Erland, "I shall go with thee to the camp to speak with thy father. When I am by her side, Singoalla need not fear."

"My husband!" whispered the girl.

"My wife!" replied the youth, lifting her in his arms and carrying her across the brook as he went with her into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAMP

THE large trees that surrounded the camping place looked in the darkness like an impenetrable, black wall upon which the starry vault rested. On the clearing log fires blazed high. They cast quaint, moving shadows, and here and there a tent appeared. The mixture of people and of brutes—of men, women, children, horses and dogs afforded a sight seldom beheld. And a murmur of voices, ranging from the deepest basso to the highest soprano; songs, string-music, shrill whistling sounds, the beating of drums, barking of dogs, cries of children, the sound of men's voices quietly conversing, scolding women, din of hammers falling on cracked copper vessels, or forging red-hot pieces of iron into horse-shoes and arrow-heads—all commingling into an ear-splitting, confused, confusing and confounding din.

With Singoalla as guide, her hand in his, Erland walked through the crowd, the object of inquiring looks and exclamations in a dialect he did not understand. The two passed between groups of men who ate or drank; threw dice or sharpened knives and swords—between women

who stirred kettles, fed children, mended clothes, gossiped garrulously and quarrelled. They passed among nude boys and half-naked girls, who played together, boxed each others ears, scratched one-another, laughed and wept—among horses, wagons, barrels, household effects and implements—toward the tent of the chieftain—the father of Singoalla.

That evening, while Singoalla was with Erland, the belated band arrived and the chief announced that decampment would take place on the second morning. Hence the unusual activity in the camp.

The chief's tent stood to the south, near the edge of the forest. Here the discordant sounds and queer sights were not so pronounced, neither was the crowd so great. The eldest and best of the tribe were gathered here; some women could also be seen who quietly, but eagerly, conversed when Erland and Singoalla approached. These women were Assim's mother, sisters and friends. All fixed their eyes on the chief's daughter as she passed them at Erland's side. The old woman, Assim's mother, resembled an ugly witch by the fire's light—perhaps also by daylight. Her long, curved nose seemed to have grown out from her face to the detriment of the deep eye-sockets and the hollow cheeks—just as when mountains rise, the surrounding surface caves in and the earth quakes. . . Her red eyes blazed, and her

lips, which, sapless and weak, hung around her toothless gums, grinned repulsively. The horrid face of the witch expressed hate and revengefulness, for Assim had already related his experience by the brook; but it also expressed wonder when she saw the son of the knight by Singoalla's side.

At the sight of Erland the elders of the tribe arose and bowed. In the opening of the tent stood the chief, speaking to Assim. Both seemed surprised at the arrival of the blond youth. Assim stole away, turning on Singoalla a sinister look. The chief put his hands to his forehead and bowed to Erland, but with half downcast eyes he thrust a gleaming glance at his daughter from under heavy, black eye-brows.

The girl was pale, but she did not tremble, for her hand rested in Erland's.

Erland announced he wished to speak with the chief without any other witnesses than Singoalla. The chief led him silently into the tent. What was said there no one knows, but half an hour later Erland left the tent with a look of contentment on his face. He was accompanied by Singoalla—who proudly met the glances of Assim's mother and the other women—and by the chief, whose face bore the signs of turbulent thoughts.

At the edge of the forest Erland shook the chief's hand, kissed Singoalla and said:

"I shall be ready at the appointed time."

CHAPTER IX

THE DEPARTURE

"WHAT is there wrong with Erland? He is gloomy and scarcely speaks," said Lady Elfrida to her husband, Knight Bengt.

"He suffers from loneliness," replied the knight after deliberately taking a draught from a cup at hand. He then looked through the narrow window toward the mountain tops and added: "He suffers from loneliness, and that is not strange. The forest is no longer the place for him; next autumn we shall send him to the king's court, there he shall learn knightly manners and hear of chivalrous deeds."

Lady Elfrida cut short the conversation as soon as it touched this subject, for the thought of the time when young Erland should leave father and mother to go out into the wide world was a sad one for her.

But Erland sat in the library of the monastery, by the side of Father Henrik, reading Virgil's Idyl by the dim light that strained through the high, pointed arch-window; and just where Meliboeus, the shepherd, utters his famous lamentation:

"*Nos patriæ fines et dulcia linquimus arva,*" Erland's heart lamented with that of Meliboeus, and he listened absentmindedly to the prior's explanation of the poet; though that explanation was much more lively than the empty comments of the late Maurus Servius, that were written with red ink in the margin.

Before going to the monastery Erland had rambled through every nook and corner in the castle, spoken kindly to all the servants, visited all the haunts of his childhood, not forgetting the cliff from which he used to jump into the lake; he had visited them to bid them farewell, and now, for the first time, he knew how dear they were to him, although many a time he had longed to be away from them to go far out into the world.

He thought of his dear father, his loving mother. He also thought of the monk, his valued teacher, who sat by his side, and his soul blessed him for the knowledge of the art of writing which he had taught him; for Erland's thoughts ran thus: "I shall soon comfort my parents with a letter, telling them why I have disappeared, that I am well, and that I shall return, a proud knight, rich in glory and achievements."

For this purpose he had cut out a leaf from a breviary and hid it in his clothes. On this leaf the letter was to be written.

"You are tired," said Father Henrik, when he perceived Erland's absentmindedness; "well we shall stop—*claudite jam rivos, pueri, sat prata biberunt.*"

The prior shut the book and returned it to its case.

"Farewell," said Erland, pressing the prior's hand. "My good teacher," he added, "to-night I desire your blessing.'

The monk laid his hands on the boy's head, blessed him and embraced him as he oftentimes did.

A loud noise was heard from the outside. The gate-keeper, Brother Johannes, opened the door and announced that some of the strange people, led by their chief, desired to be admitted to thank the prior for his kindness and to bid him good-by, as they were to leave that region the next day at noon. They had already been to Ekö and expressed their thanks to the knight for his hospitality.

The prior answered: "Admit them"!

Meantime Erland took his cloak and went out.

Father Henrik received the strangers in the refectory. All the monks were present. The chief stepped forward, bowed and spoke. Everything was solemn and amicable. But while the chief and the prior spoke the eyes of the wayfarers glanced about the walls of the hall and lingered on the shining vessels which stood on

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contends with the heart's desire and he dares not advance. He leans his head against the door-post and listens to the breathing of the sleeping loved ones. His face is pale and his eyes full of tears. He returns the same way he came. He hastens; it seems to him as if the statues of saints in the niches and on the balustrades move and stretch their hands after him. He calls Käck, wades across the channel that separates the island from the mainland—the drawbridge is, as usual, up for the night—and disappears in the forest followed by his faithful dog. He wears his poorest clothing, and has not a single coin in the pocket of his much worn coat. The belt that girds his waist and the hunting knife it holds are the only things of value he brings from his father's castle.

The chieftain had told Riddar Bengt and the prior that his people would depart the next day by noon. Perhaps he had his reasons for so saying; to Erland he had said: "Come before midnight or you will be too late."

Everything was ready for departure when Erland came to the camp. Singoalla was awaiting him anxiously. She received him with a cry of joy, from where she, herself covered with a variegated cloak, sat in her father's wagon on a bed of quilts, holding the little woolly horses, which impatiently pawed the ground. Behind her wagon was a long row of other wagons, drawn

by horses and oxen and loaded with women, children and implements. Covered with their cloaks, the married men stood behind their wagons, each one attending to his own family. The young, unmarried men constituted a rear-guard, armed with spears, bows and knives. The deserted fires lit up the picturesque scene. The torch-bearers stood in front of the wagons.

The chief walked from his own wagon, which stood first in the line, to the very last, in order to make sure that everything was in readiness. He had eagerly urged his people to hasten; his eyes were restless, and he, who always bowed so low, now had hardly time to greet the new member of his band, his daughter's husband, with more than a careless nod. But Erland did not notice it, for he saw only Singoalla. After the chief had made this round he gave the signal to start. The torches blazed brightly between the tall pines, wagon after wagon was swallowed up in the dark forest and soon the clearing lay vacant.

The line of wagons advanced as fast as the darkness and the rough road would permit. Singoalla alighted from her wagon and walked beside Erland, who led the horses by the bridle. The stars glittered over the tree tops; from behind them the lovers heard a monotonous, melancholy, but still charming song, sung by one of the wanderers. Amid rugged cliffs and through

silent vales the train advanced during the short midsummer night.

In the east the darkness grew less and less deep. There pierced through it a cool, dim light, the slowly awaking dawn, in which the stars faded and disappeared.

Assim, who had been on horseback throughout the night, rode up to his mother's wagon, spread a cloak over her as a protection against the cold of the morning, and uttered words behooving a son; but he turned his face partly away, as he always did when speaking to her, for he felt himself degraded by being born of her. That feeling she, herself, had engendered and kept alive in him by often prating of her own earth-coloured blood and of his father's purple-red blood, a quality which was far from being less marked in his grandfather and his great grand-father.

"You are of the holy, priestly blood, Assim. Your ancestors had golden hair and cornflower-blue eyes: they were the equals of the gods and their shadow imparted blessings. You are the only one in this band of wanderers who is of royal, priestly blood. Your great-grandfather, I have been told, was flaxen-haired. He remembered and understood all the traditions of the holy original language and with them he consecrated our people's brides, children, herds and fires. Your grandfather was dark—but not as

much so as your father—and when a hundred years old he still read and understood some of the old and mighty prayers. Your father, who was unwilling and slow to learn, but inclined and ever ready to command, remembered and understood only a few of their words, though more of them than he gave you as heritage. You are darker than your father, Assim; you are a mule. Your mother's, your grandmother's and your great-grandmother's blood has turned the descendant of the sun-horse into a mule. The sons of gods who led the wandering people out of Assyria, could not find any daughters of gods to make mothers of."

She had spoken to her son in this vein from his early childhood. For this reason Assim bewailed his dark blood, and looked upon it as being the origin of words and acts which caused him shame, and of which he repented. But of the purple-red blood there was at least enough left in his veins to make itself felt at the hour of dawn. Hence it was that then words came from his lips that surprised the nomads and were admired by Singoalla, but which neither she nor the others credited to Assim, because they believed it was his ancestors who spoke through him as their medium.

Assim rode down to the rear-guard. He did not even cast a glance at Erland and Singoalla. But as in rapture strangely tinged with sorrow,

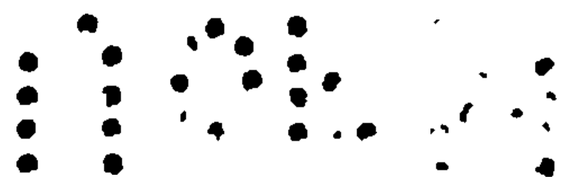
he looked toward the east, toward the source of day, where pale-red bars of cloud slept on the horizon. Through these quivered, more and more perceptibly, a magic-like richness of hues. The pale-red gradually became scarlet, the scarlet changed to a deep rose-red, that edged itself with hidden silver. The silver, in turn, lay under a rim of molten gold, whose effect aroused the warblers of the forest to exalt their gifts and to spread the good cheer of their sweet notes among the pearl and rainbow hues that kissed and thrilled all nature, from the sun's opening chamber to the dew-bejewelled mosses of the ground.

Assim had dismounted. He gazed on that heavenly display of colours. His face shone as if glorified, and he exclaimed:

"*Usas! Usas!* daughter of heaven, hail to thee, virgin Day-blush! The warriors of light, thy champions, burnish their weapons, harness red horses to thy chariot and open for thee the gate of heaven. Thou seizest the reins of the sacred order and drivest with dazzling wheels out on the lawful road, a gracious forerunner of the glorious *Sûrya*. In thee is the life of all being. Thou wakest into motion everything that liveth. The powers of Evil flee from thy sight, thou lofty, victorious, beauteous, rosy dawn."

The sun's rim faintly appeared, and soon the entire dazzling orb rose above the horizon as if

ASSIM



and urged the men to hasten. Hour after hour passed and the sun was already high; the horses were drenched with sweat, the women were tired and complained. Yet the chief shouted: "Forward!" The whips cracked over the tired beasts and the wagon wheels creaked on their worn axles.

"Chief," said Erland to Singoalla's father, "will you not soon call a halt? Do you not know that beasts of burden need rest, feed and water? Look! there flows a brook. Let us water horses and oxen!"

"There," replied the chief, pointing to a slowly rising hill, quite near,, "there we shall rest."

That was all he said, for just then a horseman dashed up to him. It was Assim. He whispered something in the chief's ear. His face grew darker and from his eyes darted restless glances. He remained silent, but beckoned some of the older men and gave them orders in a low voice. Meantime the train had reached a hill, crowned with trees amid which was a clearing. Here the animals were unhitched, the wagons placed in a circle and tied together with ropes in such a way that they formed a rampart. Inside this the people and horses were now gathered. Arms were brought forth and were laid in a heap around a great oak that stood in the centre of the green clearing. Struck with wonderment Erland asked the chief what it all meant.

"Cautiousness becomes a people having many enemies," he answered and went to hold a secret council with the elders, while the young men fed the horses and the women carried water from a spring and prepared dinner.

Around Singoalla gathered all the young women in the tribe; they chatted merrily and looked stealthily at the blond swain, whom they all found beautiful and secretly coveted for a husband. "You are happy, Singoalla," they said; and Singoalla gayly nodded assent. But among the young girls, who spoke to Singoalla, were none of Assim's sisters or friends. They kept by themselves, and Assim's mother was among them.

In the meantime Erland examined the weapons that lay under the oak, drew the bows to test their strength, tried the edge of the swords, all the while singing a merry song.

"It is fortunate that he is amongst us," said an elderly man to the chief. "He will be our hostage."

"But he is dangerous," replied another, "he is an enemy in our midst."

"A narcotic drink!" the chief whispered.

The council over, Assim went to speak with his mother.

Then he again mounted his horse and rode down the hill, accompanied by four other mounted young men.

