

# ONLY A MONTH;

OR, A CURIOUS MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

## CHAPTER XVIII.—(Cont'd.)

A hospital nurse, whose sweet, strong face contrasted curiously with her funereal garments, was sitting beside the mattresses, which for greater convenience had been placed on the floor. Frithiof lay in the absolute stillness of exhaustion, and Sigrid, who had never seen him fill, was for a moment almost overcome. It seemed hardly possible that the thin, worn, haggard face on the pillow could be the same face which had smiled on her last from the deck of the steamer when he had started on that fatal visit to the Morgans. He was talking incoherently, and twice she caught the name of Blanche.

"Try if you can get him to take this," said the nurse, handing her a cup of beef-tea.

He took it passively, but evidently did not in the least recognize her. His eyes, which for so many days had seen only the phantoms of his imagination, fixed themselves on her face, and by degrees a light of recognition dawned in them.

"Sigrid!" he exclaimed, in a tone of such relief that tears started to her eyes.

She bent down and kissed him. "I have come to take care of you. And after you have been to sleep we will have a long talk," she said, gently. "There, let me make your pillows comfortable."

"Talk," he said. "It is so good to hear Norse once more."

"I will talk if you will try to sleep. I will sit here and say you some of Bjornsen's songs." And, with his hand still in hers, she said, in her quieting voice, "Jeg har sogt," and "Olaf Trygvason," and "Prinsessen."

This last seemed specially to please him, and while, for the sixth time, she was repeating it, Roy, who had been watching them intently, made her a little sign, and, glancing down, she saw that Frithiof had fallen asleep. No one stirred, for they all knew only too well how much depended on that sleep.

For the next day or two Frithiof realized little. To the surprise and delight of all, he slept almost incessantly, waking only to take food, to make sure that Sigrid was with him, and to enjoy a delicious sense of ease and relief.

"He is out of the wood now," said Dr. Morris, cheerfully. "You came just in time, Miss Falck. But I will give you one piece of advice: if possible stay in England and make your home with him, he ought not to be so much alone."

"You think that he may have such an attack again?" asked Sigrid, wistfully.

"No, I don't say that at all. He has a wonderful constitution, and there is no reason why he should ever break down again. But he is more likely to get depressed if he is alone, and you will be able to prevent his life from growing too monotonous."

So she lived through those quiet days in the sick-room. One day Roy, coming in at his usual hour in the morning to relieve guard, brought her a fat envelope which he had found waiting for her in the hall. She opened it eagerly, and made a little exclamation of disappointment and vexation.

"Anything wrong?" he asked. "Oh," she said, "it seems so ridiculous when I had been expecting such great things from it."

"Have you made any other attempts?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Sigrid, "I began to try in Norway and even attempt-

ed a story and sent it to one of our best novelists to ask his opinion."

"And what did he say?" "Well," she said, smiling, "he wrote back very kindly, but said that he could not conscientiously recommend any one to write stories whose sole idea in taking up the profession was the making of money."

Roy sat musing over the perplexities of ordinary life. Here was he with more money than he knew what to do with, and here was the woman he loved struggling in vain to earn a few shillings.

"My father and mother come home to-night," he said, at length, "and if you will allow me I will ask them if they know of anything likely to suit you. Cecil will be very anxious to meet you again. Don't you think you might go for a drive with her to-morrow afternoon? I would be here with your brother."

Sigrid gladly assented, and the next day both Mrs. Boniface and Cecil drove to the little house at Vauxhall. Roy brought Sigrid down to the carriage, and with a very happy satisfied feeling, introduced her to his mother, and watched the warm meeting with Cecil.

"I can't think what would become of Frithiof if it had not been for all your kindness," said Sigrid. "Your son has practically saved his life, I am sure, by taking care of him, through this illness."

"And the worst is over now, I hope," said Mrs. Boniface. "That is such a comfort."

At the first moment Sigrid had fallen in love with the sweet-natured, motherly old lady, and now she opened her heart to her, and they discussed the sad cause of Frithiof's breakdown, and talked of past days in Norway, and of the future that lay before him.

"What makes me so miserable," said Sigrid, "is to feel that his life is, as it were, over, though he is so young; it has been spoiled and ruined for him when he is but one-and-twenty."

"But the very fact of his being so young seems to me to give hope that brighter things are in store for him," said Mrs. Boniface.

"I do not think so," said Sigrid. "That girl has taken something from him which can never come again; it does not seem to me possible that a man can love like that twice in a life-time."

"Perhaps not just in that way," said Mrs. Boniface.

"And, besides," said Sigrid, "what girl would care to take such love as he might now be able to give? I am sure nothing would induce me to accept any secondary love of that kind."

Now Cecil was of a wholly different type. Already love had taken possession of her, it had stolen into her heart almost unconsciously and had brought grave shadows into her quiet life, shadows cast by the sorrow of another. Sigrid's speech troubled her for a minute or two; if one girl could speak so, why not all girls?

"It may be so," she admitted, yet with a latent consciousness that so infinite a thing as love could not be bound by any hard and fast rules. "But I can not help it. Whether it is womanly or not I would die to give him the least real comfort."

"Tell Harris to stop. Cecil," said Mrs. Boniface. "We will get some grapes for Mr. Falck."

