

either personal or spiritual. Louie sees all this, you may be sure, and smiles in a superior sort of way when Grace declares that Rae's outgoings and incomings are nothing to her. He is "Rae" now, mark you.

"Very well, dear," says she calmly. "Don't let us worry about him; he is too nice to be turned into a nuisance."

And Grace is fain to subdue her rebellious soul—which, I regret to state, is far more inclined unto war than peace on all possible occasions, though she is tame enough to one person in the world—and accept her position. So the hours wax fewer and fewer which lie between our merry-makers and their merry-making.

The Vicarage people are coming, be it known, coming with young Oxford in grand form; the Boscauwens are coming; the cham., which Rae prognosticates will turn out fearfully real the next morning, is coming; the lobsters are coming; the chickens, the strawberries are coming; the everything is coming.

"With a fine day we shall do delightfully," says Mrs. Thorndyke, thinking of mademoiselle's new gray batiste costume, trimmed with real Cluny at five shillings a yard; and I do verily believe this anxious parent has reason.

"I never thought I should be so happy in England," remarks Rae, as he and Grace saunter about the garden in the twilight on Tuesday evening. He has suffered the Thorndykes to perform their fetish worship at one of the most select temples in that region alone to-night; indeed they, poor souls, have begun to experience a somewhat exasperating difficulty in enjoying his society at all of late, save at cockcrow and midnight, seasons when even the liveliest of us are apt to feel unequal to great mental effort.

"Didn't you?" replies Grace, weakly rather; then bristling up, "Of course you must have found it dull at first without the girls, or any one who was quite your own to go about with." Rae's sisters are living with a married aunt in Dresden.

"Ye-es; though I don't really think they would have made such a very great difference to me. When a fellow gets to be seven-and-twenty, he wants something nearer and dearer even than a sister in the way of a woman friend," and his voice asks the question his words do not.

"Perhaps," a most unsatisfactory "perhaps." Dead silence. Grace finds herself suddenly face to face with the secret of her life. She could as soon play the fool with this great gray-eyed man as she could turn nigger. Thus much she does know already; what more there may be for her to know she scarcely cares to think. She is so shy of herself, of her own heart this maiden of nineteen.

"Grace—" But she is off in a second. "Please don't run away from me!" says the great gray-eyed man, hastening after her between the dew-spangled shrubs, between the heavy-hearted sleep-kissed flowers.

Alack, he has no power to stay her! She is the thrall of a mightier than he.

"My dear, you look as if you had recently arrived from the moon," remarks Louie, when this silly girl presents herself at the open window of that lady's especial sanctum; a nondescript apartment opening into the garden, and sacred to the performance of various pleasant idlenesses, from the consumption of Latakia to the composition of sartorial follies.

But Mrs. Danger's placid rallery is quite thrown away upon poor Grace. "I didn't know any one was here," says she rapidly. "I want to be alone; I'm going up-stairs." Click goes the door.

"Well, to be sure!" cries Louie, trying on a marvellous combination of various fluffy substances, which is to do duty for a hat to-morrow.

"O, there you are, Captain Tewell," suddenly seeing his reflection staring at her in the glass, his cigar in his mouth, and a general woe-begone expression pervading his classic countenance. "What have you and Grace been quarrelling about?" wrestling vigorously with a vengeful bit of wire which has got entangled in her silky hair.

"I am not aware that we have quarrelled. Can I be of any use?"

"No, thanks; I usually reduce myself to a state of premature baldness about once a week at this sort of thing. There! Why! how dreadfully wretched you look! What's the matter?"

"Nothing; weather, I suppose. May I come in?"

"May you come in!" mockingly. "We were introduced exactly five minutes ago, I suppose," with a laugh. "You'll find something to sit upon somewhere, if you look for it."

Rae does not take long to find the said something; a few seconds, and he is comfortably, or rather uncomfortably, settled in a wickerwork armchair about big enough for Tootoo, who is snoring diaphanously on the sofa.

Mrs. Danger, like most pretty fair women, possesses a keen appreciation of the woes of good-looking agreeable men. Rae is good-looking and agreeable; he is also woeful. She pities him, and consequently pets and humors him to a surprising degree. They talk about the Thorndykes judiciously, they talk about Grace rapturously, they talk about to-morrow hopefully.

"I do wish I hadn't let my confounded tongue get the better of me!" exclaims he at length, after a somewhat prolonged pause.

"What did you say?"

