ONLY A MONTH;

OR, A CURIOUS MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

For a time Frithiof was rather silent and quiet; but Sigrid and Swanhild were in high spirits as they went down to Rowan Tree House, arriving just in time for supper. The atmosphere of happiness, however, is always infectious, and he soon threw off his taciturnity, and dragging himself away from his own engrossing thoughts, forgot the shadows of life in the pure brightness of this home which had been so much to him ever since he first set foot in it.

With Swanhild for an excuse they played all sorts of games; but when at last she had been sent off to bed, the fun and laughter quieted down. Mr. and Mrs. Boniface played their nightly game of backgammon; Roy and Sigrid had a long tete-a-tete in the little drawing-room; Cecil sat down at the piano and began to play Mendelssohn's Christmas pieces; and Frithiof threw himself back in the great arm-chair close by her, listening half dreamily and with a restful sense of pause in his life that he had never before known. He desired nothing, he reveled in the sense of freedom from the love which for so long had been a misery to him; the very calm was bliss.

"That is beautiful," he said, when the music ceased. "After all there is no one like Mendelssohn, he is so human."

"You look like one of the lotus-eaters," said Cecil, glancing at him.

"It is precisely what I feel like," he said, with a smile. "Perhaps it is because you have been giving me

"'Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.'

I remember so well how you read that to me after I had been ill." She took a little thin red volume from the book-shelves beside her and turned over the leaves. He bent forward to look over her, and together they read the first part of the poem.

"It is Norway," he said. "What could better describe it?

"You will not be a true lotus-eater till you are there once more," said Cecil, glancing at him. For his dreamy content was gone, and a wistfulness which she quite understood had taken its place. "Don't you think, now that all is so different, you might perhaps go there next summer?" she added.

"No," he replied, "you must not tempt me. I will not go back till I am a free man and can look every one in the face. The prospect of being free so much sooner than I had expected ought to be enough to satisfy me. Suppose we build castles in the air; that is surely the right thing to do on Christmas-eve. When at last these debts are cleared, let us all go to Norway together. I know Mr. Boniface would be enchanted with it, and you, you did not see nearly all that you should have seen. You must see the Romsdal and the Geiranger, and we must show you Oldoren, where we so often spent the summer holiday."

"How delightful it would be!" said Cecil.

"Don't say 'would,' say 'will,'" he replied. "I shall not thoroughly enjoy it unless we all go together, a huge party."

"I think we should be rather in the way," she said. "You would have so many old friends out there, and would want to get rid of us. Don't you remember the old lady who was so outspoken at Balholm when we tried to be friendly and not to let her feel lonely and out of it?"

Frithiof laughed at the recollection.

"Yes," he said; "she liked to be alone, and preferred to walk on quickly and keep 'out of the ruck,' as she expressed it. We were 'the ruck.' And how we laughed at her opinion of us."

"Well, of course you wouldn't exactly put it in that way, but all the same, I think you would want to be alone when you go back."

He shook his head.

"No; you are quite mistaken. Now, promise that if Mr. Boniface agrees, you will all come too."

"Very well," she said, smiling, "I promise."

"Where are they going to?" he exclaimed, glancing into the inner room where Roy was wrapping a thick sofa blanket about Sigrid's shoulders.

"Out into the garden to hear the bells, I dare say," she replied. "We generally go out if it is fine."

"Let us come too," he said; and they left the bright room and went out into the dusky veranda, pacing silently to and fro absorbed in their own thoughts, while the Christmas bells rang

"Peace and good-will, good-will and peace,
Peace and good-will to all mankind."

But the other two, down in a sheltered path at the end of the garden were not silent, nor did they listen very much to the bells.

"Sigrid," said Roy, "have you forgotten that you made me a promise last June?"

"No," she said, her voice trembling a little, "I have not forgotten."

"You promised that when Frithiof was cleared I might ask you for your answer."

She raised her face to his in the dim starlight.