The women now produced eatables and set them on the grass. The band gathered around the dishes in scattered groups. The chief, his family and the elders ate their dinner at the foot of the great oak. Erland was bid to sit on the right side of the chief; next to Erland sat Singoalla. One of Assim's sisters waited on them. The chief offered Erland unnecessary apologies for the beggarly character of the food, but Erland broke his bread and shared it with Singoalla.

If the food was poor, the same could not be said of the drinks. Assim's sister brought goblets to the company; the three which were put in front of the chief, Erland and Singoalla, were made of the finest silver and beautifully chased. Erland thought he recognised them and exclaimed wonderingly:

"How much these goblets resemble those I have seen in the monastery! Yes, this one looks to me amazingly like the blessed goblet that stood on the altar filled with communion wine."

Singoalla turned pale and cast her eyes downward, for she guessed what had happened. But Assim's sister filled the goblets. With the exception of Singoalla all drank, and Erland thought it had a delicious taste.

Confused shouts are heard. The camp is in a turmoil. Assim returns and hastens to the chief and speaks quietly with him.

"What is going on?" inquired Erland.

"We shall hold a military exercise," replied the chief, coolly, and ordered Singoalla to go to the other women, who had gathered with the children on a spot in the middle of the rampart. Singoalla went; but her cheeks were pale and her eyes moist.

The men gathered around the oak and armed themselves. The chief led Erland into the crowd and asked him to chose before all the best weapons were taken. But when Erland bent the chief made a sign, a rope was thrown around Erland, and before he perceived the trap the rope was wound about his arms and legs so that he could not resist or even move. His eyes blazed, his veins swelled; but the chief said to the men:

"Tie him to the oak!"

This done all ran to the wagons. From the crowd of women was heard a piercing cry; it came from Singoalla, when she perceived what had taken place. She wanted to hasten to Erland, but Assim's mother grasped her locks with her withered fingers and hissed:

"It is thou who hast brought dishonour and misfortune upon us! Woe to thee! woe to thee! Thy blond lover shall die; he will be torn to pieces; poison will torture him. . . Aye! the poisoned drink, prepared by my hand, already wracks his entrails. Look! his head droops to his breast, his cheeks turn as yellow as the

poisonous butter-cups. . . it has already taken effect!"

And while she spoke thus the other women grasped Singoalla by the arms and by the folds of her dress and vied with one another in the use of abusive words.

There was another creature to whom the sight of Erland's ill-treatment would have been intolerable. That was Käck. But he had also been disposed of. While Erland was at dinner one of the men decoyed Käck from the rampart and tied him to a tree away in the forest.

From a short distance shouts and the clank of arms were heard. A hostile crowd charged up the hill. Already an arrow—the first intimation of offered battle—whistled through the air. The women crowded closer together, pressing their children to their bosoms and glancing timorously toward that side of the rampart where the men stood, with bows bent and spears aimed, awaiting the attack.

"No mercy to the sacrilegious thieves!" cried a voice from the outside; "cut them to pieces!"

It was father Henrik who spoke thus to a crowd of the knight's peasants, who, armed with axes, bows and spears, had hurried to pursue the nomadic strangers.

Father Henrik rode a little gray horse; around his habit he had buckled a belt to which hung

the scabbard of a battle-sword, and the sword he wielded vigourously.

The knight, also, followed his men, but he was not armed; he thought it hardly worth while to don his armour or to disturb his good sword for such a battle. He led his people leaning on a cane, as was his custom when strolling over the fields.

He turned to his people and urged the importance of the prior's words by saying:

"Yes, cut down the trash and spare nobody, save women and children. Meanly have they repaid my hospitality. They have rifled the monastery of bag and baggage, not even leaving the Blessed Virgin's crown or the chalice. Swing the axes, men, as when cutting down trees in the forest!"

But before the attacking party reached the rampart the chief made a sign and Assim went up to the oak where Erland was bound. By this time the youth was nearly unconscious from the effects of the poison. Assim held a dagger in his hand. Pallid and quivering he pointed it at Erland's heart.

"Halloo!" shouted the chief, who had mounted a wagon. "What do you wish? Do you come with hostile intent? If so, let us counsel together and see if we cannot settle the matter amicably."

"No negotiations, you blasphemer!" shouted the prior, riding toward the rampart quicker than his people could follow.

"Look there, and perhaps you will be prevailed upon," said the chief, pointing to the oak, which could be seen high above the rampart, standing, as it did, on the top of the hill.

"Erland!" exclaimed the prior, turning pale with surprise.

"Yes, the knight's son! If you approach another step, I give the signal and the iron is thrust in his heart."

"Damnation be upon you, heathen!" cried the prior.

"One step!" repeated the chief, lifting his hand. Assim raised his dagger and was astonished to feel a wild desire for blood.

"Stop!" shouted the monk, beckoning to the chief as well as the knight and his people, who were just ready to rush on the rampart.

"What bodes this?" asked the knight.

"There! Look! Stop! Not a step forward!"

And Riddar Bengt also turned pale and had hardly strength enough left to call to his people:

"Back!"

"Do you negotiate? Yes or no?" demanded the chief, while his swarthy men, closely filed, half determined, half trembling, waited for the fight to begin.

"We'll negotiate!" replied the knight.

"Do you grant us safe retreat?"

"Yes!"

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give up our hostage! For afterwards they will attack and slaughter us!"

"Fear not!" said the chief in his people's tongue. "These men of the north are a strange people. As a rule they keep a promise even without oath or joining of hands. But, come what may, we are prepared to defend ourselves . . .

"Noble lord," he added, turning to Riddar Bengt, "do not believe that we took away your son by force. He voluntarily came to our camp, intending to accompany us on our journey through the world, for he has fallen in love with my daughter and will not leave her."

"That is false!" exclaimed the knight. "But I shall keep my promise to you. Depart and fear the judgment of heaven!"

"Yes, depart, Amalekite!" thundered Father Henrik.

The chief bowed in his usual manner and put his hands to his forehead.

Erland, however, was loosened from the tree and led forward by two men. His complexion was yellow, his gait staggering, and his brains so deranged that he did not know where he was or what had happened. He had to be lifted over the wagons, and, once outside the rampart with his own people, he sank to the ground.

"What have you done unto my son?" moaned the terrified knight, as he lifted Erland's head and looked at his face.

"Nothing," replied the chief, from behind the barricade. "Perhaps it is caused by fright."

"Fright!" repeated the knight, his eyes flaming with indignation. "My son frightened by your treacherous daggers! No! He was never afraid and he never can be cowed."

"It is possible," remarked Father Henrik, "that wrath exhausted the powers of the bound boy."

* * * *

It may be briefly stated that Erland was taken home to Ekö Castle, and that the knight and the prior returned with their men.

They had hardly started on their way back and the chief, through spies, had made sure that their retreat was real, when he ordered that Singoalla be taken before him.

The girl, who had fought in vain to escape from the women, threw herself at her father's feet. Her long hair waved in wild disorder; her face bled from scratches, which the old witch, Assim's mother, had inflicted with her nails; her dress was torn to shreds.

Assim's mother and the other women followed her and assembled around the chief, howling all the while. The men also flocked thither.

"Justice! Justice!" shouted Assim's mother.

"Has it gone so far that the son of the dead chieftain, a descendant of the gods, can be insulted by the daughter of the living chieftain? Is Assim not good enough for Singoalla? Wait!

Our family is powerful . . . it is a family of chieftains, and so noble that, compared with yours, it is like sunshine to dirt."

"Hold your tongue, old witch!" said the chief, "or I'll cut it out of your throat! Did I ever forget how to dispense justice?"

"Father!" cried Singoalla, clasping her arms around his waist; "the blond knight is my husband, we have sworn each other fidelity on Alako's image; you can never take him from me!"

"She is delirious," said the chief. "Where is Assim?"

"Here I am!"

"Bring a jug!"

A woman brought a jug. The chief raised it.

"Assim," he said, "I give you my daughter in wedlock, and as a token thereof I crush this . . ."

"Wait!" exclaimed Assim, "you do not know whether I desire her. I do not covet an apple which some one else has bitten."

The chief's brow wrinkled and his lips compressed. But through fear of Assim's family, which was regarded superstitiously, his wrath was vented, not against Assim, who had insulted him, but on Singoalla, who had disobeyed him.

"Away with thee!" he cried, pushing her from him. "I will show how a chieftain dispenses justice, and cursed be the tongue that dares to

taunt me about partiality! Daughter, thou hast affronted the descendant of one of the ten princes who led our people out of their fathers' land, Assyria. Thou knewest thou wast selected to be Assim's wife, and hast deserted him for a stranger. Well! Go to thy stranger, seek his love or his coldness, his mercy or his loathing, but look for nothing more from us! Thou art cast out from our tribe! Go to thy stranger!"

No little jubilation followed these words on the part of Assim's relatives and friends, who formed a majority of the band.

Through this act the chief had reconfirmed his threatened authority, which he aimed to do. But wrath also had something to do in this case. When pronouncing the sentence the father's heart felt a pang, and he waited for voices to be raised in defence of Singoalla.

But all were jubilant—all, with the exception of Assim, who remained silent, and two young girls, Singoalla's playmates, who approached her, enbraced her and wept.

From the others came acclamation, and that exasperated him.

"Our chieftain is just!" shouted the men.

But Assim's mother danced around Singoalla, pointing the finger at her. And the other women—particularly the elderly, who thought Assim a good match for their own daughters, and the younger as well, who envied Singoalla her

beauty and naturally approved of the thoughts of their mothers—cried aloud: "Go! Away! Go to thy stranger!"

Singoalla shook her locks from her forehead, and turned to her father, saying:

"I will go, father. I willingly go to the blond youth, for I love him and he loves me; he is my husband and I am his wife. But I love thee too, and when I have regained my husband I shall come to thee, for thou canst not cast me away forever, thou, who art so good."

And Singoalla walked away from the camp.

CHAPTER X

THE NIGHT

THE girl went back through the forest. She followed the wagon-tracks. Twilight had come when she, tired, hesitating and trembling, beheld the tower of Ekö Castle rising over the gray surface of the lake. The draw-bridge was up and she did not dare make her presence known by calling. She sat down on a stone by the shore, hid her face in her hands and sobbed. She thought of many things; of her father's wrath, the sneers of the women among her people, but above all of the words of Assim's mother, when she said that she had poured a poisoned drink in the blond boy's goblet.

"That must be false! Yes, it must be false!" mused Singoalla, for she wanted to drive away this terrible thought.

She was awakened from her melancholy dreaming by furtive steps. Seeing several men approach, she rose. They rushed forward to capture her and take her to the knight. In her they had recognised a woman belonging to the band of sacrilegious and poisoning pagans that they had pursued that very day under command of their master and the prior.

Then fear seized Singoalla's heart and she fled into the forest. Arrows whistled from bow-strings, though none hit their mark, but Singoalla heard their death-bearing hiss and she fled. . . fled as fast as her heaving bosom would permit. For a long while she heard behind her the steps and shouts of her pursuers; though, mayhap, it was only the wind that had just begun to blow through the forest. Often she stopped, terrified, for the darkness deceived her and caused her to see an enemy in every queerly formed bush. Then she would cry out and press her hands to her heart. And she would flee again, like a hunted hind, not knowing whither. The sky was covered with black clouds that intensified the darkness; the storm increased, rain began to fall. The wind whistled among the cliffs and cracked limbs in the trees; it seemed as if every object in nature had been granted a way to threaten and frighten her. Raindrops fell, which, cooling her burning brow, gave her strength to run. But, finally, strength and mind gave away. She fainted and sank on some moss beneath a fir.

When she returned to consciousness and looked around she was at a loss to account for her surroundings. Darkness had covered everything with an impenetrable veil; the tempest howled and the rain streamed from broken clouds. She shouted the name of her father, and that of

all white people are angry at me and their hands are raised against me. My father is a robber and my relatives are poisoners. Ah, dear Käck, I am alone and dreadfully unhappy."

Thus spoke Singoalla, and she wept bitterly. But Käck broke loose and disappeared in the darkness. He, too, deserted her. He did not understand her words; besides he was hungry, poor Käck, and longed for his master. Thus she reasoned. But not so. Käck soon returned and put his head in Singoalla's lap. He only wanted to run around for awhile, because he had been tied so long. Now he stayed by Singoalla all night; listened patiently and, as if understanding her lamentations, he licked her hands. That was the only way he could show his sympathy.

Toward morning Singoalla fell into a restless slumber. Her frail body shook from cold and exhaustion. Käck's barking awakened her. A man stood before her.

"Assim!" she exclaimed and looked at him disconcertedly.

"Yes, thou unfortunate Singoalla, it is Assim," he replied. "I have searched for thee all night."

"What dost thou want of me?"

"I wish to save thee, Singoalla, that thou mayest not fall into the hands of white men. Thou art alone, unhappy child. Thou art hungry; here is bread! Thou art frozen; take my cloak!

Arise, Singoalla! Though thou dost not love Assim, permit him to save thee. Thou art cast off by thy father, but I cannot abandon thee."

"Leave me! Thou and thy mother have killed my Erland. Thy face is an abomination to me!"

Assim, remaining speechless, buried his face in his hands.

"Assim!" suddenly exclaimed Singoalla, "thou art good; I shall not send thee away; no, I shall follow thee and shall love thee if thou wilt but grant me a single request!"

"I will die for thee; I will do anything thou wishest, except leave thee," said Assim, while an expression of happiness covered his swarthy face.

"Well! go to the castle and return with Erland. But do not return without him! Dare not come without him!"

"Thine Erland is dead!" cried Assim, whose heart was cruelly stung by the girl's words.

"Not so!"

"Yes! While I searched for thee I was in the neighbourhood of the castle. I heard people talk and they said that he was dead."

"Then go from my sight and let me die!" said Singoalla, and she leaned her head against the fir.

Assim stood as if fixed to the earth, while sighs well nigh rent his heart.