"I don't exactly know, nothing particular; but she's so different from other girls—"

"You wouldn't have her changed, would you?"

"Not for worlds. She is perfection."

"Yes, I think she is," looking round at him slowly.

He sighs, shrugs his shoulders, flings his cigar-end into the grate, gets up, stretches himself, and wishes her good-night.

"Good-night, and don't be too miserable," shaking hands with him lingeringly; but he doesn't smile a bit.

"Poor creature!" meditates Louie; "he is evidently very bad indeed. I had no idea matters had gone as far as this."

"Are you in bed?" she asks, knocking at Grace's door later.

"No."

"May I come in?"

"Yes."

Grace is sitting by the open window in her dressing-gown. She looks like the portraits of Madame Tallien, so white, so heroic, so lovely, with her piled-up masses of bright hair, her chiselled marble-pale face.

"You'll catch a cold, and be as hoarse as a raven to-morrow."

"No," with a languid shake of the head.

"But you will," pulling the pretty cretonne curtain forward. "What's the matter with you, child?"

"Nothing is the matter. Please don't worry yourself about me. I shall do very well," Grace answers grimly.

"Of that I've not the slightest doubt; still you might be a little more open with me," aggrievedly.

"I've nothing to be open about."

Mrs. Danger supports herself under these trying circumstances by the rearrangement of the hairbrushes on the dressing-table.

"How I do wish we could all die to-night, and have done with this horrid tiresome old world!" exclaims Grace, leaning her face wearily on one fair white hand, half hidden in soft lace.

"Thank you! I don't want to die at all. I've got my senses still," severely.

"I wish I had."

"So do I. The idea of refusing Rae Tewell. Why, you must be as blind as a bat to begin with!"

"Who said I had refused him?" averting her face.

"But you mean to refuse him?"

"Yes," doggedly.

"You do actually mean it?"

"Yes, if he asks me."

"But why, why, why?"

"I don't know."

"Grace!" sternly.

Miss Baird laughs, and clasps her round arms behind her head.

"I don't believe you; you say this to annoy me," exclaims Louie.

"Why should it annoy you?"

"Because I have your interests at heart—because I love you, dear." The tears are in her tender eyes.

"I wish people wouldn't love me; I don't want to be loved; I hate being loved; being loved drives me mad!" cries Grace vehemently.

"So it seems. Good-night." And Mrs. Danger departs in a state of dignified rigidity fearful to contemplate.

Then Grace begins to think whether she does indeed hate being loved quite so fiercely after all; thinks and thinks until she scarce has heart to think at all, so weary is she of the ever-echoing Yea or Nay.

To be continued.

GUNNAR: A NORSE ROMANCE.

BY H. H. BOYSEN.

PART IV

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

When the ballad was at an end, it was some time before any one spoke, for no one wished to be the first to break the silence.

"Always the same mournful tales," said at length one of the old men, but only half aloud, as if he were speaking to himself.

"Rhyme-Ola," cried one of the fiddlers, "why don't you learn to sing something jolly, instead of these sad old things which could almost make a stone weep?"

"You might just as well tell the plover to sing like the lark," answered Rhyme-Ola.

"I love the old songs," said Ragnhild Rimul, (for she was there also), "they always bring tears to my eyes, but sometimes I like better to cry than to laugh."

Peer Berg now signalled to the oarsmen, and the boats soon shot swiftly in through the fjord. In about an hour the whole company landed on the Berg pier, and marched in procession up to the wedding-house. First came the musicians, then bride and bridegroom, and after them their parents and nearest kin. The guests formed the rear. Among the last couples were Lars Henjum and Ragnhild; last of all came Gunnar and Rhyme-Ola.

Berg was an old-fashioned place, for Peer Berg took a special pride in being old-fashioned. Coming up the hill from the water, Berg appeared more like a small village than a single family dwelling. The mansion itself in which Peer with his wife and his Wild-Ducks resided was of a most peculiar shape. It was very large and had two stories, the upper surrounded by a huge balcony, which made it appear nearly twice as broad as the lower. Over this balcony shot out a most venerable slated roof, completely overgrown with moss, grass, and even shrubs of considerable size; the railing, which had once been painted and skillfully

carved, was so high and so close that it afforded little or no room for the daylight to peep in and cheer the dreary nest of the Wild-Ducks. Round the mansion lay a dozen smaller houses and cottages, scattered in all directions; if they had grown out from the soil of their own accord, they could hardly have got into more awkward or more irregular positions. One looked north, another west, a third south-east, and no two lay parallel or with their gables facing each other. Every one of these houses, however, had been erected for some special purpose. First, there were, of course, the barns and the stables, which in size and respectability nearly rivalled the mansion. Quite indispensable were the servant hall, the sheepfold, and the wash-house; and without forge and flax-house Berg could hardly have kept up its reputation as a model establishment.

