

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON

MAGNHILD; DUST

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Magnhild; Dust

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Magnhild; Dust

PREFACE

"Magnhild" was planned during the summer of 1873, while the translator accompanied Mr. Björnson on a journey across Norway. The story is located in Lærdalen and Skarlie's home is in Lærdalsören, a small town at the head of one of the branches of the far-famed Sognefjord on the west coast. I well remember with what care the author made his observations. The story was written the following winter in Rome, but was not published until 1877, when it appeared in the original in Copenhagen and in a German translation in the *Rundschau* simultaneously.

The reader will see that "Magnhild" is a new departure, and marks a new epoch in Björnson's career as a writer of fiction. It is but justice to say that Mr. Björnson himself looks upon this as one of his less finished works, and yet I believe that many of his American readers will applaud the manner in which he has here championed the rights of a woman when she has become united with such a man as Skarlie.

The celebration, on the 10th of August, 1882, of the twenty-fifth anniversary since the publication of "Synnöve Solbakken," was a great success. The day was celebrated by his friends in all parts of Scandinavia and by many of his admirers in Germany, France, and Italy. At Aulestad (his home in Norway), more than two hundred of his personal friends from the Scandinavian countries were assembled, among whom may be mentioned the eminent Swedish journalist Hedlund, the Danish poet Drachmann, and the Norwegian author Kristofer Janson. Over Aulestad, which was handsomely decorated, floated Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and American flags. There was a great banquet, at which speeches and poems were not wanting. Mr. Björnson received a number of valuable presents and countless telegrams from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, England, and America.

This volume closes the present series of translations of Björnson's works. The seven volumes¹ now published contain all the novels and short stories that Björnson has written. His other works are, as shown in the biographical introduction to "Synnöve Solbakken," chiefly dramas.

Being thus about to send my last Björnson manuscript to the publishers, I desire to express my hearty thanks to the press and to the public for the generous reception they have given these stories as they have appeared one by one. Those who are acquainted with Björnson's original and idiomatic style can appreciate the many difficulties his translators have had to contend with. I am fully conscious of my shortcomings and am particularly aware of my failure to transmit the peculiar national flavor of Björnson's style, but I have done my best, and have turned his phrases into as good English as I could command. Others might have been more successful, but they could not have taken more pains, nor could they have derived more pleasure from the work than I have found in it. To Auber Forestier, who has kindly assisted me in the translation of the whole series, I once more extend my hearty thanks. Without her able help the work could not have progressed so rapidly. Finally, I commend "Magnhild" to the tender mercy of the critic and to the good-will of the reader, and say adieu!

RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

Asgard, Madison, Wisconsin.

November, 1882.

¹ The first edition of Björnson's writings, from which the present edition is arranged, was in seven volumes. "Magnhild" formed the seventh volume, and the present preface is reprinted as it there stood.

MAGNHILD

CHAPTER I

The landscape has high, bold mountains, above which are just passing the remnants of a storm. The valley is narrow and continually winding. Coursing through it is a turbulent stream, on one side of which there is a road. At some distance up the slopes farms are spread; the buildings are mostly low and unpainted, yet numerous; heaps of mown hay and fields of half ripe grain are dotted about.

When the last curve of the valley is left behind the fjord becomes visible. It lies sparkling beneath an uplifting fog. So completely is it shut in by mountains that it looks like a lake.

Along the road there jogs at the customary trot a horse with a cariole-skyds.² In the cariole may be seen a waterproof coat and a south-wester, and between these a beard, a nose, and a pair of spectacles. Lashed to the back seat is a trunk, and seated on this, with her back to the cariole, is a full-grown "skyds" – girl, snugly bundled up in a kerchief. She sits there dangling her coarsely-shod feet. Her arms are tucked in under the kerchief. Suddenly she bursts out with: "Magnhild! Magnhild!"

The traveler turned to look after a tall woman in a waterproof cloak who had just walked past. He had caught a glimpse of a delicately-outlined face, beneath a hood which was drawn over the brow; now he saw the owner standing with her forefinger in her mouth, staring. As he was somewhat persistent in his gaze, she blushed.

"I will step in just as soon as I put up the horse," called out the skyds-girl.

They drove on.

"Who was that, my dear?" asked the traveler.

"She is the wife of the saddler down at yonder point," was the reply.