SINGOALLA

Singoalla also was silent and appeared like a statue, as she sat with her brow pressed against the hard bark of the fir.

At last Assim approached, lifted her in his arms and carried her away. On the same hill where the rampart had been, two horses waited for Assim. He covered Singoalla with his cloak, tied her on one of the horses, took the reins, mounted the other and rode southward.

Käck followed Assim and Singoalla.

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to the brim with poison—love and forgetfulness of the past. In Erland's mind these goblins and witches gradually took the shape of a young, beautiful girl, toward whom he at first smiled, but who soon appeared mysterious and hideous. This girl had Singoalla's features.

Sometimes Singoalla's name slipped from his lips, but it came thoughtlessly, and the sound of that name, once so beloved, reached his soul as if it had been spoken by others, and it filled him with anguish.

In a confused way he remembered the adventure he had met with in the camp of the wandering people; he felt his arms bound and saw a dagger aimed at his heart. But the hand that held that dagger seemed sometimes to belong to a man with terrible eyes and sometimes to a young, charming girl; and that girl was Singoalla.

But his imagination also played with memories of a fairer past. Sometimes he thought himself removed to the hill by the brook; there he gathered flowers in company with a girl, who seemed endearing and lovable.

But this womanly likeness had not Singoalla's, but Helena Ulfsax's gentle features. And that was not strange, for Helena Ulfsax sat often by the invalid's bed, and then his eyes beheld her face.

After a time Erland had so far recovered that

he could leave the castle and, leaning on his mother's arm and accompanied by the fair Helena, he walked in the fragrant forest and inhaled the fresh air of heaven.

By accident, or perhaps from habit, he followed the path made by himself to the hill by the brook, his meeting-place with Singoalla. The fir whispered as of old on the hill-top: the brook murmured as usual and the same flowers blossomed there. Erland sat at the water's edge; faint recollections of a sweet past played through the mist that clouded his memory, and filled his breast with gentle sadness. He looked up, saw Helena by his side and pressed his lips on her hand.

But Riddar Bengt now decided that when Erland entirely recovered he should leave the paternal home in order to regain courage and vitality in the maelstrom of life and train himself for knighthood and manliness in the grim school of war.

Nobody desired this more than Erland himself. Like the warriors of old he wished to earn name and fame through acts of daring. The desire of the youth for adventures was awakened. The summer was spent in making preparations for the journey. Twenty men of the knight's people were equipped to accompany Erland. He selected them himself from among the most stalwart youths of the neighbourhood and daily exer-

cised them in the use of arms in the court-yard of the castle.

Autumn came and Erland bade his home farewell and went out with his little troop, abundantly supplied with arms, horses and money.

They went by way of Kalmar, thence a sailing vessel was to carry the adventurers across to Germany, where Erland intended offering his services to the Emperor.

But before Erland left Ekö Castle, he and Helena Ulfsax were betrothed.

When the waves of the sea danced around Erland's ship and carried him farther and farther away from the shores of his native country it sometimes happened that strange thoughts came to the youth.

The name Singoalla echoed and re-echoed in his mind in a puzzling way. He at once detested and loved that name. Its sound contained love and romance, poison and witchcraft. At times there flashed before his memory brown eyes and blushing, brown cheeks, which, as seemed desired, were to challenge the likeness of Erland's betrothed and vie with their beauty to surpass that of the gentle Helena. Then Erland would pray:

"Be gone from my soul, ungodly tempter!" And he would whistle for the wind, and go to the helm and steer his keel southward.

CHAPTER I

SORGBARN*

TEN years have lapsed and left many changes. The master of Ekö Castle is now Riddar Erland Månesköld; his wife is Helena Ulfsax, and she carries a junior Erland on her heart.

Riddar Bengt and Lady Elfrida are gone the way of all the living. When Erland returns from his foreign journeys, weary of war, bloodshed and empty honours, both the parents already rest in their tomb beneath the altar of the monastery chapel.

But Father Henrik is still alive, and, as formerly he visited Riddar Bengt, he now visits Riddar Erland, and in the evenings he sits at his side in the hall, conversing about the memorable adventures the knight has experienced in distant lands. Lady Helena listens and smiles on her little son; the maids also listen from where they swing their distaffs at the other end of the hall.

Erland is happy with his wife, but his happi-

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* Child of Sorrow.

ness is not unalloyed; and what earthly happiness ever is?

In the din of battles he has spent the ardour of youth; manly earnestness, sometimes changing into melancholy, rests on his brow. He has tried life and men; he now seeks at the home's fireside earthly happiness in tranquility and forgetfulness.

But in the depth of his soul dwells a shadow that seems to sigh in its darkness and wish to rise to the light of thought and feeling.

Yet the knight curses its sighs and, as an evil spirit, he conjures it to remain quiet in its infernal abode—but banish it he can not.

This shadow is Singoalla.

Her memory followed him in battle and adventure, in joy and sorrow, in times of hope and in times of disappointment. His remembrance of the dark-featured girl is clearer, but still it is in a dismal light, similar to that which falls upon the heath when a red moon rises above the horizon. It continually mingles with recollections of nightly meetings in the forest, of sacrilege, poisoned draughts, dagger-thrusts, witchcraft and paganism. Yet, he sometimes admits to himself that his love still clings to that vision. At such times he cannot look in the eyes of his Helena. He rides out in the forest, rides furiously and long, so much so that his horse is covered with foam.

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conversed about the perishability of everything human, and when Erland would perceive only the change, fleetness, frothiness and evanescence in the course of life, the prior pointed toward heaven and reminded him of eternity. And when Erland rejoined that nowhere had he found the unalloyed in human nature, the prior replied: "Dust is dust, and spirit is spirit. But even here in the dust the spirit must become the master. The material is subject to spiritualization, heaven will descend to earth and a new era come for the human race."

"Do you believe it will, holy Father?" asked Erland, adding: "If so, perhaps it is the architect who is now going over the face of the earth, clearing the ground for the new edifice."

"What do you mean?" asked the monk.

"I mean the plague, the Black Death, the boil-disease that now ravages the world. I have already related to you what I saw in Germany, Italy and France, aye, wherever I went. When I returned here I left behind me a grave-yard—all the countries of the south . . . full of lamentation, death and decay. Men died as grass falls before the scythe. Lübeck was the last city I saw in the Roman Emperor's domain. From there I embarked for Kalmar; and in the streets of Lübeck there lay nine thousand corpses. I have heard about cities where a hundred thousand people died in a few days. Is this not the builder,

going over the face of the earth, clearing the ground for the new edifice? Will it not soon be our turn?"

"*Miserere Domine!* Lord have mercy!" murmured the prior, folding his hands.

"See," continued the knight, pointing to the window, "see these drops that beat against the panes and glide down as rivulets! Perhaps the clouds that produce them have driven hither from the infected countries of the south, where they absorbed the vapour from the corpses that cover the ground; perhaps these very clouds are the mantle of the Destroyer, that flutters over our heads; perhaps each of these drops carries with it the seed of destruction to the living. Who knows?"

"Lord have mercy!" repeated the monk.

The darkness in the library was made more dense by the black clouds that floated across the vault of heaven. Now and then a bolt of lightning flashed through the air and threw a blinding light into the room. It was as if a voice from heaven endorsed Erland's terrible suggestion.

"A tradition says," he continued, "that the arrival of the plague at a place is announced by a vision. Early in the morning a boy is seen entering the city gate, carrying a rake in his hand. If he rakes outside a house, many die therein. Sometimes he is accompanied by a girl, who carries a broom, and if she sweeps outside a

building, all its occupants die. But I suppose that this is only a tale. Certain it is that many people believe the day of judgment is near, and, therefore, will their property to churches and cloisters."

"You spoke truly. It is the builder who clears the ground for his new edifice. Erland, when I saw you return home and saw the white mantle with a red cross, that covered your armour, then I said to myself:

"'See there, a warrior who has consecrated his sword to the propagation of the faith, his body to mortification, his property to the church, his entire being to God!' I thought you had taken the oath of a religious order of knights, that you were monk and warrior in one. I rejoiced at this, for thus I had pictured your future when you were yet a boy; that was the mark I wanted you to set up of your own accord. All of this did not come true; you have fought the pagans in Lithuania, but you are a worldly man; you have a wife and child. Know, young knight, that an edifice is being erected with the earth for foundation and heaven for a roof. A new, powerful workman has put his shoulder to the wheel and hurries the work with giant strides; aye, this workman is, as you said, none other than the Pestilence, that now devastates the earth. Men, as you also have said, will their property to churches and cloisters.

"Well! this new edifice rises thus, stone upon

the prior lit a lamp. Its dim light could not conceal the flashing thunderbolts that now and then shone vividly against the black back-ground and lighted the pale faces of the knight and the monk.

"Follow me to the chapel! . . . . God's voice is heard in the storm . . . . let us go and pray!" said the prior as he rose. Erland followed him.

The monks were summoned to the chapel. The wax-tapers in the candelabra were lighted. Gathering around the altar the monks knelt and intoned a hymn, in the melody of which were expressed feelings to which no human heart is quite a stranger. Man fears the supremacy and wrath of Nature, its mysterious generative powers and its seemingly irresistible lust of destruction. But Man also trusts in a merciful Being, whose love is present even in devastation.

The sound of consecrated bells united with the voices of the monks. But louder and mightier than all rumbled the thunder and roared the tempest.

When prayers were over the knight and the prior returned to the library. The bells still slowly pealed and were to ring as long as the tempest raged, to exhort the people in the neighbourhood to prayer.

Erland now intended to return home, and was about to call for his horse, which had been given over to the care of Brother Johannes. But at that moment the latter entered and announced

SORGBARN

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"Who art thou?" asked the priest, as he held the lamp toward the little stranger.

"My name is Sorgbarn."

"Hast thou come far in this terrible weather, poor child?"

"Yes."

"Whence comest thou?"

"From far away."

"Sorgbarn! A strange name! Though known in Holy Writ. Art thou alone?"

"Yes."

"Art thou a Christian?" Riddar Erland asked suddenly.

The boy once more answered in the affirmative.

"Canst thou speak the names of God and Christ?" the prior asked, to be doubly sure.

"God and Christ," the boy repeated, bowing his head and making the sign of the cross.

"Now," continued the prior, with increasing assurance, "tell us thine errand and give us also a full account of the occasion of thy journey—how thou camest, and whence. Who are thy father and thy mother and where are they? Then thou wilt be taken to the kitchen to eat thy fill, and after that thou wilt get a bed to rest in, for thou must be hungry and tired."

While the prior spoke a bolt flashed through the room and there was such a clap of thunder over their heads that the knight and the prior

crossed themselves and mumbled: "Miserere!" But Sorgbarn stood quiet, with his eyes downcast.

"Come hither!" said Erland to the boy, "and let me look closer at thee."

Sorgbarn stepped forward and looked the knight in the face.

Riddar Erland laid his hand on the boy's head and sighed deeply—Why? he did now know. He could not help looking at the boy's features; they reminded him of something past. And while he thus looked into the face of the little wanderer the shadow that dwelt at the depth of his soul again began to sigh, move and attempt to force itself into his being's loftier sphere and be revived by contact with the light of memory. Then the knight seized the little one's arm with unconscious vigour, hesitating as to whether he would press him to his breast or repel him with all his strength.

But the boy looked at Erland as if he wanted to say:

"Let go my arm! You hurt me!"

The prior got the information he wanted only by means of questions oft repeated. And this is what he learned:

Sorgbarn had come a great distance, through large forests, many cities, and sailed over extensive seas. The names of these forests, cities and seas he knew not, nor was he desirous of learning

names; and those he had heard he had forgotten. He had not been alone in his journeys, but had had companions. But as to who they were, he gave no account. When the prior questioned him more closely on that subject he kept silent, or acted as if he misunderstood the questions, and when the prior repeated them, the child remained silent.

As to the purpose of his appearance Sorgbarn had this to say, which rather astonished his hearers:

"It has been revealed to my mother that there is a monastery in this neighbourhood, that once in bygone years was plundered by pagans. It was also revealed to her that the stolen treasures would be recovered through me, if she would go with me on a pilgrimage to the distant monastery, and if a knight, who is master of the surrounding country, would take me as his only body-servant and I were to serve him one hundred days and sleep on the mat at his door. Then my mother said that this would be a work pleasing to God.

"My mother also told me that she has been very unhappy, and that God perhaps would give her back her peace of mind if this revelation were to be fulfilled. She also thought that we ought to do it for the sake of my father's soul, for my father had sinned deeply by breaking a holy vow. Therefore my mother was glad that she had this revelation; she delayed not her de-

not that. Thy speech hath been long and sinuous as an eel. It hath, however, left no trace of itself. Who art thou, thyself? After all thou hast said, I still know nothing.

Father Henrik reminded the knight in well chosen words that this was not the proper way to treat a pilgrim, especially one so young and helpless as this one, and who had come on so wonderful an errand.

The worthy prior seemed satisfied that the strange visitor and his stranger errand should receive patient hearing and consideration, and that —not alone for the pilgrim's sake, or his father's and mother's sake, or yet merely for the monastery's sake, but principally to learn whether God would work a miracle—it was Riddar Erland's duty to receive the pilgrim in his house and allow him to sleep on his door-mat. If there should be any delusion or fraud, that would soon be found out, if not before, then at the end of the one hundred days.

The prior added that Sorgbarn would sleep in the monastery that night but if the knight consented to take him as his servant for the stated time, the pious work that the child would perform through such a service would be consecrated the next morning with a solemn mass in the chapel of the monastery, to which the knight and Lady Helena would be invited.

"Well," answered the knight, "be it so."

And he continued, whispering: "If I had not heard this boy pronounce the names of God and Christ, I would have taken him to be an evil spirit, a demon, a vision from hell. Look at his eyes! Are they the eyes of a child? Doth not calamity speak from their dark depths? I pray you, pious father, sprinkle plenty of holy water on this child to-morrow."