With gay music and noisy laughter and merriment, the bridal procession passed into the yard, where from the steps of the mansion they were greeted by the master of ceremonies in a high-flown speech of congratulation. The doors were then thrown wide open, and soon like a swelling tide the crowd rolled through the house, and the lofty halls shook with the hum and din of the festivity. For at such times the Norsemen are in their lustiest mood; then the old Saga-spirit is kindled again within them; and let him beware who durst say then that the Viking blood of the North is extinct. The festal hall at Berg, which occupied the whole lower floor of the building, was decorated for the occasion with fresh leaves and birch branches, for the birch is the pride of the trees; but as it was still early in the season, it was necessary to keep up a fire on the open hearth. This hearth might indeed, in more than one sense, be said to have given a certain homely color to everything present, not only in the remoter sense, as being the gathering-place of the family in the long winter evenings, but also in a far nearer one; its smoke had, perhaps for more than a century, been equally shared by the chimney and the room, and had settled in the form of shining soot on walls, rafters, and ceiling. Two long tables extended across the length of the hall from one wall to another, laden with the most tempting dishes. The seats of honor, of course, belonged to the bride and bridegroom, and they having taken their places, the master of ceremonies urged the guests to the tables and arranged them in their proper order in accordance with their relative dignity or their relationship or acquaintance with the bride. Now the blessing was pronounced and the meal began. It was evident enough that the boating and the march had wetted the guests' appetites; huge trays of cream-porridge, masses of dried beef, and enormous wheaten loaves disappeared with astonishing rapidity. Toast upon toast was drunk, lively speeches made and heartily applauded, tales and legends told, and a tone of hearty, good-humored merriment prevailed. The meal was a long one; when the feasters rose from the tables it was already dusk. In the course of the afternoon the weather had changed; now it was blowing hard, and the wind was driving huge masses of cloud in through the mountain gorges. Shadows sank over the valley, the torches were lit in the wedding-house, and a lusty wood-fire crackled and roared on the hearth. Then the tables were removed, the music began, and bride and bridegroom trod the springing dance together, according to ancient custom; others soon followed, and before long the floors and the walls creaked and the flames of the torches rose and flickered in fitful motion, as the whirling air-currents seized and released them. Those of the men who did not dance joined the crowd round the beer-barrels, which stood in the corner opposite the hearth, and there slaked their thirst with the strong, home-brewed drink which Norsemen have always loved so well, and fell into friendly chat about the result of the late fishery or the probabilities for a favorable lumber and grain year.

It was late, near midnight. The storm was growing wilder without, the dance within. Clouds of smoke and dust arose; and as the hour of midnight drew near, the music of the violins grew wilder and more exciting.

All the evening Lars Henjum had been hovering near Ragnhild, as if watching her; and Gunnar, who rather wished to keep as far away as possible from Lars, had not yet spoken to her since her arrival. Now, by chance, she was standing next to him in the crowd; Lars had betaken himself to the beer-vessel; which, it was clear enough, he had already visited too often. As Gunnar stood there he felt a strange sensation steal over him. Ragnhild seemed to be as far away from him as if he had only known her slightly, as if their whole past, with their love and happiness, had only been a strange, feverish dream, from which they had now both waked up to the clear reality. He glanced over to Ragnhild and met a long, unspoken yad look resting on him. Then, like an electric shock, a great, gushing warmth shot from his heart and diffused itself through every remotest vein and fibre. The fog-veil of doubt was gone; he was again in the power of his dream, and in the very excess of his emotion; forgetting all but her, he seized her hand, bent over her and whispered, "Ragnhild, dearest, do you know me?" It was an absurd question, and he was aware of that himself in the very next minute, but then it was already too late. She, however, had but little difficulty in understanding it: for she only seized his other hand too, turned on him a face beaming with joyful radiance, and said softly, "Gunnar where have you been so long?" Instead of an answer, he flung his arms around her waist, lifted her up

from the floor with a powerful grasp and away they went like a whirlwind.