In a little while they had advanced far enough to gain a view of the fjord and the first houses on the point. The skyds-girl reined in the horse and jumped down from the trunk. She first attended to the animal's appearance, and then busied herself with her own toilet. It had ceased raining, and she removed her kerchief, folded it, and stowed it away in a little pocket in front of the cariole. Then thrusting her fingers under her head-kerchief she tried to arrange her hair, which hung in matted locks over her cheeks.

"She had such a singular look," – he pointed over his shoulders.

The girl fixed her eyes on him, and she began to hum. Presently she interrupted herself with, —

"Do you remember the land-slide you passed a few miles above here?"

"I passed so many land-slides."

She smiled.

"Yes; but the one I mean is on the other side of a church."

"It was an old land-slide?"

"Yes; it happened long ago. But that is where once lay the gard belonging to her family. It was swept away when she was eight or nine years old. Her parents, brothers and sisters, and every living thing on the gard, perished. She alone was saved. The land-slide bore her across the stream, and she was found by the people who hastened to the spot, – she was insensible."

The traveler became absorbed in thought.

"She must be destined to something," said he, at last.

The girl looked up. She waited some time, but their eyes did not meet. So she resumed her seat on the trunk, and they drove on.

² Conveyance.

The valley widened somewhat in the vicinity of the point; farms were spread over the plain: to the right lay the church with the churchyard around it; a little farther on the point itself, a small town, with a large number of houses, most of which were but one story high and were either painted white and red or not painted at all; along the fjord ran the wharf. A steamer was just smoking there; farther down, by the mouth of the river, might be seen a couple of old brigs taking in their cargoes.

The church was new, and showed an attempt at imitating the old Norse wooden church architecture. The traveler must have had some knowledge of this, for he stopped, gazed a while at the exterior, then alighted, went through the gateway, and into the church; both gate and door stood open. He was scarcely inside of the building when the bells began to ring; through the opening he saw a bridal procession coming up from the little town. As he took his departure the procession was close by the churchyard gate, and by this he stood while it moved in: the bridegroom, an elderly man, with a pair of large hands and a large face, the bride, a young girl, with a plump, round face, and of a heavy build. The bridesmaids were all clad in white and wore gloves; not one of them ventured to bestow more than a side glance at the stranger; most of them stooped, one was hump-backed; there was not one who could truly be said to have a fine form.

Their male friends lagged behind, in gray, brown, and black felt hats, and long frock coats, pea-jackets, or round-about. Most of them had a lock of hair drawn in front of the ear, and those who had beards wore them to cover the entire chin. The visages were hard, the mouths usually coarse; most of them had tobacco stains about the corners of their mouths, and some had cheeks distended with tobacco-quids.

Involuntarily the traveler thought of her in the waterproof cloak. Her history was that of the landscape. Her refined, unawakened face hung as full of yearning as the mountains of showers; everything that met his eye, both landscape and people, became a frame for her.

As he approached the road, the skyds-girl hastened to the wayside where the horse was grazing. While she was tugging at the reins she continued to gaze fixedly at the bridal procession.

"Are you betrothed?" asked the stranger, smiling.

"He who is to have me has no eyes yet," she replied, in the words of a proverb.

"Then, I suppose, you are longing to get beyond your present position," said he, adding: "Is it to America?"

She was surprised; that query was evidently well aimed.

"Is it in order that you may more speedily earn your traveling expenses that you have gone into the skyds line? Do you get plenty of fees? Hey?"

Now she colored. Without uttering a word in reply, she promptly took her seat on the trunk with her back to the stranger, before he had stepped into the cariole.

Soon they had neared the white-painted hotels which were situated on either side of the street close by the entrance to the little town. In front of one of these they paused. By the balustrade above stood a group of carriers, chiefly young fellows; they had most likely been watching the bridal procession and were now waiting for steamer-bound travelers. The stranger alighted and went in, while the girl busied herself with unstrapping the trunk. Some one must have offered her help, for as the traveler approached the window he saw her push from her a great lubberly boy in a short jacket. In all probability some impertinence had also been offered her and had been repaid in the same coin, for the other carriers set up a shout of laughter. The girl came walking in with the heavy trunk. The traveler opened the door for her, and she laughed as she met him. While he was counting out her money to her, he said, —

"I agree with you, Rønnaug, you ought to be off to America as soon as possible."

He now handed her two specie dollars as her fee.

"This is my mite for your fund," said he, gravely.