And glad to escape from the carriage for a minute, and glad, too, to be of use even in such a far-off way, Cecil went into the fruiterer's, returning before long with a beautiful basket of grapes and flowers.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"See what I have brought you," said Sigrid, re-entering the sick-room a little later on.

Frithiof took the basket and looked, with a pleasure which a few weeks ago would have been impossible to him, at the lovely fruit and flowers.

"You have come just at the right time, for he will insist on talking of all the deepest things in heaven and earth," said Roy, "and this makes a good diversion."

"They are from Mrs. Boniface. Is it not kind of her? And do you know, Frithiof, she and Doctor Morris have been making quite a deep plot; they want to transplant us bodily to Rowan Tree House, and Doctor Morris thinks the move could do you no harm now that you are getting better."

His face lighted up with something of its former expression.

"How I should like never to see this hateful room again!" he exclaimed. "You don't know how I detest it. The old ghosts seem to haunt it still. There is nothing that I can bear to look at except your picture of Bergen, which has done me more than one good turn."

The change to Rowan Tree House seemed to work wonders in him. The house had always charmed him, and the recollection of the first time he had entered it, using it as a shelter from the storm of life, much as Roy and Cecil had used his father's house as a shelter from the drenching rain of Bergen, returned to him again and again through the quiet weeks that followed.

Sigrid told him all the details of her life in Norway since they had last seen each other, of her refusal of Torvald Lundgren, of her relations with her aunt, of the early morning on Hjerkinsho. And her story touched him.

"It was just as if I had worn a crape veil all my life," she said, looking up from her work for a moment with those clear, blue, practical eyes of hers. "And up there on the mountain it seemed as if some one had lifted it quite away."

Her words stirred within him an uneasy sense of loss, a vague desire, which he had once or twice felt before.

"Sigrid!" he said at last, with a suppressed eagerness in his voice, "Sigrid, you won't go back again to Norway and leave me?"

"No, dear, I will never leave you," she said, warmly. "I will try to find some sort of work. To-night I mean to talk to Mr. Boniface about it. Surely in this huge place there must be something I can do."

"It is its very hugeness that makes one despair," said Frithiof. "Good God! what I went through last autumn! And there are thousands in the same plight, thousands who would work if only they could meet with employment."

Sigrid watched his returning strength with delight; indeed, perhaps she never realized what he had been during his lonely months of London life.

Frithiof hardly knew which part of the day was most pleasant to him, the quiet morning after Mr. Boniface and Roy had gone to town, when he and Sigrid were left to their own devices; the pleasant little break at eleven, when Mrs. Boniface looked in to remind them that fruit was good in the morning, and to tempt him with pears and grapes, while Cecil and the two children came in from the garden, bringing with them a sense of freshness and life.

Quiet the life was, it is true, but dull never. Every one had plenty to do, yet not too much.

Into the midst of this home there had come now some strangely fresh elements. Three distinct romances were being worked out beneath that quiet roof. There was poor Frithiof with his shattered life, his



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past an agony which would scarcely bear thinking of, his future a desperate struggle with circumstances. There was Cecil, whose life was so far bound up with his that when he suffered she suffered too, yet had to live on with a serene face and make no sign. There was Roy already madly in love with the blue-eyed, fair-haired Sigrid, who seemed in the glad reaction after all her troubles to have developed into a totally different being, and was the life of the party. And yet in spite of the inevitable pain of love, these were happy days for all of them. Happy to Frithiof because his strength was returning to him; because, with an iron resolution, he as far as possible shut out the remembrance of Blanche; because the spirit life within him was slowly developing, and for the first time he had become conscious that it was a reality.

Happy for Cecil because her love was no foolish sentimentality, no selfish day-dream, but a noble love which taught her more than anything else could possibly have done. Happiest of all perhaps for Roy, because his love story was full of bright hope—a hope that each day grew fuller and clearer.

"Robin," said Mrs. Boniface one evening to her husband. "I think Sigrid Falck is one of the sweetest girls I ever saw."

"So thinks some one else if I am not much mistaken," he replied.

"Then, you, too, have noticed it. I am so glad. I hoped it was so,

but could not feel sure. Oh, Robin, I wonder if he has any chance? She would make him such a sweet little wife."

"How can we tell that she has not left her heart in Norway?" "I do not think so," said Mrs. Boniface. "No, I feel sure that can't be, from the way in which she speaks of her life there. If there is any rival to be feared it is Frithiof. They seem to be wrapped up in each other, and it is only natural, too, after all their trouble and separation and this illness of his. How strong he is getting again, and how naturally he takes to the game! He is such a fine-looking fellow, somehow he dwarfs every one else." (To be continued.)

## TREES IN A CHURCH.

The phenomenon of trees growing in a church is to be seen in the parish church of Ross, on the Wyre, England. Tradition has it that they grew out of the grave of the Man of Ross, a local philanthropist of the eighteenth century, immortalized in a well-known poem by Pope. One of the directions in which his bounty flowed was in the beautifying of the town with trees and shrubs; and the appearance of trees on his sepulchre was hailed by his grateful townsmen as highly appropriate. At present the trees are bare and leafless, though one is said to have sprouted again lately. An artificial greenness is imparted to them by graceful trails of a Virginia creeper that festoons them.

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