

## A GENTLE LITTLE LADY.

(Villanelle.)

A gentle little lady, with melting eyes of blue,  
Kissed me in a dream at the middle of the night.  
How happy would I be if my dream came true!

The moon through the window a silver lustre threw  
When the lovely vision rose like a seraph on my sight.  
A gentle little lady, with melting eyes of blue.

I dreamed that she loved me, and all my sorrow flew  
Far away, like a bat, at the dawning of the light.  
How happy I would be if my dream came true!

And as she bent above me it seemed to me I knew  
Another who possessed each charm and beauty bright.  
A gentle little lady, with melting eyes of blue.

But my sorrow soon returned, for the moments were  
But few.  
She lingered there before me in a radiance of light;  
How happy I would be if my dream came true!

Oh, sweetheart, I will whisper the secret now to you;  
Yours was the presence that put my care to flight,  
A gentle little lady, with melting eyes of blue;  
How happy I would be if my dream came true!

SAMUEL MINTURN PECK.

## A NORTHMAN'S STORY.

BY MRS. PARK, AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY FOX,"  
"ROBIN," ETC.

## I.

On the coast of Norway, half-way between Stavanger and Bergen, among the many light-houses which mark the spots of especial danger, not one stands more conspicuous than Folgeruaes, a little north of that broken line of reef which stretches out from Volø.

Bare, wild, desolate, the sight of a human habitation on that lonely rock seems to send through the beholder a shudder—there, on the very summit crowning its pinnacle, stands the light-house, and by its side the long white-painted dwelling of those whose duty it is to keep the light in order.

Except for the railed-round walk, levelled to keep watch from every inch of ground must be scrambled over, and a line of staples driven into the rock points the almost sheer descent to where a boat lies sheltered below.

Seldom do the elements favor the wishes of those who feel a curiosity to land here; and it is mostly due to necessity or misadventure that the spot is ever visited by a stranger. Should chance in either form have carried one there, he would not long ago have been brought face to face with two whose lives by a strange fatality seemed linked together, Henrik Larsen and Nils Kroll.

Though near of an age the one to the other, while Larsen's hair was already gray, his face lined, and his heavy figure slouched and bent down from the shoulders, Kroll's still youthful-looking face met your gaze with a frank cheery smile; he was possessed of a fund of good humor, and his movements were quick and active as became a smart sailor.

"What made you come here, Nils? What makes you stay?" were questions I had kept on my lips ever since I first saw him, and some years had gone by since then, each season bringing me to Norway to the same neighborhood, when certainly once during my stay I contrived to pass a day—sometimes lengthened into two or three—with my friends the two light-house men.

At first Larsen would only growl a reply to me, but about the third year—seeing that my determination not to leave without seeing them made me run a risk of considerable danger—his mood softened, and, after his sombre fashion, he deigned to bid me welcome. Nils' pleasure in my company was very outspoken, and steadily increased as we got to know each other better. In his early days he had spent some time in England, and though by every opportunity I had, through magazines and newspapers, I tried to quench his thirst for knowledge, much more satisfactory to him than reading was my presence and the intercourse we held together.

Larsen usually took advantage of my being there to have a fit of "the shivers," only a pretext for Nils enjoying my company unrestrainedly, as whatever there was to do he did it. Nothing would have given him greater offence than for Nils to disturb himself in any way.

"I talk it all over with him after," Nils would say; "and that's what he likes—if he ever listens to what's going on it must be in his own way."

I smiled. Time had taught me how attached to each other these men were; the causes which bound them still remained a mystery.

There are occasions when confidences seem begotten by the atmosphere; the sun, the sky, the moaning wind, each brings an influence to bear. Nils and I, sheltered in a hollow—where, dropped in the rock, we could stand leaning our elbows on a ledge in front of us—were watching the departing glories of a northern sunset. It was late in the season. I was homeward bound, the next day was the day of parting. I had seized the opportunity of unusually calm weather to pay an extra visit to Folgeruaes while waiting for the steamer which would put in for me on its way to Stavanger.

A few hours before, when all around was calm and still, Larsen—to whom croaking became as natural as a raven—predicted that there would

be more wind, and now the clouds broken up in fleecy masses over the sky promised that the morrow would bear truth to his prophecy. The edge of each cloud was a golden setting which deepened and spread out toward the fiery orb already slowly sinking.