"Yes, I did promise."

"And the answer is—?"

"I love you."

The soft Norse words were spoken hardly above her breath, yet Roy knew that they would ring in his heart all his life long.

"My darling!" he said, taking her in his arms. "Oh, if you knew what the waiting has been to me! But it was my own fault—all my own fault. I ought to have trusted your instinct before my own reason."

"No, no," she said, clinging to him; "I think I was hard and bitter that day; you must forgive me, for I was so very unhappy. Don't let us speak of it any more. I hate to think of it even."

"And nothing can ever come between us again," he said, still keeping his arm round her as they walked on.

"No; never again," she repeated; "never again. I know I am too proud and independent, and I suppose it is to crush down my pride that I have to come to you like this, robbed of position and money, and—"

"How can you speak of such things," he said, reproachfully. "You know they are nothing to me; you know that I can never feel worthy of you."

"Such things do seem very little when one really loves," she said, gently. "I thought it over, and it seems to me like this—the proof of your love to me is that you take me poor, an exile, more or less burdened with the past; the proof of my love to you is that I kill my pride—and yield. It would have seemed impossible to me once; but now— Oh, Roy! how I love you—how I love you!"

* * * * *

"And about Frithiof?" said Roy, presently. "You will explain to him and make him understand that I would not for the world break up his home?"

"Yes," she replied, "I will tell him; but I think not to-night. Just till to-morrow let it be only for ourselves. Hark! the clocks are striking twelve! Let us go in and wish the others a happy Christmas."

But Roy kept the first of the good wishes for himself; then, at length releasing her, walked beside her toward the house, happy beyond all power of expression.

And now once more outer things began to appeal to him; he became conscious of the Christmas bells ringing gayly in the stillness of the night, of the stars shining down gloriously through the clear frosty air, of the cheerful glimpse of home to be seen through the uncurtained window of the drawing-room.

Cecil and Frithiof had left the veranda and returned to the piano; they were singing a carol, the German air of which was well known in Norway. Sigrid did not know the English words; but she listened to them now intently, and they helped to reconcile her to the one thorn in her perfect happiness—the thought that these other two were shut out from the bliss which she enjoyed.

Quietly she stole into the room and stood watching them as they sung the quaint old hymn:

"Good Christian men rejoice,
In heart and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss;
Joy! joy!
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath oped the heavenly door,
And man is blessed evermore.
Christ was born for this."

Cecil, glancing up at her when the carol was ended, read her secret in her happy, glowing face. She rose from the piano.

"A happy Christmas to you," she said, kissing her on both cheeks.

"We have been out in the garden, right down in the lower path, and you can't think how lovely the bells sound," said Sigrid.

Then, with a fresh stab of pain at her heart she thought of Frithiof's spoiled life; she looked wistfully across at him, conscious that her love for Roy had only deepened her love for those belonging to her.

Was he never to know anything more satisfying than the peace of being freed from the heavy load of suspicion? Was he only to know the pain of love? All her first desire to keep her secret to herself died away as she looked at him, and in another minute her hand was on his arm. "Dear old boy," she said to him in Norse, "won't you come into the garden with me for a few minutes?"

So they went out together into the starlight, and wandered down to the sheltered path where she and Roy had paced to and fro so long.

"What a happy Christmas it has been for us all!" she said, thoughtfully.

"Very; and how little we expected it!" said Frithiof.

"Do you think," she began, falteringly, "do you think, Frithiof, it would make you less happy if I told you of a new happiness that has come to me?"

Her tone as much as the actual words suddenly enlightened him.

"Whatever makes for your happiness makes for mine," he said, trying to read her face.

"Are you sure of that?" she said, the tears rushing to her eyes. "Oh, if I could quite believe you, Frithiof, how happy I should be!"

"Why should you doubt me?" he asked. "Come, I have guessed your secret, you are going to tell me that—"

"That Roy will some day be your brother as well as your friend," she said, finishing his sentence for him.

