

# THE AMBER DEMON.

(Continued.)

"Else, misery will come of this as sure as there is a sky above us. Karl is quite changed from what he used to be. It is not fair to him."

"Did he ask you to be his champion?"

"No."

"I thought not. He would not thank you any more than Ole for your silly interference. And remember this, I will not stand any lecturing from a nobody like you. Ta, ta, I am off out of this lugubrious place. By the way, shall I send you information the next time I intend to have a tender meeting with—Karl? You might like to witness it."

As she went off her mocking laughter came back to the ears of the girl who had once more thrown herself down on the mound of earth that was her mother's grave.

She did not know that Else was speaking out of mere bravado.

"I have done no good, only made it worse," she moaned.

"Ah! Ole, what will the future hold for you? What will you do when you find out the true nature of the woman you worship? I—I would have died for you and I cannot save you pain."

Her head sank upon her arms as the hot tears welled up in her eyes and slowly fell over.

She remained there silent for some time alone with the grief that swelled her heart nearly to bursting.

Overhead the seabirds flew shrieking along the dunes, the wind was rising and moaned and wailed eerily, lashing the salt spray up from the sea like down, as it rolled along over the beach with a hoarse murmur.

Out in the bay the fleet of boats was slowly returning laden with the rich spoils of the day.

And from the tortured soul of the lonely girl, there in the neglected churchyard, went up a wail of despair, "Why was I born? there is no happiness in this world for me. Oh! mother, take me to you."

But there was no answer to her frenzied appeal. Only the wind sighed through the rank grasses on the deserted graves, and the birds overhead wheeled and circled, uttering mournful cries that seemed in unison with her sad thoughts.

As she raised her tear-wet face her eyes caught sight of the returning boats, among the occupants of which was the man she loved with the whole force of her simple soul.

"Ole, my love," she whispered brokenly, afraid lest the wind might waft the words to his ears, "may you be happy in your future life, but I fear, I fear."

And it seemed to her as at length she moved slowly away, that mocking laughter and voices greeted her on every side, and chanted again and again the futility of anything she might do or attempt for him.

"Useless, useless," moaned the wind, "you, puny mortal, cannot alter—fate."

## CHAPTER V.

The small fleet of boats lay off the great amber-reef securely riding at anchor on the gray-green water while the divers worked at their arduous calling underneath.

Each boat had four or five men on board besides those who were working below.

The air pumps had to be kept going without a moment's stoppage and the supply of air was regulated by a little dial-plate placed amidships in each boat. The pumpers fixed their gaze steadily on this dial, watching the air pressure gauge and never letting their eyes wander from it while the divers were under water, for too much air would prove as fatal as too little to their companions below.

Occasionally strange looking sea-monsters were drawn to the surface and hauled into the boats.

These were the divers who came up for a short rest and to breathe the upper air before resuming their work of dislodging the amber from the masses of stone and weed that encumbered the reef.

In one of these boats the young men Karl Malen and Ole Bertel worked apparently on the best of terms and as firm friends as they had been before their rivalry for Else's hand.

The friendship was sincere on Bertel's part, but a jealous fiend had taken possession of Malen's soul and was continually whispering to him: "Were Ole but out of the way, then Else would openly declare her love for you and become yours in the sight of all men. It is *you* she loves, not this confiding fool who believes in *her* affection and *your* friendship."

Each stolen meeting with Else, for, woman-like, after that scene with Joanna in the churchyard she was more determined than ever to have her own way, and though she had made the resolution of not seeing Karl again, she continually broke it; each stolen meeting but fanned the fire of his love into a fiercer flame, a more consuming passion that threatened to overwhelm them in its vortex.

Sometimes, so infatuated was Karl with the siren who held him in her toils, he would let the boats go out to the reef without him, though of course in this way he lost many opportunities of gathering valuable pieces of amber.

But what did he care for this if some of those moments stolen from legitimate toil could be passed in her presence, and Else was only too ready to fan the flame of his passion with her false smiles and love-words, that were far from having the ring of true metal, though the unfortunate young man could not discern their baseness.

Else Preben was selfish to the core. Hers was but the beautiful casket, fair in outward seeming, but instead of enclosing a jewel, holding but a worthless stone.

Not satisfied with having secured the handsomest and now richest of all young men of the village for herself, she must also keep Karl dangling after her to the exclusion of the other marriageable maidens.

It pleased her pride and flattered her vanity to know that neither Ole Bertel nor Karl Malen would care for or lavish their affection on any other woman, no matter how worthy or amiable she might be.