I do not know how long we had stood silent—we were both smoking—when, as well as I can remember, for the first time I heard Nils sigh heavily.

"I fear, my poor fellow," I said, "this half imprisonment is often very irksome to you."

He shook his head, but in a way that did not quite answer me, and suddenly I found myself asking why he had come, what had brought him there, and he was saying, "I'll tell you. I should like you to know, what nobody else has ever heard, my story—which means the story of us two. Henrik"—and he nodded back to the light-house where Larsen was trimming the lamp—"and I were both born in Bergen, and from childhood there ran the streets together. What made us such close chums I don't know, for his people were more well-to-do than mine; he had a father living, I but a widowed mother. Besides this, he was three years older—something important that in the age of boys; and then the difference in our dispositions, nothing could be wider. He was shy and retiring, called sullen because he did not speak, and obstinate when he would not give way. Somehow I could generally manage him, and coax him out of any ill-humor; and not seeing his faults, as others named them, he obtained a great influence over me. I worshipped his resolution and his courage to endure, and looked on him as a hero because, though his father might thrash him within an inch of his life, he could not make him give in."

"Old Larsen was an ill-conditioned, violent man; and all the family, it seemed to me, except Henrik, were like him. There was little peace in the house, so Henrik took to spending his evenings with me; my mother, because he was attached to me, made him welcome, although on a few occasions he drew on himself her displeasure by betraying jealousy."

"While still a very young lad, with my mother's apron string not loosened round me, it became necessary that I should part from her. A shipmate of my father's came over from North Shields. He was in want of a boy, and he made an offer for me. To be turned into sailors seemed to me then the sole reason why boys were brought into the world. All my companions, their fathers, the men we knew, were connected with the sea. How was it possible to have any other ambition? My heart was filled with joy to think I was about to enter on this life. I knew of only two regrets: I had to part from my mother, and Henrik was not going with me. Old Larsen had other views for him; he meant to place him with a cousin who was a fish salter."

"That first rough apprenticeship was the beginning of my picking up the English I know, and it served me in good stead when I got back again to Bergen and was looking about for something better to do."

"Four years I had been absent, and it seemed as if it could not have been more than a day, for all was as I left it. I knew the people I met in the streets, although not one of them remembered me; the wares in the shop windows looked still familiar, and Mother Olsen, sitting in the Torv Almendingen under the steps of Handelsmand Dybvad's house, had the same horns of currants and tied-up sticks of cherries, and was knitting away at the long leg of a stocking just as I left her."

"I quickened my steps home, because the tears would come into my eyes—all my life through they've played me that nasty trick of getting suddenly watery. My mother, I asked myself—will she recognize me?"

"One of the first questions I put after freeing myself from her embrace was, 'And Henrik, where is he?'"

"Very little letter-writing had been kept up between us while I was away. Mother, with four of them younger than me to work for, had too much to do, and I was a slave, kicked and driven by everybody. It was the usual fate of a collier boy in that day."

"Henrik has left Bergen. His father is mad against him. He has run away." Where, she did not know, only he had gone to sea, "to seek you," she added, "for he has never had another friend."

"No more had I; but then, a stranger in a foreign land, I had no opportunity; Henrik had many. His constancy flattered my vanity, which, as I dare say you have seen, is a weak point with me."

"That evening I set to work to find him out, and very soon I was put on his track; so that, having got a berth on board a Hamburger detained in Bergen for repairs, at Hamburg I came upon him, and it was not long before he joined our ship's company, and thus the intimacy of our boyhood was restored."

"By this time I could not help seeing that Henrik had grown into a queer kind of chap; not that I had anything to complain of, excepting through his jealousy. No matter who it might be—old, young, man, dog (we had not the chance of its being a woman in those days), if they liked me he hated them, and would go to work at scheming how he could set us one against the other."

"Lots of chaps wanted to chum with me. Not one cared for Larsen. I cannot quite tell why. If he was rough and surly, so were they; at least the most of them. Still, by common consent he was treated as an outsider—seldom noticed, never confided in."