"To me his face is charming: neither do I see anything evil in his eyes," replied the prior.

"I am thinking of the pestilence boy," mumbled the knight; "may this one bring no misfortune on my house!"

"What a thought!"

The knight mechanically fingered the manuscript that lay before him, dropped his head in his hands, but raised it again and cast a look of surprise and suspicion toward the door, for he heard something from that point. It was the half whispering, half singing voice of a child, accompanied by sounds of serene, fragile, etherial music.

"What is that? Is it he? Dare he sing in our presence? And while it thunders! God have mercy! What a flash!"

Erland rose. His eyes glanced threateningly at the boy; but the prior put his hand in a quieting way on his arm. He, too, was astonished when he heard Sorgbarn sing, and saw him kneeling and striking with his fingers on some pieces of

glass, which he had produced from his clothes and laid on the floor. It may be true that children often pass from seriousness to play, and from play to seriousness, but to do this now, and under such conditions, certainly seemed rather perplexing.

"My old teacher, I am ashamed to say it, and I do not understand it, but this child, if a child it be, confuses me, frightens me and rouses old reminiscences and imaginations. Hear his singing! Believe me, it is an enchantment! Let me tell you! In my boyhood I once heard a wanderer sing an enchanted song. That time it was an old man. The song almost crazed me. I felt like rushing into multitudes to cut and kill, and be killed. He sang of Satan, whom he called Odin, leading Swedes and Goths, our unhappy heathen forefathers, and urging them to fight against warriors who, probably, were those of Christendom. He sang of waterfalls of arrows, hurled into forests of spears; of a sea of arms, forming shrieking waves, lashed by a storm of Valkyries and of a flame made up of the flashings of swords. I saw, yes I saw Satan on an eight-legged dragon. Gray clouds and the blue of the sky were cut into ribbons that fluttered from his shoulders. I heard his cries above the blasts of the battle-horns that sounded as loud as the arch-angel's trumpet. The thought of it still cuts through the very marrow in my bones. I was

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to the boy as he passionately shook him by the arm. "Dost thou wish to mock God's voice in the tempest? Where didst thou learn manners? Should not the pious cross themselves and bow their heads to the lightning? Art thou a heathen?"

Sorgbarn looked at his crushed instrument and then at Erland.

"May I serve you one hundred days or not?" asked the child as if he had not understood the knight's anger.

Erland let go the boy's arm. He could hardly endure his look, but replied:

"Thou mayest come, for I wish to know who thou art. But be sure these one hundred days will not be holidays for thee! Thou wilt sleep on my mat, but wilt also be my dog and be paid with kicks. And if the plundered treasures are not recovered through thee as thou pretendest it is revealed to thy mother, then thou mayest expect no mercy."

Sorgbarn did not seem to fear, but rather to like this threatening promise, for his eyes sparkled as if with joy.

Riddar Erland now bade the prior good-night. The latter regretted in his heart the knight's austerity toward the little pilgrim. But Father Henrik tried to make amends for it by showing him greater kindness. As soon as the knight had gone the monk took Sorgbarn, not to the

kitchen, but to his own table in the refectory, and placed him between himself and the eldest brother and related to the monks all that the boy had told of his pilgrimage and remarkable errand.

When the brothers had heard this, they showed Sorgbarn greater reverence than aged men are wont to show to boys.

After supper a bed was prepared for Sorgbarn in the library, where he was left alone after the prior had bade him good-night, blessed him, and gone to his cell.

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHT AND THE PILGRIM

EARLY the next morning mass was said in the monastery chapel, during which Father Henrik had decided to consecrate Sorgbarn's pious service with the knight.

Thunder and lightning during the night had cleared the air. The morning was bright and beautiful. Lady Helena walked to the monastery by Erland's side, followed by all the servants. The knight had related to his wife the meeting with Sorgbarn, the latter's errand, and his own promise to accept the boy's services. To this promise Lady Helena had no objection to make, especially as it concerned a pious work, through which, perhaps, God's power might be revealed in a wonderful way. On the contrary, her soul was all aglow with desire to see the young pilgrim, and she was very glad that her house was the one in which the revelation ordered him to do penance by service. When Lady Helena entered the chapel and was greeted by the notes of the solemn hymn being sung by the monks, and she beheld the boy among their kneeling figures, in a snow-white garb, and more beautiful

"My old Käck! Livest thou still! Whence comest thou?"

Riddar Erland patted the dog, and could not cease to wonder at this unexpected meeting, for Käck had disappeared ten years before, and the knight believed that the strange people had stolen him, or that the wolves had devoured him.

Still Erland did not really enjoy that meeting. At this time it rather filled him with gloomy thoughts and sad forebodings, connected with recollections from which he wished to be free. But Käck faithfully followed the knight to the castle, where he was welcomed by the elders among the servants, to whom his return was a source of much gossip. Then he took possession of his old kennel in the court-yard, much to the chagrin of its present occupants.

* * * *

But how did Sorgbarn spend his day at Ekö Castle?

It was with no little reluctance that Riddar Erland submitted to the arrangements rendered necessary by Sorgbarn's mission. Lady Helena selected a room in the tower for her husband's bed-chamber, and she entreated him in a kind but determined way to allow only Sorgbarn to wait on him, regardless of what the service might happen to be, since it was so ordered in the revelation. Hence it was scrupulously seen that only Sorgbarn filled the knight's cup and did his

THE CONSECRATION

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in the hall, Sorgbarn's place was in a distant corner. Lady Helena often spoke kind words to him, but the sorrowful expression in his face was never replaced by that of joy.

He appreciated her kindness; that she saw from the look in his eyes. But when the knight, as it often happened, took his son, the little Erland, in his arms, or dandled him on his knees, and fondled and kissed him, then Sorgbarn suppressed his sighs, but his tears would flow, for tears cannot be heard, and the corner where Sorgbarn sat was dark.

The tenth day of Sorgbarn's stay in Ekö arrived. The knight had rowed out on the lake to fish, and Sorgbarn went in the forest. When Erland returned and sat down at the dinner table Sorgbarn was not there. His place usually was behind the knight's chair, for he waited on his master even at the table.

"An attentive servant and zealous penitent, this Sorgbarn!" said Riddar Erland. "Woe be unto his poor father's soul if no other works of self-denial than those of this son can redeem it from purgatory!"

But hardly had the knight spoken these words before Sorgbarn entered.

"Come here!" sternly said Erland, whose anger was stirred by heaven alone knows what. "If thou art to be my servant, thou must be in thy place, thou rascal!"

And the knight struck Sorgbarn in the face so violently that he fell to the floor.

Lady Helena gave her severe husband a reproving look for this cruelty, but Sorgbarn rose, wiped some moisture from his eyes and took from under his coat a shining jewel, which he, with blushing cheeks, handed the knight.

It was the Virgin Mary's golden crown, stolen ten years before from the monastery by the strangers. The knight recognised it and was amazed. Lady Helena took the crown and could not withold her tears. Little Erland, who sat next to his father, stretched his tiny hands for it, because its lustre pleased him.

"Where didst thou find this crown?" asked Erland.

"In the forest," Sorgbarn replied.

"Hast thou found all?"

"No, but in ten days I shall find more, and in one hundred days I shall have found all the treasures, as my mother said."

The knight said no more, but continued to eat. Lady Helena, however, took Sorgbarn's arm, pressed his cheek to hers and whispered;

"Forgive Knight Erland, my little pilgrim! He does not mean to hurt thee, but he has a rash temper."

At these words Sorgbarn burst into tears. Little Erland joined him. Children sincerely sympathise with one another's trials. Besides,

the tiny knight liked Sorgbarn, who sometimes played with him, and was very patient with his caprices.

At this juncture, Erland rose from the table, threw his chair on the floor, left the hall, and went to his room in the tower.

Sorgbarn followed, for such were his orders. But he found the door locked; the knight wished to be alone. Sorgbarn then sat by the door and waited for many hours. But Erland did not appear until towards evening. Then he went to the hall. Little did he say to Lady Helena, but ate his supper and returned to his bed-chamber, followed, as usual, by Sorgbarn.

Daylight fell sparingly through the narrow and dim window. The knight examined an old sword, but remained silent. All was so quiet that the sand running in the hour-glass was heard as might have been a gentle voice, whispering of solace and of death.

"Fill my goblet!" finally commanded Riddar Erland.

Sorgbarn poured a little wine in the cup and offered it to his master with trembling hand and downcast eyes.

"It tastes good," said the knight, and put the cup on the table.

Erland went to rest; Sorgbarn lay down on his mat. Then he perceived that his bed was softer than usual and found a quilt concealed

SINGOALLA

"Sorgbarn, why dost thou not sleep? Children always sleep in the night! Art thou sad, Sorgbarn? Yes, I have been harsh toward thee, I have ill-treated thee. Poor little pilgrim, alone in the world, but beloved by God! Wilt thou forgive me?"

Sorgbarn replied with sobs only.

"Sleep now! Sleep well, poor little child!" said the knight.

CHAPTER III

THE CAVE

IT pleased Lady Helena not a little to perceive the sudden change that had taken place in Riddar Erland's treatment of Sorgbarn. "Patience and gentleness have triumphed over wrath," thought the lady. Besides, the fact that Sorgbarn had found the golden crown and thus proved the revelation to be genuine, must have somewhat influenced the knight with more gentle feelings toward the child.

In truth, from the eleventh day of the little pilgrim's stay at the castle Riddar Erland was kind to him. This influenced Sorgbarn as well, so that his manner was more free and natural. In the knight's presence he played on his pieces of glass, not caring whether he was heard or not. He now no longer felt any bitterness, or whatever else it may have been that caused him to weep in silence when the knight fondled his little son. He looked Riddar Erland freely in the face and smiled when he handed him his cup. He continued his daily visit to the forest at hours when the knight did not need his services, and Käck generally followed him.

On the twelfth day it happened that Father Henrik went to the castle, partly to see the little pilgrim, whom he loved and looked upon with more reverence since the marvellously recovered crown once more adorned the statue of the Virgin Mary in the monastery, and partly to disclose to the knight the contents of a letter, which had arrived from a monastery, situated in the mountains near the Norwegian boundary.

But when the prior arrived at the castle he learned that Sorgbarn had gone to the forest. Riddar Erland, however, had just returned and Father Henrik went to see him.

The prior's face, which generally wore an expression, at once quiet and yet animated, now plainly revealed a burdened and restless state of mind. The two men met in the tower-chamber.

"Sad news," said the prior, laying the letter on the table and sitting down heavily in an arm-chair. "This parchment was sent to me from my brother, Benedict, who is prior of the Godstorp monastery, which lies close to the Norwegian boundary line."

"Well?" queried the knight.

"Your prophesy was right . . . . I feared it would be . . . . Read this! The day of God's wrath is coming with long strides . . . . The plague is in the country and spreading rapidly. God have mercy on us! Who will now wonder if the strongest of hearts tremble!"

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abode of death will carry this letter. I doubt whether it will reach you. *Pax tecum!*"

"God be gracious unto us!" said the knight in a reverential tone. "The date of this letter is already old. It may be that the great Manslayer is very near. In times like these it is hard to have wife and child."

"It is best," said the prior, "not to love anything earthly. Then death's open door does not frighten us."

"I have been close to the plague," continued Erland. "In the cities of the south I have walked among piles of corpses; I have carried sufferers on my back, felt their breath mixed with mine, and still I live."

"Our lives are in the hands of God . . . ." These words lifted from the prior's soul the dread with which it was stricken by the first news of the calamity, and he breathed freely again.

"Yes, you are right," continued the knight, "our time is in God's hands. Pious father, if Sorgbarn, my cup-bearer were here, we would ease our hearts with good wine. He will be here soon, though, for he carefully attends to his duties."

Here the knight impatiently looked through the window, for his heart, which had cruelly fought against its own feeling, had now become so attached to Sorgbarn, that he longed for him every moment of his absence. This feeling was mysterious and unexplainable. Though Sorg-

barn's eyes certainly were reflectors of his own soul, it seemed to the knight as if, from their depths, another being looked. In this he beheld, at first with trepidation, but afterward with composure, a resemblance to Singoalla . . . .

With trepidation, because the recollection of Singoalla was to him a heathenish memory mixed with the poisoned draught's influence upon him bodily, and the spiritual influence of superstitious tales together with visions of sacrilege, deceit, murder and witchcraft. But with the memory of Singoalla was also connected the recollections of an oath; a heathenish oath, to be sure, but still an oath which Erland had broken, and the thought of the retribution incident to that broken oath worried him . . . But he hoped that, by means of the self-denying service of the little pilgrim this memory might, so to express it, become christianised. In other words, Erland believed that, through kindness toward Sorgbarn, he could atone for his involuntary sin against Singoalla.

But let us leave the castle and follow Sorgbarn into the forest. The boy's pale cheeks were reddened from his rapid running among the pines along the shore of the lake when he arrived at a group of rocky hills, great portions of a mountain which, in primeval times, had been riven asunder by subterranean forces, and which were now heaped up in confused masses.

SINGOALLA

Sorgbarn entered the intricate mazes formed by these cliffs and crags. After making many turns and counterturns he finally entered a cave, into which a dim light penetrated through thin spaces between the overhanging rocks. Käck had followed the boy along his almost trackless way among brushwood and thickets.

The cave was inhabited. A mossbed, covered with skins of wild animals, lay along the irregular walls. A flat stone in the centre served as a table. On the floor lay a bow, a bunch of arrows and a sword, and close by were some partly burned branches upon a pile of charcoal and ashes.

When Sorgbarn and Käck entered two figures sat in the dim light. One was that of a man, thin, swarthy and with a dull look in his sunken eyes. The other was a woman, as dark and thin as the man. Both were silent and stared aimlessly at the walls. Indescribable suffering was written in every line of this woman's face; anguish and grief were expressed in every outline of her form. But beauty still lingered as a dim and dying lustre on this vision of grief; a melancholy beauty, reminding one of its impending annihilation.