"A devil of a fellow in the dance, that Gunnar Henjum," said one of the lads at the beer-vessel to Lars, who happened to be his next neighbor; "never saw I a briskeer lad on a dancing-floor as far back as my memory goes. And it is plain enough that the girls think the same." Lars heard it, he saw Gunnar's daring leap, saw Ragnhild bending trustfully towards him, and heard the loud shouts of admiration. In another moment he imagined that all eyes were directed towards himself, and his suspicion read a pitying sneer in all faces.

"No use for you to try there any longer," cried a young fellow, coming up to him, and in the loving mood of half-intoxication laying both his arms round his neck; "it is clear the houseman's boy has got the upper hand of you."

"And if you did try," interposed another, "all you would gain would be a sound thrashing; and you always were very careful about your skin, Lars."

Lars bit his lip. Every word went through him like a poisonous sting, but he made no answer. The bridegroom had gone to give the fiddlers a jug of beer, and the music had stopped. Ragnhild sat hot and flushed on a bench by the wall, and Gudrun stood beaming over her and eagerly whispering in her ear. Gunnar walked towards the door, and Lars followed a few steps after,—the two lads at some distance. "Now there will be sport, boys," said they, laughing.

Gunnar stood on the outer stairs, peering into the dark, impenetrable night. The storm had now reached its height; the wind howled from overhead through the narrow mountain gorges; it roared and shrieked from below, and died away in long, despairing cries. Then it paused as if to draw its breath, and there was a great, gigantic calm, and again it burst forth with increased violence. To him it was a relief to hear the storm, it was a comfort to feel its power; for in his own breast there was a storm raging too. When, ah! when should he summon the courage to break all the ties that bound him to the past? Before him lay the wide future, great and promising. O, should he never reach that future? The storm made a fearful rush; the building trembled; something heavy fell upon Gunnar's neck, and he tumbled headlong down into the yard. His first thought was that a plank torn loose by the wind had struck him; but by the light from the windows he saw a man leap down the steps after him; he sprang up and prepared to meet him, for he knew the man. "I might have known it was you, Lars Henjum," cried he, "for the blow was from behind."

When Lars saw his rival on his feet he paused for a moment, until a loud, scornful laugh from the spectators again kindled his ire.

"I knew you would be afraid, Lars Henjum," shouted a voice from the crowd.

Gunnar was just turning to receive Lars when a blow, heavier than the first, struck him from behind over his left ear. The darkness was thick, and Lars took advantage of the darkness.

The flaring, unsteady light of a hundred torches struggled with the gloom; men and women, young and old, pressed out with torches and firebrands in their hands, and soon the wedding guests had formed a close ring around the combatants, and stared with large eyes at the wild and bloody play; for they knew that the end of such a scene is always blood. At windows and doors crowds of young maidens watched the fighters, with fright and eager interest painted in their youthful faces, and clasped each other more tightly for every blow that fell.

By the light of the burning logs Gunnar now found his opponent. Wildly they rushed at each other, and wild was the combat that followed. Revenge, long-cherished hatred, burned in Lars' eye; and as the memory of past insults returned, the blood ran hotter through Gunnar's veins. The blows came quick and strong on either side, and it would have been hard to tell who gave and who received the most. At last a well-directed blow struck Lars on the head; the blood streamed from his mouth and nostrils, he reeled and fell backward. A subdued murmur ran through the crowd. Two men sprang forward, bent over him, and asked if he was much hurt. Gunnar was about to go, when suddenly he saw the wounded man leap to his feet, a long knife gleaming in his hand; in the twinkling of an eye he was again at his side; he wrung the weapon from his grasp, and held it threateningly over his head. "Beg now for your life, you cowardly wretch!" cried he, pale with rage.

Lars foamed; he made a rush for the knife, but missing it, he flung his arm round Gunnar's waist and struggled to throw him. Gunnar strove to free himself. In the contest, Lars' foot slipped, they both tumbled to the ground. A shooting pain ran through Lars' body; in another moment he felt nothing. A red stream gushed from his side; he had fallen on his own knife. Gunnar rose slowly, saw and shuddered. The last gleam of the torches flickered, dying.

Wildly howled the storm, but over the storm arose a helpless shriek of despair. "O Gunnar, Gunnar, what hast thou done?" and Ragnhild sprang from the stairs, frantically pressed onward through the throng, and flung herself upon Lars' bloody body. She lifted her eyes to Gunnar with horror. "O Gunnar, may God be merciful to thee!"

The last spark was quenched. Night lay before him, night behind him. He turned towards the night—and fled.

(To be continued.)