"Strange as it seems, this did not appear to give him so much pain as it gave me; and, to my surprise I soon noticed that while they might slight or annoy him without rousing his anger, I had but to show the most trivial preference for anybody to throw him into a fury. A slavish affection is certain to become irksome, and I was beginning to fret under the gall of its fetter when, we having by this time reached Monte Video, I fell sick of the fever."

"It was desperately hot weather, and we were taking in hides for our cargo, the sun beating down on our heads, so that you had to gasp for every breath. Stupid, foolhardy, with no knowledge of danger, because precautions interfered with my pleasure, I refused to take them; and being struck down senseless was the penalty. It was then Henrik showed his devotion. He deserted from the ship rather than leave me, and sold and spent everything he had until he was left with not much more than the shirt on his back in his endeavors to pull me through. It was to his care I owed my life, and tears in great drops rolled down his cheeks the first time I was able to speak to him in my usual way. After I had once answered the helm I went along with my head to wind and was soon all right again; but, with no respectable clothes and our money gone, the two of us had a roughish time. We were forced to work at whatever came to hand—from serving liquor at a bar to doing the dirty bidding of a nigger-driver."

"At last, through hanging about the port, we stumbled across a Norwegian whose ship hailed from Nieuwediep. Its captain was a Dutchman, and having listened to our story, which we told him truly, he believed us, advanced money for our clothes, and took us aboard with him, though she was a leaky old tub, and not the sort of craft we had been used to. Out of gratitude we stayed by her the whole trip, returned in her, and soon found our way back to Norway. I went home, but Henrik didn't care to face his family, so we parted at Christiania, where he entered on board a coaster, and I soon after found a similar berth in another."

"I was very well satisfied with my position; but though we found opportunities to meet frequently, Henrik was discontented. He made a grievance that I did not care to be with him, and so constantly worried me, that at length one evening when we had met at Stavanger and were ashore there, I gave him a promise that I would look out for a foreign-going ship in which we could again be together."

"Delighted that he had gained his point, he became, for him, quite jovial. Nothing would do but we must have an extra glass to drink luck to the undertaking, and afterward we strolled down to the landing-place and stood smoking."

"On an evening like this I can always bring that long past one back to me. Again in my ears sounds that voice; I strain them to catch its melody."

"Listen!" I said to Henrik, "they are singing," and I motioned him to go closer up to the house, through whose open windows the music reached us. Two persons were singing, the voices of a man and a woman; one of them played an accompaniment on a guitar. Even now I cannot tell what spell fascinated me, but after the song had stopped, I pushed Henrik away. "Wait," I said, "perhaps she'll sing again." "There are two of them," was his reply. There might have been a dozen, I listened but to one, the notes of a voice that had entranced me."

"At twelve o'clock that night my vessel left Stavanger to continue on its journey, and as we slowly steamed away I fixed my eyes on the house and made a promise that, on our return, I would find out who was the singer. But some months went by and I had not found my opportunity, though by that time I had contrived to pick out the air, all but two or three bars which always baffled me. One evening at Laurvig I had gone into the wood expecting to meet Henrik, whose vessel started from there. The townsfolk were flocking up to hear the band; I loitered among the trees expecting him to overtake me. Suddenly all the blood in my body rushed to my head—I heard the song, it was sung by the same singer. Half a dozen steps brought me close behind the group—three young girls: they were walking hand in hand together."

"Hush! Signe," said one mischievously, "somebody is listening," and turning they were brought face to face so close to me that we all burst out laughing. Among our class of life in this country our manners are free; those who have a fancy for each other need not be kept silent for lack of introduction. Within half an hour of that moment we were all the best friends. I had been told by them who they were, and in turn they knew what there was to hear about me. When the other two had paired off with the young fellows whom we met on the way, I found courage—for I never felt so shy with any one before—to tell Signe how at Stavanger I had listened to her song, and how ever since it had haunted me. Yes, she had but lately returned from Stavanger, where she had been staying with a friend; her home was Laurvig. She was an orphan, but her mother, just before dying, had married again, and she was given a home by her step-father. Talking earnestly together we soon lost her companions, and did not meet them again; as for poor Henrik, I had forgotten all about him."