"Sorgbarn is here," said the man; for the woman had not heard the sound of the boy's steps, nor even perceived that Käck had lain down on the moss near by her, where he yawned and stretched as if quite at home.

known that. . . . Sorgbarn, is Lady Helena very beautiful? Doth the knight often kiss his wife? Doth he love her much?"

"Yes," replied Sorgbarn; and Singoalla turned away and pressed her face against the cold cliff.

"Let the power work!" Assim's voice was heard to say.

"Be not sad, mother," entreated Sorgbarn, renewing his caresses, until Singoalla again turned her face to him.

"Well!" said Singoalla rising, "the power will work. Sorgbarn thou wilt bring thy father to me!"

"If God gives me strength, mother."

"Thou hast it," replied the mother; "thou hast the power that Alako gives his chosen ones. Thou canst achieve great things with that power. Thou art a son of the glow of the south and of the frostiness of the north. Thou art a child of faithfulness and deceit, heathen and Christian, of the light-blond and the dark-brown, of the first love and youthful vigour. Poor Sorgbarn! Why art thou here? Behold! Thou art the son of a knight. A castle should be thine abode, velvet thine attire and golden spurs should clank as thou steppest forth. But thou wast born to sorrow, not to joy; the lines of thy palm, the arch of thy forehead, and the web of the veins on thine eyelids destine thee to sighing and woe.

Thy cheeks are as pale as a flower growing in darkness. In sorrow wast thou born into the world; suckled on a sighing breast, and even thy mother's kisses were salt with her tears!

"Sorgbarn, thou wilt bring thy father to me. He hath sworn fidelity to me on Alako's image; he is mine. I have a right to shed his blood, to close his heaven against him, if his God and thy God is my God. Thou wilt lead him to me this very night, Sorgbarn! He shall be tried for his treachery and cruelty. Oh! if he hath a heart he will cry over thy pale cheeks and shudder at thy poor mother's torments."

"I will take my father to you, but Assim must not kill him," said Sorgbarn.

"As thy mother bids," said Assim harshly, kicking the sword that lay on the floor. "I have promised to be thy mother's slave, though my faithfulness is less dear to her than thy father's deceit."

"Silence!" cried Sorgbarn to Assim. "If you are my mother's slave be silent!"

"I am the son of a prince and her slave."

"I leave you now, mother. Riddar Erland waits for me. To-night I'll return with my father."

"There, on the stone, are some seeds which I gathered by the full moon," said Assim. "Put them in the knight's goblet and he will readily obey thee."

Sorgbarn hesitated.

"Take them," said Singoalla; "Assim gathers other seeds than poisonous ones."

At these words Assim looked downward. Sorgbarn took the seeds to go, but paused thoughtfully an instant.

"Mother," he added with an air of unusual concern, "one more word! Have you had a revelation as to where I shall find any of the hidden monastery jewels next time?"

"I have had another revelation and when eight days shall have passed I will show thee the spot where thou wilt find the chalice."

Singoalla kissed Sorgbarn. The boy called Käck, who was just falling asleep, and leaving the cave, he ran through the forest to the castle.

When he had left, Singoalla said to Assim:

"Up! take the shovel and the chalice! Bury it under the loose root that I showed thee, where the brook falls into the lake! Sorgbarn's soul must not be tainted with falsehood."

Assim rolled away a stoned that covered a pit where the stolen cloister treasures were gathered. He took the chalice, leaving the rest there, replaced the stone, took a shovel and went out.

With these stolen treasures Assim had deserted his people, after he had been their chief for some time, having succeeded to Singoalla's father, who fell in a battle on Jutland's sandy coast. During that time Singoalla had followed Assim, and it

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CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET POWER

SORGBARN returned to the castle while the knight and the prior still sat conversing by the table in the tower-chamber. Sorgbarn filled their cups and the prior emptied his with hope, because it was handed to him by a pious pilgrim.

After dinner the prior returned to his monastery. Neither he nor the knight had spoken to Lady Helena or the servants of the terrible message that had come from the Norwegian boundary, for they did not wish to frighten them needlessly.

Accompanied by Sorgbarn, Erland went to his chamber to enjoy the night's repose. Sorgbarn's heart quivered, for he had put some of Assim's mysterious seeds in Riddar Erland's wine. The child's heart trembled because this very night he was to take his father to his mother with the help of what Assim and Singoalla had called "the secret power."

This power is well-known now, though it still is an unsolved riddle. The learned of our time, who search out the nerves and microscopically enlarge them, who know the laws that guide the

heavenly bodies in the universe and direct the drop of water in its passage through a tube of the fineness of a hair, have not yet fully fathomed the secrets of this power.

Yet, long before Mesmer discovered it, it was known and used by the Brahmins of India, and by the peoples of Assyria and other lands. But the people of Assyria were not given to research; they simply used the power and were content to let it remain what it then was and still is—a mystery.

This peculiar power was richly bestowed upon Sorgbarn. His mother had experienced that. When her heart was torn by anguish, and sleep fled from her eye-lids, Sorgbarn would gently stroke her temples with his hands, and sleep would come and her heart would be lulled to rest for a time.

* * * *

Now the knight has fallen asleep. The sand-glass monotonously whispers. The stars peep through the tower-window. Sorgbarn rises from his mat and steals with noiseless steps to Erland's bed. The little pilgrim's heart beats violently. His hands are raised with hesitancy. Now they glide like shadows over the knight's fore-head and toward his breast. The sand-glass still whispers incessantly, and the stars look in through the tower-window. Silence reigns; even the knight's breathing has ceased. He lies in his bed as one who is dead, while the light from

the stars twinkles on his pale face. Still, like shadows, Sorgbarn's hands continue to glide over Erland's face, and they glide as noiselessly as shadows.

The knight rises! Sorgbarn is appalled—gives a half suppressed cry of fear and falls on his knees. Erland's eyes are closed.

"Knight Erland," whispers Sorgbarn, "I wish you no harm. Be not angry!"

The knight answers nothing.

Sorgbarn now perceives that the power is effective. He rises and says quietly:

"Sir Knight, you must leave your bed and follow me!"

"Whither wilt thou lead me, Sorgbarn?"

"You shall know soon."

Erland dressed himself; Sorgbarn took his hand.

They descended the cockle-stairs and came through a back door to the shore where the knight's fishing boats were fastened. In the smallest of them Sorgbarn rowed across the channel, with strokes so noiseless that the sentry did not hear them. On landing Sorgbarn again took Erland's hand and led him into the forest.

The secret power had such an effect that Riddar Erland's mind, strong and obstinate as it otherwise was, yielded to that of the boy; nay, both blended together into one. Erland's soul looked into Sorgbarn's, as the faithful

full life and feeling; the feelings of the love of his youth, the sweetest of all love, the love which, otherwise, never returns. This re-awakening passion already thrilled his being, and his thoughts and feelings centered on Singoalla.

"Sorgbarn," said Erland, when they had gone quite a distance into the forest, "let us sit down and rest! The night is beautiful. Dost thou see the star that twinkles there above the crown of the oak? I love thee as a son, as if thou wert my little Erland; aye, I love thee more, pale little child, and I see in thy soul that thou returnest my love. The night is so beautiful, so cool! Where dost thou lead me, Sorgbarn? I will follow thee to the end of the world!"

"I lead you to my mother."

"Doth thy mother live in the forest?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that thou wert my son! Art thou not my son?"

"I am your son," replied Sorgbarn, surprised, moved and perplexed by these gentle words.

"Who is thy mother? Is it Singoalla . . . Singoalla . . . Singoalla?"

The sound in his voice became gentler and gentler.

"Yes, Singoalla is my mother."

"Oh God!" exclaimed the knight, and tears trickled from his half-closed eyes; "I am so happy. Beloved son, why did I not immediately recog-

nise thee? Thou hast been a stranger in thy father's house; thou hast suffered much from his unjust anger. I see in thy soul, though, that thou dost not hate me; nay, thou lovest me and art made happy by my words. Come, Sorgbarn, I will go to thy mother!"

They continued their meandering journey. Sorgbarn shivered in the darkness . . . shivered from happiness, as it often happens when happiness comes as a flood of sunlight that streams into eyes which, once blind, suddenly recover their sight . . . . shivered from an awful feeling, for Riddar Erland was so pale, so changed, his voice was like that of a spright. It was like an illusion, as if a strange soul had been speaking through his lips.

They stopped at the opening of the ravine. Sorgbarn took his father's hand and guided him into the labyrinth. A light was seen, but quickly disappeared, for it was hidden by a wall of rock. It soon reappeared, however. It was from the cave.

"Oh, how I tremble," mumbled Erland; "doth my soul's beloved dwell among these cliffs?"

The steps of the knightly visitants re-echoed in the cavern and announced their arrival to the inhabitants of that dismal abode. Singoalla sat on the mossbed, the light from the fire reflected from the moist stonewalls and spread a deceptive semblance of a blush on her cheeks. Assim was

in his old place with his arms folded. He had just sharpened his sword on a stone. Now it hung, unsheathed, from his girdle.

"Listen!" whispered Singoalla, who, ever since the twilight hour, had attentively waited and listened. "Listen! They come! Assim, why dost thou not go?"

Assim arose.

"I shall remain within reach," he said; "if thou wishest him to die, poke the fire. That will be the signal. My sword is sharp, my hand is firm, an unexpected cut will fell the wild polar bear."

"Go! Go!" whispered Singoalla.

Assim disappeared.

The next moment the knight and Sorgbarn entered. Singoalla stood before Erland. She beheld him . . . Who can describe a look like that? A life with all its adventures, delights and sorrows—with all its treasures of passion and feelings—can be concentrated in one single glance, as the lens focuses all the rays of the sun into one. The past, the present and the future can meet together in one glance. In Singoalla's case, they met into an interrogation point, proud and humiliating, and yet not without trembling.

The question was of remembrance or forgetfulness, of love or hatred, of tears or blood? On his half-shut eyelids Erland felt a burning sense of this questioning glance.

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But without, Assim's eyes are aglow with rage. He gnashes his teeth from pain. He wants to see Singoalla happy; but for him, the rejected one, how can he bear to behold this happiness! Better for him to die by fire!

Singoalla caresses Erland's face, and whispers gentle questions while her eyes fill with tears.

"Erland, why art thou so pale? Why have the roses withered on thy cheeks? Whither hath thy youth fled? I dreamed that thou wast still seventeen years of age! Erland, hast thou suffered?"

"Where hast thou been so long, Singoalla?" asks Erland in return. "Dost thou remember the home of our happiness, where the fir whispered, where the brook murmured? Ah! the fir whispers still, and the brook murmurs yet. The past has returned; we are young again. Come, Singoalla, let us play and gather flowers at the edge of the brook! The time for the tryst has arrived, the stars of heaven twinkle! Dost thou not see them?"

Erland takes Singoalla's hand and leads her out of the cave. Scarcely conscious, but in an ecstacy of bliss, Singoalla follows him. With bowed head she wanders by the side of her knight in a romantic mood. She sees nothing of the stars, nor of the trees amongst which she walks. Oh, that this bliss might never cease! Let them play by the brook and die ere morning

comes with its blazing daylight and cruel reality! The night, the dream, the romance, the flickering shadows, the twinkling stars, the uncertainty, the limitless—all commingling—in nature, the sweet delusions that are born in the breast of mystery! Oh, what is the sun with its golden brightness, what the day with its clearly revealed objects and cold realities as against all this!

Sorgbarn followed his father and mother. The little one's face beamed with delight. An unknown spirit moved within him and made him sing. The song sounded as if it were only for the spirits that soar through the dimness of night.

They came to the hill by the brook; it was not far away. Erland and Singoalla rested at its foot on the grass where they formerly had sat together, but play and gather flowers now, they could not. Entranced they leaned upon each others shoulder. They could not speak, but only sigh and feel each others presence, half awake, half dreaming.

But Sorgbarn sat at the water's edge, looking at the stars that were reflected therein and singing for them.

Thus the moments passed and the stars went out, one by one, in the western haze. Gray mist mixed with the darkness; the ground was moist with early-dew.

Sorgbarn then went to his father, put his hand on his shoulder, saying:

"Day is breaking. Rise and follow me!"

Erland awoke reluctantly from his semi-conscious state; his mind was submissive to Sorgbarn's; he must obey.

Sorgbarn thus disturbed them because it was already long after midnight, The secret power through which Sorgbarn's soul mastered that of the knight began to wane. The boy felt that through the cold and weakness in his limbs.

"Mother," said he to Singoalla, "come! I am weak and chilled! We must hurry!"

"Bid farewell, O, mother! We must hurry," he repeated anxiously.

Singoalla rose.

"Farewell!" she whispered to the knight.

"No! No!" exclaimed Riddar Erland; "here shall we stay for ever!"

"We will meet again! Farewell!" replied Singoalla.

"Flee, mother! Stay not!" implored Sorgbarn.

"Come, father, you must follow me," said the boy to his charge.

Sorgbarn took the knight by the hand. They returned rapidly to the boat, rowed across the channel, ascended the tower-stairs and entered the chamber.

"Take off your clothes and sleep!" ordered Sorgbarn. The knight obeyed. Sorgbarn wrapped himself in his quilt, lay down on his mat and went immediately to sleep.

CHAPTER V

DAY AND NIGHT

ERLAND awoke with a heavy head. Sorgbarn arose a little later, weak, but with a clear recollection of the night's happiness in his soul. "Father!" he was about to call to Knight Erland, as he recalled the words of fatherly love expressed during the night. But the word died on his lips when he looked up and saw the awful expression on Erland's face.

The knight uttered a curse and mumbled; "I had a horrible dream last night. Evil spirits tortured me. One of them even had thy features, *Sorgbarn.*"

Riddar Erland dressed himself rapidly and ran out to seek relief in the morning-air. He was melancholy the whole day. He spoke but few words to Lady Helena, and fewer to Sorgbarn. He did not caress his little son, but all the more liberally upbraided the servants.