She did not give a thought to the harm or suffering she might inflict upon either or both her lovers; it rather gave a zest to her amusement to think of the storm she could raise if she chose, by informing her betrothed of the stolen meetings with Karl, of his fierce love-making, and the kisses bestowed upon her perfect lips by the man Bertel honored as his friend.

Once or twice, indeed, she felt a vague fear of the two-edged sword with which she was playing so recklessly.

It was when the demon she had raised to life in Karl Malen's soul nearly overmastered him, and his pent-up fury broke forth and almost wreaked itself upon his temptress.

Karl's soul was not all evil, but Else did her best to crush out what good remained in it, and—with fatal results.

He had been passionate and self-willed ere his unhappy love for Else dominated every other thing, but it had been left for her to turn a high-spirited man into a morose and furious creature with the brand of Cain upon his brow and the feelings of the lost in his soul.

..omen like Else Preben have much to answer for.

They rouse the demon that is said to lurk in every human being's nature, lay waste men's lives and go through life with a serene conviction of having done no wrong, only amused themselves a little. Occasionally, it is true, the evil they do recoils on them, and Else very nearly found this to be the case.

One day, knowing that Karl had gone out that morning to the amber-reef with the other divers, she was preparing to leave the cottage, which now in her eyes bore so mean and sordid an appearance.

"Are you going out, Else?" asked Joanna, who, out of pity for the poor, feeble old woman, used to come every day to do the work that she was incapable of doing, and that her granddaughter flatly refused to soil her hands by performing.

"Yes," the beauty answered, shortly, not very well pleased at being interrogated by one she looked upon as so very much her inferior.

"May I come, too?" she asked, eagerly. She had seen Malen go up past the sand hills only a little while before, and she feared Else was going to meet him. She thought if she were with her Ole's betrothed would not for shame's sake allow another man's fierce caresses, and in her loyalty to the man she secretly and hopelessly loved, she would try and keep Else from harm. Latterly, Malen had looked so fierce and wild eyed, that Joanna had been living in fear of some tragedy occurring.

Else would never love Ole as *she* loved him; but Joanna knew even were her rival married to another, or dead, Bertel would never love again. His affection once given, was given for ever.

"When I want your company I will ask for it," said Else, rudely, in response to her appeal. "Do you think I care to be going with a puny creature like you, who is always crying? No, stay here and scrub the pots and pans, that is all *you* are fit for," and with a scornful gesture Else turned away from the cottage door.

With a sigh, Joanna watched her. She knew how useless it would be to follow her and try to shake her resolution.

"She is going after Karl," she thought sadly, as she saw the direction Else took. "How can she play with a good man's love in such reckless fashion? She has everything, and yet she is not satisfied. She leads Malen on; well for her if he does not turn upon her one day. She is goading him to madness."

Joanna's fears were not altogether unfounded.

Else walked slowly while she was in view of the hut, as though she were only taking a stroll, but once she got behind the range of sand-hills, and she knew she could be no longer seen, she hurried her pace.

The wind was rather keen, it blew small particles of sand into her face, and among her hair, but she did not heed it, it only brought a richer color to her cheeks, a greater brilliance to her eyes.

As she rounded one of the sand-hills she saw Karl with a brooding expression on his dark, handsome face.

She gave a little affected start of surprise. "You here?" she said.

"Of course I am," he responded. "Do I not wait for you here always?"

"Oh! Karl," she continued shooting him a glance from her magnificent eyes that made all his nerves quiver. "I think I must give up meeting you."

"Why?" the monosyllable fell fierce and hoarse from his strained throat.

"That little fool Joanna suspects, she will tell Ole."

"What do I care for fifty Joannas or fifty Oles?" he cried wrathfully, "you are mine by the right of our love. I will not give up seeing you though all the powers of Heaven and earth bade me do so."

"Karl, dear Karl, be reasonable!" she exclaimed, that half defined feeling of fear coming over her again at his wild looks and still wilder words. "When I am married—"

"You never shall be," he hissed in her ear, "unless it is to me. Do you hear? I would lay you a corpse at my feet sooner. What is to prevent me strangling the life out of you here where you stand? Yes," as his long, nervous fingers twitched in a way she did not like, and made her put up her hands as if to guard her white throat from the clutch she almost imagined she felt already. "I know that other tragedy that took place some years ago. Ha! ha! this may be different. It will be before marri-