She regarded him with wide-open eyes and open mouth, took the money, returned thanks, and then put up both hands to stroke back her hair, for it had again fallen out of place. While thus engaged

she dropped some of the coins she held in one half-closed hand. She stooped to pick them up, and as she did so some of the hooks in her bodice gave way. This loosened her kerchief and one end fell out, for a knot in one corner contained something heavy. While readjusting this she again dropped her money. She got off at last, however, with all her abundance, and was assailed with a volley of rude jests. This time she made no reply; but she cast a shy glance into the hotel as she drove the horse past, full trot.

It was the traveler's lot to see her once more; for as he passed down to the steamer, later in the day, she was standing with her back turned toward the street, at a door over which hung a sign-board bearing the inscription: "Skarlie, Saddler." As he drew nearer he beheld Magnhild in the inner passage. She had not yet removed her waterproof cloak, although the rain had long since ceased. Even the hood was still drawn over her head. Magnhild was the first to espy the stranger, and she drew farther back into the house; Rønnaug turned, and then she too moved into the passage.

That evening Rønnaug's steamer ticket was bought; for the sum was complete. Magnhild did not undress after Rønnaug had gone home late in the evening. She sat in a large arm-chair in the little low room, or restlessly paced the floor. And once, with her heavy head pressed against the window pane, she said half aloud, —

"Then she must be destined to something."

CHAPTER II

She had heard these words before.

The first time it was in the churchyard that blustering winter day her fourteen relatives were buried, – all whom she had loved, both parents and grandparents, and brothers and sisters. In fancy she saw the scene again! The wind had here and there swept away the snow, the pickets of the fence stood out in sharp prominence, huge rocks loomed up like the heads of monsters whose bodies were covered by the snow-drifts. The wind whistled behind the little group of mourners through the open church porch whose blinds had been taken out, and down from the old wooden belfry came the clanging toll of the bell, like one cry of anguish after another.

The people that were gathered together were blue with the cold; they wore mittens and their garments were closely buttoned up. The priest appeared in sea-boots and had on a skin suit beneath his gown; his hands also were eased in large mittens, and he vigorously fought the air round about him with these. He waved one of them toward Magnhild.

"This poor child," said he, "remained standing on her feet, and with her little sled in her hand she was borne downward and across the frozen stream, – the sole being the Lord saw fit to save. To what is she destined?"

She rode home with the priest, sitting on his lap. He had commended her to the care of the parish, and took her home with him "for the present," in order to set a good example. She nestled up to his fur overcoat, with her small cold hands inside of his huge mittens, beside his soft, plump hands. And all the while she kept thinking: "What am I destined to, I wonder?"

She presumed that her mind would become clear on this point when she got into the house. But nothing met her eye here she had not seen before until she entered the inner room, where a piano which some one was just playing in the highest degree attracted her.

But for that very reason she forgot the thought she had brought in with her.

In this household there were two daughters, heavy-looking girls, with small round heads and long, thick braids of light hair. They had recently been provided with a governess, a pale, though fleshy person, with her neck more exposed and her sleeves more open than Magnhild had ever seen in any one before. Her voice sounded as though it needed clearing, and Magnhild involuntarily coughed several times; but this was of no avail. The governess asked Magnhild's name and inquired if she knew how to read, to which Magnhild replied in the affirmative. Her whole family had been noted for their love of reading. And then the governess proposed, still with the same husky after-tone in her voice, that she should be allowed to share the instructions of the little girls, in order to spur them on. Magnhild was one year older than the elder.

The mistress of the house was sitting by, engaged with her embroidery. She now glanced up at Magnhild and said, "With pleasure," then bent over her work again. She was a person of medium size, neither thin nor stout, and had a small head with fair hair. The priest, who was heavy and corpulent, came down-stairs after removing his gown; he was smoking, and as he crossed the floor, he said, "There comes a man with fish," and passed out of the room again.

The youngest girl once more attacked her scales. Magnhild did not know whether she should remain where she was, or go back to the kitchen. She sat on the wood-box by the stove tormented with the uncertainty, when dinner was announced in the adjoining room. All work was put aside, and the little one at the piano closed the instrument. Now when Magnhild was alone and heard the rattling of the knives, she began to cry; for she had not yet eaten a morsel that day. During the meal the priest came out from the dining-room; for it had been decided that he had not bought enough fish. He opened the window and called out to the man to wait until dinner was over. As he turned to go back into the dining-room he espied the little one on the wood-box.

"Are you hungry?" asked he.

The child made no reply. He had lived long enough among the peasants to know that her silence meant "yes," and so taking her by the hand he led her to the table, where room was silently made for her.