Late in the afternoon Riddar Erland rode out. Sorgbarn hastened to the cave in the forest. There Singoalla sat with beaming face; still intoxicated by the memories of the night. Assim

was cooking food in a kettle over the fire, in silence, as usual.

Singoalla embraced Sorgbarn, covered him with kisses and inquired after his father.

"My father!" replied Sorgbarn. "Alas! to-day I dare not call him father. He is angry and says he had a horrible dream last night."

"Did he say a '*horrible dream*'"? asked Singoalla reflectingly.

"Yes!"

"It is impossible. He loves me. Our fathers have told us that when the secret power hath sway man appears as his real self. Aye, in his innermost heart he loves me. Oh! but last night! Blessed night! Sorgbarn, to-night thou shalt again lead thy father to me. But ere then I will appear before him, to convince thee that he always loves me. Come, Sorgbarn, I am going to the castle."

"Mother!" cried Sorgbarn, "you will ruin yourself! Remember the knight's spouse, Lady Helena!"

"She!" exclaimed Singoalla with blazing eyes, "I am Erland's first and only wife, as true as God is in heaven. He loves her not, he can not! Didst thou not see, didst thou not hear, last night? Me, and me alone his soul loveth! To him I am going!"

Sorgbarn's remonstrances were of no avail. She went. Sorgbarn followed her, weeping and

imploring. She went, for a doubt which she vainly scorned had come to life in her heart. Assim took his bow and followed her, but at a distance.

After walking quite a way Singoalla and Sorgbarn came to a gradually inclining ridge over which their path led. When they reached the top she saw Erland on the other side, mounted on his horse. His face was dark and terrible to behold. His horse was covered with foam. A bow hung on the pommel of his saddle.

He, too, saw Singoalla and stopped, shaded his eyes with his hand, and cried out:

"Cursed apparition! Heathen witch! Dost thou pursue me even by daylight!"

And he grasped his bow, drew it, placed an arrow to the string and sped it.

But Singoalla had already disappeared. Assim had rushed forward, dragged her away and placed her out of sight. Then Assim bent his bow and ran back to return the shot; but by that time Erland was gone.

When Assim returned Singoalla sat on the green moss and stared vacantly. Sorgbarn sat by her side, silent and wishing to die.

"Singoalla," said Assim, bending over her, "dost thou not wish me to kill Erland? I have a poisoned arrow in my quiver, and my aim is good."

"I have a right to take his blood. Kill him!" Singoalla angrily replied.

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These words were again heard from Erland's lips. But now Sorgbarn shuddered at their sound. They were not his father's, but those of a mocking spirit who spoke with the tongue of his father.

"Sorgbarn, thou knowest not how I love thee," said the knight, during their walk to the cave.

"No, let go my hand! You must not touch me! I will not be your son!"

"The night is dark, clouds sail under the sky . . . and thou, Sorgbarn, speakest words that chill my blood. Dost thou see the clouds on the sky, my own Sorgbarn?"

"Yes, it begins to rain. Hurry! I shall take you to my poor, unhappy mother."

The rain falls in torrents. The wind rustles in the forest. No star lights up the lone and indistinct footpath. The owls screech among the crags. And by the side of the little boy walks a figure, pale as a ghost, with eyes half opened.

They reach the ravine. Sorgbarn stops. Another shudder runs through his frail body. He thinks of Assim's sword and the doom that awaits the knight. Aye, and stops and wishes for death.

"Sorgbarn," said Erland, "give me thy hand. Why dost thou not take me to Singoalla? Naughty Sorgbarn, I shall complain of thee to thy mother for speaking cruel words to thy father."

So threatened the knight with gentle voice. But Sorgbarn wept.

"Why dost thou weep? Why art thou angry at me? Come, Sorgbarn! Be a good boy! I shall not complain of thee to Singoalla."

The knight wanted to enter among the cliffs.

But Sorgbarn's power over him kept him back. The boy cried passionately:

"No, stop! Are you not afraid, Sir Knight?"

"The wind howls in the forest, but who is afraid of the wind and the darkness?" answered the knight. "Thou art a timid boy."

"Do you not hear what the wind tells you? It is a sad tale and you ought to fear."

"What doth the wind say? Tell me its tale! I shall listen willingly if thou wilt wipe away thy tears and be joyful."

While the knight thus spoke he leaned against a cliff, smiled and raised his forehead toward the dark sky. Among the rocks appeared a shadow.

"The wind saith: 'My mother bore me at night in the graveyard. There she searched for her husband's grave, but he was not dead.'"

"Wonderful boy, didst thou hear the wind say that? What saith it now?"

"The wind saith: 'My father was a knight, who travelled far, was fickle in mind and faithless!'"

"Then the wind is like thy father."

"'My mother searched for him and wandered

from land to land, but found him not. She thought herself loved and searched for by him. She thought him very unhappy and wept for him; her tears fell as dew on the meadow, as rain on the mountain!'"

"Did the wind say that? But what saith it now? Now its voice soundeth harsh in the forest."

"The wind saith: 'My father was not unhappy, for he had forgotten my mother and did not search for her. He loved another, who came from the north!'"

"The wind has a faithless father," said the knight. "But hear how it moans in the forest; Is it the voice of the wind once more? What saith it now?"

"The wind saith: 'I was suckled at a sighing breast, I was lulled with mournful songs. My mother is very unhappy.'"

Erland lowered his brow and folded his arms over his breast.

"Sorgbarn," said he, "thou who understandest the words of the wind, tell me what it proclaimeth now, for now it shouteth, now it is angry and the leaves of the trees tremble."

Sorgbarn replied:

"The wind saith: 'To-day my father wanted to kill my mother; he sent an arrow toward her breast, but she fled! Why do you hate my mother? What offence has she committed? Answer me, Knight!'"

But it repeated anxiously: "Flee Sorgbarn! Assim hears us!"

Sorgbarn hastened away and the knight had to follow, though his soul was filled with anguish.

But Singoalla—for she proved to be the shadow—also followed Sorgbarn, and when they had gone some distance from the dangerous ravine, where death lurked for the knight, she ordered him to stop.

Erland sank at Singoalla's feet and clasped her knees.

Singoalla bent over him and laid her hand on his head.

"Erland," said she, "we see each other now for the last time on earth. Farewell, my love!"

"Am I to die?"

"No," replied Singoalla. "I intended to kill thee this night. But that was when my soul was clouded with anger and despair. Now, thou shalt live, Erland; live for thy wife and son. For thou lovest Helena and she loveth thee . . . and thy little son. . . . Tell me, doth he resemble thee or thy blue-eyed Helena? I should like to kiss him."

"Hush!" exclaimed Riddar Erland. "Speak not about Helena! In the daytime, when my faculties are deranged, I can endure that woman; but thou, Singoalla, art my only true love, as thou art my first and real wife."

"Do not deceive me!" besought Singoalla in

tragic earnest. "Do not speak words which will again raise my hopes but to dash them as on rock, and leave me to anger and despair! Did not thy words deceive me when Sorgbarn led thee to me last night? I thought thou hadst always loved me, that it was thy source of greatest happiness to look at me. . . . Then I decided to go to thee. But thou shuddereds t at my sight and grew angry and wanted to kill me. Erland, thou hatest me in the daytime; thou canst love me only during the night, when Sorgbarn's secret power hath possession of thy will."

"There is truth in thy words, but not the whole truth, for now I see clearly," replied the knight. "I am not the same by day that I am now when with thee. During the day I am unhappy and insane; aye, insane.—Dost thou remember the wrong which Assim and thy father committed against me? My deranged mind layeth the blame for that on thee. During my sickness the very thought of thee became an indelible night-mare, and even thy sweet name, Singoalla, sounded terrible in my ears. Then appeared a girl who was the friend of my childhood and my nurse when I was sick. I imagined I loved her, but thou wast always the woman I loved, my wife. It was thou who wore a mask with Helena's features. Nay, I never loved Helena, but thee in Helena. That I am sure of now. Singoalla, if thou wilt not kill me in justice

for my broken oath and for the pangs I caused thee, then kill me for mine own sake, for I tremble for the morrow. I will not awaken to madness and to hate toward thee, who art my soul's own heart."

Singoalla replied:

"Thy perjury is forgiven. Thou shalt not die for it. Neither will thy words lead me to believe that thou dost not love Helena, at least during the day when thou art insane. What matters it, Erland, that thou art insane, if thou art but happy.

"See, I came back to this neighbourhood and sent my son to thee, that he might curb thy spirit through gentleness (for the secret power hath no influence over an unfriendly soul) and then bring thee to me. I took the cave for my abode and waited for thee eleven days. I wished to see thee and speak to thee once more before my death; for I know that I shall soon die. This was the reward I asked of God for all the sorrows I had endured, and the merciful God hath granted me this reward. What more can I wish for myself?

"It is harder to think of Sorgbarn, for what will become of him when I am gone? During the day, when thy soul is unfriendly, he is no longer thy son! But God will protect Sorgbarn if he keeps his soul pure, and, besides, Sorgbarn will not live long. That much I have seen in thy fate-line, beloved, pale boy! . . . No, Erland, we shall now separate for ever. To-morrow

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Then Erland gave way to such lamentations that Sorgbarn felt them pierce to the very marrow of his bones. The little pilgrim trembled, and felt that his power was giving away; his will weakened, his heart melted.

"Sorgbarn!" cried Erland, "I shall crush thee if thou dost not swear by God to lead me to Singoalla to-morrow night and every night!"

"I swear to you to do that," sighed Sorgbarn, nearly unconscious.

"Hurry! Let us return to the castle! I feel that thy power relaxes and that I shall soon be awake. Hurry, or we shall be lost!"

Sorgbarn walked with rapid steps. Erland followed him. A quarter of an hour later the knight rested in his bed and the pilgrim on his mat.

But Assim lurked in vain for his victim. Singoalla had seen to it that Erland should not come near to where he stood amongst the cliffs with his sharpened sword in hand. When Singoalla returned to the cave she only said: "The knight will not be here." At this Assim struck his sword against the cliff, and so hard that the blade broke at the hilt, whereupon he ran to the shore of the lake to ease his rage and spent the rest of the night imitating screeching birds and rolling stones from the cliffs into the water.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST NIGHT'S WANDERING

SORGBARN kept his oath.

And Singoalla. . . . she who had already reconciled herself to the thought of eternal separation and death . . . alas! she soon forgot her resolution, when Erland returned the next night, guided by Sorgbarn's hand, and begged her to stay. He said he belonged to insanity and Helena by day, he wished to belong to happiness and Singoalla by night. He called her wife and entreated her to keep the oath she swore on Alako's image, even if he had been driven by evil powers to break his. How lovingly he caressed the wretched woman whose all he had been from her tender youth! How beautiful were these nights alternated with the clandestine meetings, when they whispered to each other in the cave or sat hand in hand with inexpressible yearnings by the brook! Singoalla could not resist; she stayed, and spent the hours as in romantic dreams.

On the twentieth day after the pilgrim's arrival at Ekö Castle he returned from the forest with the chalice in his hand. It was given to the

prior, and everybody marvelled at the truth of the revelation and the power of penance.

But over Riddar Erland there had come a change. This became more evident day by day. If he formerly had been melancholy now and then, he now was so every day, and from morning until night. He grew very thin. His eyes were sunken, his cheeks hollow, every day plowed a fresh furrow in his forehead, every hour poured oil on the awe-inspiring fire in his eyes. The servants trembled when he approached; Lady Helena no longer dared to ask him why he fretted, for it seemed he could see when such a question lingered on her lips, and then he would leave her presence. He was cold to his wife's sorrowful looks, avoided her kisses, and did not look at his little son. Seldom did he say a word to anybody.

Lady Helena opened her mind to the prior and told him her uneasiness over Knight Erland's condition and consulted him about what ought to be done for his deliverance, for it was evident that this melancholy would take him rapidly to his grave. The prior decided to speak openly with the knight and enjoin him to make a complete confession.

"Doth a sin burden thy soul, my son? Or what is it that causes thy despair? Brood not over thy grief, for out of that might result bodily and eternal death! Flee to the bosom of God

But Sorgbarn suffered much besides that. His cheeks were, if possible, paler than formerly, and his body was like a shadow. Though he endured Erland's ill-treatment patiently, he counted the hours of the day and gratefully welcomed the night, when the terrible face would again be peaceful, the wild looks grow more gentle, and the mute mouth would call him son and overwhelm him with assurances of love. In truth, the night was Sorgbarn's day, and the day his night. During the day his mother sat alone in the forest with the silent Assim. It was then his father and himself were unhappy. When night came it was with intoxicating happiness for them all.

Finally Erland was stricken with a fever, during which he once rushed out of his bed and nearly pierced Sorgbarn with his sword. The boy was saved by the prior and another monk, who watched by the bedside. During his delirium the knight spoke much of a cave and of a hill on which a fir grew; sometimes he called Sorgbarn "son," and sometimes "little devil." Briefly, his fever was high and his brains full of puzzling visions.

Then Singoalla waited in vain for her knight; but Sorgbarn visited his mother often.

When Riddar Erland recovered he decided to confess. The prior was rather frightened when he heard him relate how he was beset by two devils: One that appeared to him as a woman,

while the other took the form of Sorgbarn. The prior naturally inferred that this connecting of the child with such a spirit was, no doubt, to discredit the pilgrim and his pious mission.

Secretly the prior took Erland to the monastery chapel and conjured the evil powers to leave him. The knight felt easier and believed he was free.

But the next night both spirits had returned. When he awoke in the morning he remembered that he had been pursued by the two devils during the entire night.

Not long after this it happened one night that Riddar Erland awoke, not in his bed, but in the forest. The moon shone, and when he turned around he with amazement saw a fugitive, who looked like Sorgbarn. How had they gotten in the forest? He did not give himself time to ponder over this, but pursued the phantom. When the knight opened the door to the tower-chamber the little pilgrim lay on his mat.