"Well, that night, the forerunner of many others, left but one thought in my head—when, how, where, should I meet Signe? I loved her madly; the one question I was always asking myself was, 'Did she love me?' Henrik, to whom I confided my fears, scoffed at my timi-

dity. "Why don't you ask her?" he would say, roughly. I did not for answer tell him how often I had tried, but that the words seemed to choke me. And so time went on. I had to leave Laurvig—I came back; again I went away. Sometimes Henrik and I met, sometimes I missed him; when I did so the fault was mine. With Signe I wanted no other company."

"Falling in with him at Christiania, he surprised me with the news that an offer had been made him of a good birth. A captain from Bergen, whom he knew, was going a voyage to Valparaiso, and if he liked to take it, the post of third mate would be given to him."

"Well, of course you'll go?"

"I should if they had room for two," he said quietly.

"But come, old fellow—I stopped, not quite knowing how to put what I wanted to say. My love for Signe had changed me completely, and I saw that I had no right to allow him to miss this chance, when I meant to seize the first opportunity. Knowing his temper, I began speaking in a roundabout way; he anticipated me."

"I understand," he said. "You mean we needn't be so much together now? All right!" and he was turning away when he stopped. "Look here," he said, "do you care for the berth? If so, take it," and he wheeled himself round brusquely."

"But I was not going to let him part with me that way; for a whole hour I tried to win him to a happier humor, and in doing so opened out my heart and its desires, finally dealing a last fatal blow by saying, 'If I took your offer it would be because of Signe.'"

"And it is because of her I make it to you."

"Ah!" I said, with a lover's stupidity; "at last you are beginning to like her, I know, for my sake." But he stopped what I was saying by shaking me off roughly."

"If it's settled that you'll go," he said, "we'd best look up Jansen and ask him if he'll take you."

"And the result of this visit was that a month later I started for Valparaiso, the betrothed of Signe."

## II.

"Never try to light a flame near a mine of gunpowder," Signe, with that desire for conquest which seems the thirst of woman's nature, although her heart was given to me, began striving to make Henrik her prisoner."

"I was not without blame in this matter; for, seeing her interested, I had amused her by relating instances of his almost savage jealousy; and now, when ostensibly by virtue of his trust—for I begged him to be a brother to her—he, in hopes of finding an occasion for slander, dogged her footsteps and followed her everywhere, the thought came that she would try if she had the power to make him love."

"People did not call Signe beautiful. I did not think her so myself, but her eyes, like her voice, haunted you. They were tender, deep, sad; they seemed to look down into your heart and leave their light there. Henrik always looked away from her; it is his habit, you know, more especially if he does not feel well disposed toward a person; and he hated Signe from his very soul, and, strange to say, quickly penetrated the game she was playing with him."

"I, who have been given the confidences of the two, know the fight that went on between them. The lapse of years makes our judgment clearer, and, in full possession of the misery wrought, I still have pity for them. 'Tis said that hate and love often lie closer than we dream they do. One moment Henrik was my friend, the next every barrier was dashed down and he had clasped Signe to his heart and called her his own."

"Poor child! until that time the love permitted to meet her eyes had run as a placid stream. Suddenly a torrent had overwhelmed her, and by its force carried her breathless away. Fear of the giant she had called to life sealed her lips, stopped her heart—another time she would find courage. When he was gone she would think of what to say. But as a snake with a frightened bird so Henrik's power was cast over Signe. She was no longer mistress of herself; a nature stronger than she had dreamed of held her at its mercy, and Henrik was mad; the love he now felt was a frenzy. Leave her! go, as I had done, for her to make a victim, and fall the prey of some other? Sooner would he have carried out the temptation often present to his mind of jumping with her into the seething waters and thus securing his possession forever; and Signe dreamed as much and the heart in which I still was imaged died away within her. Another influence, too, was brought to bear. Her stepfather, desirous of getting married himself, urged Henrik's suit, and the unhappy one, not daring to confess the truth, that it was through her coquetry this savage love had been born, advanced fifty excuses, but never the right one.... They were married."

"I had been gone eighteen months, and, driven desperate that I had never been written to by either of them, I was preparing to leave my ship and get some berth in a homeward-bound one, when a former shipmate met me. He had a sister at Laurvig, and she had written to him."

"So you have lost your sweetheart," he said; "and a precious good riddance I should say, since she has taken up with Larsen."

"Larsen! Oh, has she?" Not I, but my lips were speaking; they were making a brave effort for me."