He caught her hand in his and held it fast.

"I wish you joy, Sigrid, with all my heart. This puts the finishing touch to our Christmas hapiness."

"And Roy has been making such plans," said Sigrid, brushing away her tears; "he says that just over the wall there is a charming little house back to back, you know, with this one, and it will just hold us all, for of course he will never allow us to be separated. He told me that long ago, when he first asked me."

"Long ago?" said Frithiof; "why what do you mean, Sigrid? I thought it was only to-night."

"It was only to-night that I gave him his answer," said Sigrid. "It was when we were at the sea last June that he first spoke to me and then—afterward—perhaps I was wrong, but I would not hear anything more about it till your cloud had passed away. I knew some day that your name must be cleared, and I was angry with Roy for not believing in you. I dare say I was wrong to expect it, and it disappointed me so dreadfully. He says himself now that he ought to have trusted—"

"It was a wonder that you didn't make him hate me forever," said Frithiof. "Why did you not tell me about it before?"

"How could I?" she said. "It would only have made you more unhappy. It was far better to wait."

(To be continued.)

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DUCHESS AS DOG-FANCIER

Following the example of her brother, Wm. K. Vanderbilt, the Duchess of Marlborough is building up a reputation as an enthusiastic dog fancier.

At one time the Duchess ignored the dog craze and it was a matter of common talk that she was practically the only woman in the "smart set" circle who did not possess a dog of some class among her household pets. Now she appears to be falling into line with her friends and is paying fancy prices for bulldog breeds and water spaniels.

Her experiences have not been up to the present entirely favorable, for a few days ago a valuable animal which was being consigned to her from Ireland got suffocated on the journey, and as the consignment was at owner's risk the loss will mean something in the neighborhood of $5,000.

Duchess of Marlborough.

Next year the Duchess hopes to join the ranks of the society women who have been for a number of years an active and conspicuous element in the Ladies' Kennel Club.

A WOMAN AS SHIP SURGEON.

British Board of Trade Law Does Not Forbid It.

Heretofore the position of ship's surgeon has been monopolized by men, but all doubt as to the eligibility of women for the position has been set at rest by a Scottish steamship company.

The company had a steamer on the Clyde ready to sail for Australia with a large number of passengers, including emigrants, on board. All that kept it from leaving was the lack of a surgeon.

A qualified woman doctor, the daughter of a marine engineer, heard of the difficulty and offered her services. The board of trade officer who had to certify the ship looked up all precedents, and, although he found that no woman had ever before been signed on as surgeon of a ship, he could find nothing against it, and the woman doctor went out with the steamer.

Winter Care of Drafters.

Most farmers do not get full use of their horses through failure to provide work for them during the winter months. There is generally not much doing on the farm then except, perhaps, hauling of a little produce to town, dragging in the logs for firewood and scattering manure on the snowy fields.

Altogether they are kept idle for so many days that the average number of hours worked per day for a year is even less than two, counting those days in summer overtime is the rule for man and beast.

This condition is unprofitable from an economic point of view, and from the viewpoint of the horse's health.

Heavy drafters in good flesh and fed liberally on oats and timothy will need exercise and plenty of it to keep in fair health during the winter. They will need warm stables properly ventilated; there must be no cement or other damp floors for them to lie on; there must be plenty of air and sunshine.

One winter we fed scarcely anything but straw and just a little grain and the horses came through in better shape than those of a neighbor who fed liberally, but who did not have any more work for his horses than we had. There was not so much rich stuff to poison the blood.

I know of a farmer who regularly hires a teamster to take his magnificent drafters out into the employ of the local ice company, and so keeps them busy during the winter. Another engages his two teams in the cordwood business for the same purpose.

Neither of these men makes very much money through the deal, but they force their horses to pay for their winter board and to come through in splendid shape for the summer's heavy grind.

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"She's getting to be quite an expert on finger prints. Who's the culprit this time, my dear?"

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