From this moment Riddar Erland's thoughts went back to their old rut. He worked diligently to effect unity out of the commingled figures in his soul. He gathered his recollections of the visions of the nights, compared them with each other, selected and assorted those that were correlated and rejected the others for the time being; he gave renewed attention to all Sorgbarn's movements and decided to keep awake nights.

But his power failed him in attempts to carry out the last resolution. When evening came he was so tired that he could not chase sleep from his eyelids, and his promise compelled him to sleep alone with Sorgbarn.

Gradually, after indefatigable brooding, Erland succeeded in getting his figure or picture completed. It was an awful mosaic, consisting of broken memories, but in its entirety it presented the picture of a reality.

From bedtime on, and through the semi-conscious state that precedes sleep, he recalled more and more distinctly that two shadows glided before his mind, and that Sorgbarn's eyes glistened between these shadows as stars through clouds.

He recalled his walks in the forest by Sorgbarn's side, and tried during the day to retrace the path he imagined he had trodden during the night. But here memory failed him, and he always walked in other directions, sometimes miles distant from the one that led to the ravine and the cave.

He also remembered the purpose of these walks, and the meetings with Singoalla; but the recollections of these were mixed with everything terrible that his imagination had ascribed to the pagan maiden, and were thus surrounded by a heavy mist through which the most frightful figures appeared.

But his suspicions of Sorgbarn were now

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"This time the power operated quickly," thought the child to himself. "Stand up and follow me!" ordered the boy's gentle voice.

The knight arose. Sorgbarn took his hand, led him down the cockle-stairs, rowed across the storm-tossed channel, and went into the forest.

"It is a terrible night," said the pilgrim, whose locks were lashed by the wind. "Hear how it howls around us! The wind is cold. What if trees should fall upon us, father! Let us hasten!"

"Where dost thou lead me?" asked Erland cautiously.

"Where else would I lead you but to Singoalla?" replied Sorgbarn, astonished at the question.

"Then Singolla is thy mother?"

"Certainly. . . . How strangely you speak tonight!"

The knight must have perceived that his questions were not of the proper kind, and that it was wiser to be silent than to speak, for he walked for a long while by the pilgrim's side without uttering a word.

Deeper and deeper into the forest they went.

The black, torn clouds which, like the splinters of a ship wrecked in a storm, drifted in the sky, allowed now and then the moon to shed a pale-yellow, sickly light over the landscape. The swinging branches of the trees and their quivering leaves threw one of a thousand shadows

woven lattice-work upon the lighted parts of the ground. There all objects seemed alive, moving and sporting in ghostly confusion. But where the trees and their foliage were thicker darkness covered the path of the night-wanderers.

What is it that shines there among the trees? It is not the moon-light; it seems like red flames, coming from tar-torches. Voices are heard in the forest that are not those of the wind. Listen to their cry:

"Alako, have mercy! Alako. . . Alako . . .!"

Sorgbarn was frightened.

"The evil spirits are meeting to-night," mumbled Erland.

"Father!" cried the boy, pressing nearer to the knight, "I am afraid! It is a terrible night . . . protect me!"

"Father!" repeated Erland to himself, "that is an odd word from this strange pilgrim from hell. Do not fear," he added loudly, taking a good hold of the boy's arm, "nobody will take thee from me."

Thus they walked on, beneath cracking, groaning and moaning trees, through yellowish moonlight and black shadows. And all the while, though from considerable distance, came cries of many voices: "Alako! Alako!" In the shriek of the storm, the roar of the lake, and even in the shapes of the flying clouds there was felt something unusual and death-boding.

"Alako," repeated Erland, contemptuously, as he listened to this cry. "What doth that word mean? Where did I hear it before? Oh, I know . . . the incantation that fettered my soul. But to-night it sounds in vain. To-night all incantations are impotent against my determination."

He stopped and angrily and shudderingly looked up at the moon, whose mountains outlined a face plainer than usual—and a face stamped with impenetrable mysteriousness. The knight lifted his mailed hand toward the silent spectre above and, though his tongue was silent and his lips compressed, his soul found utterance in these words: "Thou, thou who with the accursed gift of the silver-crescent didst unite the spirit of my family with thine own spirit, the spirit of the night sky and of the precipices of the forest! Thou, who avengest our conversion to Jesus Christ by inciting the heathen woman, the black-eyed vampire, to suck my heart's sap! Alako, thou. . . .!"

They had now neared the ravine.

"Sorgbarn, is it far to thy mother?" asked Riddar Erland, while his hand searched for his dagger under his coat.

"Now, you again speak so strangely . . . as if you did not know that," said Sorgbarn, looking in his father's face. It did not look as it used to when the secret power had influence over him. It was melancholy as in the daytime; aye, darker and more terrible.

will not kill her? You will not harm my mother, will you?"

"Do not think of her safety; think of thine own," said the knight loudly. "Well! dost thou obey? or darest thou defy?"

"Knight Erland, I obey . . . I obey willingly. But promise . . . "

"Be silent!" cried the knight, and, unable to suppress his anger any longer, he drew his knife from its sheath. "Thou art thy mother's accomplice, and as certain as she sucked the sap of life from my heart, I promise that her own heart shall throb at the point of my knife. And I promise thee that if thou hesitatest for a moment to lead me to her I shall kill thee and find the way myself. And if I do not find her to-night, to-morrow the hunting-horn will sound, the packs will be let loose and the hunters will close in upon the devilish witch. She shall not escape me. Therefore, do not try my patience with another word! Remember for thine own good the oath of obedience thou hast sworn to me! Forward!'

"No! No!" exclaimed Sorgbarn with heart-rending cries, kneeling and clasping Erland's knees once more. The knight loosened his arms violently and kicked him away as if with absolute abhorrence.

"Wretch, whom I could crush with a blow of my fist! Up, I say, and take me to the end of our journey! Obey or die!"

"Father spare me! Do not kill me!"

"Father!" repeated Erland, his anger increasing; "thou, who, with diabolical witch-craft, hast so long enthralled and defiled my soul, thou, who art the dregs of hell, a bastard of a devil and a witch, darest thou dishonour a Christian with the name of father? Thou shalt die with thy mother! For the last time I bid thee: Up, and show me the way!"

As the boy did not move, the knight took hold of his arm and dragged him along. Sorgbarn's limbs were dashed against the trees and were cut by the thorns of briers. Pain and fright brought a wailing sound from his lips; his wailing and the little resistance he offered exhausted the patience of the angered and almost maddened man. He stopped, gave his victim a look of immeasurable abhorrence, and thrust his knife into the child's breast.

He walked a few steps from the spot, which already was red with Sorgbarn's heart-blood, then he stopped and said to himself:

"'Father!' What a lie!"

Again he took a few steps and again he stopped and repeated:

"'Father!' What an unpardonable, cruel, terrible lie! I shall return and shout in his ear: It is false! I am not thy father . . . I shall shout: Be thou damned for that falsehood!"

A black cloud passed over the moon and left

everything in darkness. But the knight thought he heard a death rattle and was attracted by its sound. He stumbled over a body. He bent over it. At that moment the cloud passed away. The moon shone on a face, but it was not Sorgbarn's; it was a terribly distorted black and blue face, covered with foaming blood. It was an unknown, swarthy man. His breast was naked, and the knight, who looked at him with amazement, perceived the marks of the great Manslayer, boils and black spots.

"The plague!" mumbled Erland, and his lips grew pale.

He arose and ran on, he knew not whither. He put his hands to his head, in which the blood rushed through a deranged brain. Sometimes he hastened his steps, sometimes he stopped and looked up at the yellowish melancholy moon. He wandered about, thoughtless and aimless. He heard the leaves of the trees whisper words, now terrible, making him shudder; now mocking, causing him to gnash his teeth with anger and to pull off their branches the leaves that had whispered thus; now joyous, urging him to laugh loudly; now sorrowful, making him weep bitterly.

But most mysterious of all things whispered in the night-wanderer's ear was that by the fir which stood on the hilltop, on the meeting spot by the forest-brook, for there he had chanced to go. It stood there, as formerly, slender, straight, proud,

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perate and writhing existence until they stiffen and become dead parts of a once living body. But that—as is commonly claimed—they should strive to reunite, this knight-errant could not comprehend. He, on his part, did not wish for any reunion. 'Twere better to be annihilated, he felt, and to laugh at everything, knowing as he did that the pestilence raged over the world, and would turn to death and to dust all offspring of murderers that now infested the earth. After that the grass and the flowers would be allowed to grow unmolested by the teeth of animals, and no axe would fell the trees, which would freely entwine their branches into a vault over the silent earth. Then Paradise would be restored in all its glory. Would that no Adam and Eve might come and spoil it afresh! For after a new Adam would follow a new Cain, who would kill his brother; and after Cain, fathers who would kill their sons, and sons who would kill their fathers.

His head filled with such confused thoughts, Erland continued roaming in the forest.

And it happened that toward dawn he saw the glimmer of a fire, and thither wended his way.

CHAPTER VII

THE DAWN

THE flickering light came from the ravine.

This night—so Singoalla had decreed and so she had told Sorgbarn—would be the last of her happiness. Was that a prediction of what this night would bring in its course? No; though Singoalla was possessed of prophetic insight—a cultivated ability to forecast—she, herself, would have declared that this time it was a conclusion, not a prediction. The happiness she had enjoyed was unspeakable, it had more than sufficed for everything she had suffered; her heart was overflowing with thankfulness to God for the mystical joy of those nights, for the hours by the side of her lover and husband. Now these hours were being reckoned, for she felt, she perceived that Erland could no longer endure the strain. If his strength continued to be divided between happiness by night and anguish by day he would surely die.

But would not memory be mighty enough to alleviate the loss she would suffer, if she bade Erland her last and irrevocable farewell and forever left his side? Again, would it be a loss? Cannot life be made a dream to which imagina-

tion gives to the heart that which is desired and in which the past becomes a recovered reality, thus leaving no room for loss or regrets. Aye, Singoalla would dream away the remainder of her life. On the other side of the sea, far beyond the steppes in the East, there is a land where palms rise toward their bluish-green sky and the air is heavy with the narcotic fragrance of flowers. That is the land of rest and dreams. There stands, cut out of the cliff, a mysterious temple, guarded by silent priests robed in white. In the shade of porticos priestesses, decked with ornaments of gold and pearls, slumber on downy pillows. Their only vocation is to perform, at the sound of tamtam, a dance as an offering to the senses, and then return to the contemplation of endless nirvana.

There Singoalla will go when she leaves the land of the pine. There she will talk to the palm of the fir of the North; to the lotus of the yellow water-lily, and to herself she will repeat an endless tale of a blue-eyed lover, and sing this tale as a lullaby to her heart until it stops to rest. Sorgbarn will be the boy-priest in this temple, where it is a custom that the god's incense be lighted by a youth in whose beauty perishableness is plainly read. From sacred writings, which are kept by the priest, Sorgbarn will there learn primitive lore until the prophecy is fulfilled that she read in the veins on his eyelids.

expected ones. Thus would she sit for hours. Her life during these days was one of longing and anxious waiting. She did not notice the flight of time, but she counted the moments.

The storm raged without. Now and then a gust of wind and rain would force its way into the cave, threatening to extinguish the fire that illuminated it.

"They tarry to-night," said Assim after hours of silence. And when this remark, to which no answer was expected, remained unanswered, he said to himself, while he put some branches on the fire: "For a short while yet the flame will burn. But soon it will have consumed itself. That is well. We shall then get rest."

Assim went to the entrance of the cave, looked up to the sky, where the moon moved among the clouds, and he listened eagerly to the song of the storm. He thought that the northern forest had never roared more magnificently than during this night. He wished to express in words what he felt, but he could not. But that much he understood, that in the song were melted together dignity and wrath, anguish and courage, sad trials and victory.

But other sounds were heard that were not those of the storm. In the forest, voices repeated: "Alako! Alako!"—and Assim's face, that had hitherto expressed little but romance and dreaminess, assumed an expression of vivid

interest and astonishment. When sure that his ear did not deceive him, he said in a loud voice to Singoalla:

"There are folks in the forest who implore our people's god!"

"It is the echo of my prayer," replied Singoalla, raising her head. "I have asked my people's god for the strength of sacrifice and my prayer is granted. But dost thou not hear other voices in the forest? Dost thou not hear Erland's voice, and Sorgbarn's?"

"No!"

"The night is terrifying to such as can have fear. Perhaps Sorgbarn's heart trembles and fear bewilders his steps. Go and meet them, Assim, and lead them hither."

"To-night there are many things to learn in the forest," said Assim as he went.

When he returned at last, it was with the dying boy in his arms, and he laid him at Singoalla's feet.

* * * *

It might have been difficult enough to find the way and climb amongst these cliffs and masses of great stones thrown confusedly about—especially at night, by the light of a dim moon; but Erland found it easily and felt as if he had done it more than once and was accustomed to it. He only wondered that in his boyhood, when he roamed so much in the forest and found and

loved its most remote hiding-places, he had not formed a better acquaintance with this curious path, which seemed to lead him to the palace of the mountain-king.

He was not far from the entrance to the cave, when he was suddenly estopped by the thought that he now was on his way to continue the work of the heathen god, Thor, and kill the most malicious goblin of the forest, the enticing giantess who had sucked the life-blood from his heart. But then, he remembered the plague, that had come over the world to exterminate everything living and thus make all other ways of killing superfluous, yes, mean and ridiculous. Then also he remembered the ghastly pale boy, and the word "father," and the dagger, which, dripping with woe-bespeaking blood, had been thrown in a bush; and the fir on the hill-top he could not forget, nor the song:

"Deep flows delight when lovers true are met;
But deeper far when calm-ful twilight reigns."

This proved a puzzling mixture of recollections which the knight could not dispose of. But this thought suggested itself: "Why not remain untouched by them all? Why attach the slightest importance to anything past, present or future? When one is out promenading for the sake of the promenade, one does not care for a destination. One enters this cave because one happens to come in this direction, and for no other reason.

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And to Erland, the man said, grasping his arm:

"Hesitate not, but finish what you began! Sorgbarn had time to announce your arrival before he closed his eyes. You come to take revenge for the injury Singoalla caused you, when she made you the light of her eyes, the desire of her heart, her husband by oath, and her son's father. She has cruelly offended you with love and faithfulness. She deserves death and wishes it from your hands. She wants to die beside the first victim of your legitimate wrath—your own son. Aye, she is deeply culpable and deserves death. I can testify to that, I, who have heard the untold sighs your memory has wrung from her heart and beheld the countless tears she has shed for your sake. Kill her, noble knight! And afterwards will come the hour of reckoning between you and me!"

"It is unnecessary," replied Erland. "I came to kill her, in that thou art right, but the forest has caused me to change my mind. The plague is here, and it is useless to bungle Death's handicraft. That and much beside have I learned in the forest to-night.

"Anyhow this woman is not the one I am looking for, though she resembles the other. This one is a human being; she sheds tears over her dead child and she appears deeply sorrowful. Hence I feel woe in my soul when I look at her. . . ."

"Why!" exclaimed Assim, "do you hesitate to accomplish what you have begun? Have you courage to recede? Do you dare to reflect? Then you shall hear the terrible, the. . . ."

"Stop!" cried the knight, "I have courage to do anything and I fear nothing. Nobody ever said that I had fear. I have courage to reflect. Do not disturb me, for it begins to clear up in my soul, and soon I shall have collected my memories. This woman's face sheds light deep down in the shaft of oblivion."

"Hurry!" shouted Assim. "She *asks* death from your hands. She cannot live, and, at the same time, know that you, her husband, have killed her son and yours. Be not cruel to the pitiable woman! She wishes death as a gift. Reward her for the mercy she has shown you! She has not uttered a harsh word against the murderer of her child; she has accused herself, but not you. . . ."

"Yes," said Erland, "thou art right. Her face expresses an ardent, soulful mildness. I love this face, though the sight of it melts my heart. I am a hard and stern man, but this woman could, by her mere presence, change me, especially if I were allowed to sit at her feet and she would read to me from some holy book about God's love and mercy."

"He is beside himself," whispered Assim with a shudder; "he talks as one demented. . . .

"Noble knight," he resumed loudly, "do not gather your memories or look into the recollections of your youth; else you will remember the chieftain's daughter of fifteen years, the tender child whose heart you stole. . . You will see a reality and will be seized with remorse impossible to endure! No; cling to the sacred prejudices that hitherto have been your armour, your shield and your bow, and rush blindly forward on the pathway you have marked with blood! I tell you this black-eyed woman is a being of another species than yourself, a child of unfathomable nature, who, as the flower, has had no other water sprinkled upon her than the dew and the rains of heaven; never prayed under any other temple-vault than that studded with stars, and never was wrapt in other incense than the mist from the ground. She has never been sprinkled with holy water, never blessed by a priestly hand and has no hope of ever coming to your heaven. She is—don't you understand me?—an outcast, a heathen, a witch, who, with the heathen witch-craft of her eyes and cheeks and voice, has enthralled you, and for this unspeakable crime she deserves death.

"Up, knight! Strike her down! You have no weapon. . .here is a sword! Murder the witch, as you have murdered her offspring! Hurry! No hesitation! Haste or it will be I who shall kill you."

And Assim put the sword in Erland's hand

feel it more and more every moment; the longer I look at thee, the more certain my memories become, the more confidently I am convinced that thou. . . Oh, God! . . . that thou, aye, I recognise thee, Singoalla . . . thou, the dream of my youth . . . my first love . . . my wife!"

Until now immovable as a statue, Singoalla bent lower and lower over her son's body and Erland heard her sobs. Then he went forward, lifted her up and pressed her to his bosom. His breast heaved, his eyes were wet with tears through which beamed the look of a pure spirit. But this embrace was short; a thought loosened it.

Erland turned away and walked out of the cave with his hands pressed to his forehead. Assim followed him through the ravine and saw him slowly disappear in the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLAGUE

THE day dawned. The air was sultry and the sky cloudy. When the sun shone, as it did at times between the clouds, its light was yellowish and unusual. The wind had gone down and thus increased the sultriness.

Early the monks were awakened by a violent ringing. The lay-brother, Johannes, opened the gate and found a man, dressed in clothing of many colours, but torn. This man asked permission to speak with the monks. Soon some of them came out, led by Father Henrik.

With a quick glance the prior recognised the man's face and exclaimed:

"What do you wish? You belong to the ungodly people that plundered this monastery ten years ago, or my eyes deceive me!"

The man answered: "That matter you might have had time to forget. I now come to ask for your help, if you have any help to grant. We arrived here last night and camped in the forest. The Black Death rages amongst us."

"The Black Death," repeated the prior with stiffening tongue.

"Yes, the plague!" said the man.

"The Black Death!" repeated the monks, staggering against the pillars of the arch-way or throwing themselves headlong on the floor, or stooping with pallid faces, mumbling over and over: "*Miserere domine!*"

Father Henrik was the first to recover, and said to the man:

"We will follow you!"

"Up!" said he to the monks. "The Harvester has come. Now for the saving of the wheat, while the tares are plucked to be burned in eternal fire! Up, and form in sacred procession! Take crucifix, Host, aspergill and reliquary! Up!"

The monks arose trembling. A quarter of an hour later the procession moved out from the monastery. The stranger led the way. The wanderers they met threw themselves upon the ground. Many of them already knew of the arrival of the "Terrible Visitor"; others just arrived from their lonely homes in the wilderness, and who had seen no human face that morning, were in ignorance. The monks sang while they proceeded with crucifix and banners, the Host and reliquary, but this old hymn did not resound on the heavy air, the forest echoes having died away:

"*Aufer immensam, Deus, aufer iram,*
Et cruentatum cohibe flagellum:

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Then the monks went and worked all over the clearing to save heathen souls and alleviate suffering. The well and the sick alike inclined their heads at the font and were sprinkled with the water through which they would receive grace from the Christian God. Many a sufferer just christened immediately received Extreme Unction, as death was nigh. With wine and water parched throats were refreshed at the same time that words of comfort were spoken to despairing souls. Those among the strangers who were not affected with the plague were asked to take their shovels and dig a grave for the dead. This was done, and hour after hour a monk said mass in a monotonous, trembling, but indefatigable voice at the edge of the grave to which was incessantly brought more and more victims. While the monks laboured thus, the news of the arrival of the great Manslayer spread over the entire neighbourhood. Every heart quivered. Many thought of human expedients to divert the calamity from themselves and their own. Some fled with their wives and children southward in the forest; the pioneers, in their lonely cabins, prepared bows and arrows to threaten whoever dared to approach their roofs. But the terrible visitor could not be frightened away by bows and arrows.

During the last few weeks suspicious deaths had taken place in the neighbourhood, but nobody believed or desired to believe that it was

the work of the "Terror," as the Black Death was known. Now, when there could be no possible doubts of its presence, the last invisible barriers against its depradation were broken down. The night after the arrival of the strangers the angel of death hastened from door to door and no prohibitory sign on the doorpost could keep him out.

* * * *

"No! their wine and water and ointment and hymns and incense are of no avail. We must die! Then let us live while life lasts. It behooves the undaunted wanderer to hold joyous feasts at the brink of the grave."

So spoke the men of the strange people, and, taking their arms they marched against Ekö Castle, the cellars of which surely were well stocked with wine and beer. When they came to the channel they found the draw-bridge up and in the court-yard they saw men with heads covered leaving only their faces exposed; they were pacing back and forth by themselves as if afraid of touching one another.

"Halloo! Let down the bridge!" shouted the marauders.

The few men in the court-yard answered to this command first with threatening signs, then by throwing stones and shooting arrows. But the strangers unconcernedly forded the channel. Then the people in the castle fled in boats across

the lake. After that life grew merry in Ekö Castle; drinking and singing lasted until nightfall. Then the horde departed, though not until after having set fire to the castle and waiting to see the flames lick the towers and pinnacles.

But Lady Helena with her son and the maids had already moved to the monastery in the afternoon, hoping to regain some peace for her troubled soul inside the sacred walls and near the men of God. Where Riddar Erland and the little pilgrim were, no one knew.

* * * *

Seven days had passed when, at midnight, the monastery's doorbell rang.

After awhile steps resounded in the archway, and a voice asked:

"Who art thou, without?"

"Brother gatekeeper! Friend Johannes! I recognise thy voice. Open for Erland Bengtson Månesköld!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed the voice, "art thou still alive, gracious knight? Or is it a delusion that mocks my ears?"

The gate opened, and the lay-brother's pale, emaciated face, now stamped with an expression of wonder, appeared, faintly lit up by the light of a lamp which he carried in his hand.

"Brother Johannes," said the knight, "do not fear! I am not a ghost, but a living being,

loved prior, but how strange . . . my eyes have no tears for his memory. It is with me as with you, I have buried my heart in the grave with my brethren."

"Which of the two died first, my wife or my son?" asked the knight, with trembling voice.

"Your son is still alive . . . did I not tell you? . . . That is, provided he has not died since I placed him in the arms of the comforter. God sent an angel in the form of a woman, who sat by your wife's deathbed consoling her. Who she was I know not. She was never before seen in this neighbourhood. She spoke consoling words to the dying Lady Helena, and comforted her by often mentioning your name."

"Then I know who this woman is," said Erland, "and it was in her arms thou laidest my son?"

"Yes, what else could I do?"

"Is she gone?"

"Yes, she followed the strange people, or rather the strange people followed her. It was a wonder to behold. When she appeared before them the first time, all the despairing among them became jubilant, the furious turned gentle and the plague fled from the clearing. She is a higher being and your son rests safely in her arms."

The two men walked for a while silently side by side. The knight had a feeling of satisfac-

tion over the knowledge that he had nothing more to lose, nothing to hope for. At last he felt free from his fate. He had lost everything, but he did not murmur; it would have been unreasonable to insist upon a permanent right to earthly happiness in this world of ceaseless change, decay and death. He who takes part in the changeful play of the senses must understand the meaning of the play. The golden cloud that floats against the sky at the day's dawn is not, with all its beauty, a proper object of ever enduring veneration. The shimmering of the sun on the surface of the sea, the wave that rises and falls, the whisper in the crown of the oak, can one demand of them an eternity they do not possess? Can one crystallise them into forms that defy decomposition? If not, then one should not expect eternal endurance of castles with towers and pinnacles, nor of riches and glory, nor of domestic happiness, nor yet of anything which the inexperienced grasp for and the loss of which they vainly bemoan. He who has a foothold on the eternal rock, fears no crash of the universe, or that heaven and earth will be ground to atoms. It is only a ray of the sun that is extinguished, one wave that has sunk to the sea's level, a single whisper that is hushed.

Erland looked at the stars and felt that whatever his fate might be as written in them—henceforth he would no more fear, neither would he

indulge in any joy; he deemed himself free—free from anything that might happen and any event and any chance that could be gauged by time. But behind events there appeared to his soul to remain something else. It was that which the vanished view of Helena, of little Erland, of Sorgbarn and of Singoalla signified; that which was symbolised in their appearance and disappearance; that was something inaccessible to death or, rather, something that death could not explain away.

A terrible memory was that of the night in the forest, when the moonlight glimmered on a blood-stained blade; but even that no longer startled him; he had made up his mind that sin must be atoned for, and wished, so far as he had sinned, that unrelenting retribution might take its course.

He did not possess scales on which he could weigh his own share of responsibility for his life's dark fate; and if he had had, he would have thrown them away without using them, for he had no desire to bargain and treat about sin and retribution. He also thought of another symbol—that of atonement—and he listened piously when Brother Johannes, who walked by his side, broke the silence and sang in a low voice this stanza from the plague-hymn;

"*Da crucem, clavos, scuticam, coronam,*
Lanceam, funes, rigidamque mortem
Inter iratam mediare dextram
Et mala nostra."

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ing gently at the knight's expression, formerly so harsh and commanding, now so tender and submissive. "Let us return to the monastery for shovels," he continued, "and then to work!"

CHAPTER IX

THE HERMITS OF THE FOREST

IT was a beautiful summer evening. The horizon in the west was decked in gold and purple. The rain that had fallen at noontime seemed to have renewed and refreshed all nature; pines and meadows gave forth their fragrance, the people breathed the pure, exhilarating air with delight.

Far in the forest the blow of the pioneer's axe resounded; there hard labour was needed, for the plough was again to turn the fields that had lain untilled for five and twenty years—ever since the plague.

At the entrance of their cave sat one of the hermits of the neighbourhood, the pious Father Erland, whom the people regarded with high esteem. An hour ago he left the garden, where he had all day long tilled with pick and shovel. Now he sat on the moss-bed and looked with dreaming eyes at the rosy evening sky, a reflection from which fell upon his gentle face. In his hand was a book, "The Meditations of a Mystic Spirit," his favourite book, taken from the library of the deserted monastery several years ago.

Brother Johannes, the other hermit, had just returned from fishing in the lake and was now preparing supper.

Johannes, who seldom broke the silence that Erland loved, was unusually talkative this evening. On his way from the lake he had seen something uncommon in the forest and he could not refrain from relating it.

He had seen men of foreign appearance, noble and proud in manner, with gorgeous equipment, making a halt with their horses in the forest. No doubt they were travelers from a great distance, and they had asked him in the Latin language for the best road to take their horses northward toward Lake Vettern. Who they were and what their errand was he did not know.

Erland listened patiently, not because such an occurence really was unusual and worth giving any thought, but because Johannes evidently enjoyed speaking about it and seemed to expect some curiosity from his friend.

As already stated Johannes did not know who these men were or what their errand was; and tradition itself can alone suggest, for darkness covers much of the past.

The secret parchments that are to be found in the repository of a holy order, where, under seven seals are preserved the history of this order's descent from an older and disbanded fraternity, would, if researched by the uninitiated, reveal