In the afternoon she went coasting with the little girls, and then joined them in their studies and had a lesson in Bible history with them; after this she partook of the afternoon lunch with them, and then played with them until they were called to supper, which they all ate at the same table. She slept that night on a lounge in the dining-room and took part the next day in the duties of the priest's daughters.

She had no clothes except those she had on; but the governess made over an old dress for her; some articles of old linen belonging to one of the little girls were given to her, and a pair of their mother's boots. The lounge she had slept on was removed from the dining-room, because it occupied the space needed for some shoemakers who were to "see the household well shod." It was placed in the kitchen, but was in the way there; then in the bed-room of the maid-servants, but there the door continually struck against it; finally it was carried up to the nursery. Thus it was that Magnhild came to eat, work, and sleep with the priest's daughters; and as new clothes were never made for her she naturally fell to wearing theirs.

Quite as much by chance she began to play the piano. It was discovered that she had more talent for music than the daughters of the house, so it was thought best that she should learn, in order to help them. Moreover, she grew tall, and developed a fine voice for singing. The governess took great pains in teaching her to sing by note; she did so at first merely in the mechanical way she did everything, later because the remarkable skill in reading at sight which her pupil developed under her guidance proved a diversion to them all in their mountain solitude. The priest could lie on the sofa (the place he most frequently occupied) and laugh aloud when he heard Magnhild running all sorts of exercises up and down like a squirrel in a tree. The result of this, so far as Magnhild was concerned, was that the young girl learned – not more music, as one might have supposed, but – basket-making.

The fact was that about this time there spread, like an epidemic among the people, the idea that skill in manual industries should be cultivated among the peasants, and propagators of the new doctrine appeared also in this parish. Magnhild was chosen as the first pupil; she was thought to have the most "dexterity." The first thing taught was basket-making, then double spinning, then weaving, especially of the more artistic kinds, and after this embroidery, etc., etc. She learned all these things very rapidly, that is to say, she learned zealously as long as she was gaining an insight into each; further development did not interest her. But as she was henceforth expected to teach others, grown people as well as children, it became a settled habit for her to repair twice each week to the public school where many were assembled. When anything had once become part of her daily routine she thought no more about it. The house that had given her shelter was responsible for this.

The mistress of the house made her daily regulation visits to the kitchen, cellar, and stables, the rest of the time she embroidered; the whole house was covered with embroidery. She might be taken for a fat spider, with a little round head, spinning its web over chairs, tables, beds, sledges, and carts. Her voice was rarely heard; she was seldom addressed by any one.

The priest was much older than his wife. His face was characterized by its small proportion of nose, chin, and eyes, and its very large share of all else belonging to it. He had fared badly at his examination, and had been compelled to support himself by teaching until, when he was advancing in years, he had married one of his former pupils, a lady with quite a nice property. Then he betook himself to seeking a clerical appointment, "the one thing in which he had shown perseverance," as he was himself in the habit of playfully remarking. After a ten years' search he had succeeded in getting a call (not long since) to his present parish, and he could scarcely hope for a better one. He passed most of his time in lying on the sofa reading, chiefly novels, but also newspapers and periodicals.

The governess always sat in the same chair in which Magnhild had seen her the first day, took the same walk to the church and back each day, and never failed to be ready for her duties on the stroke

of the clock. She gradually increased in weight until she became excessively stout; she continued to wear her neck bare and her sleeves open, furthermore to speak in the same husky voice, which no effort on her part had ever yet been able to clear.

The priest's daughters became stout and heavy like their father, although they had small round heads like their mother. Magnhild and they lived as friends, in other words, they slept in the same room, and worked, played, and ate together.

There were never any ideas afloat in this parish. If any chanced to find their way there from without they got no farther than the priest's study. The priest was not communicative. At the utmost he read aloud to his family some new or old novel that he had found diverting.

One evening they were all sitting round the table, and the priest, having yielded to the entreaties of the united family, was reading aloud the "Pickwick Club."

The kitchen door slowly opened and a large bald head, with a snub nose and smiling countenance, was thrust in. A short leg in very wide trousers was next introduced, and this was followed by a crooked and consequently still shorter one. The whole figure stooped as it turned on the crooked leg to shut the door. The intruder thus presented to the party the back of the before mentioned large head, with its narrow rim of hair, a pair of square-built shoulders, and an extraordinarily large seat, only half covered by a pea-jacket. Again he turned in a slanting posture toward the assembled party, and once more presented his smiling countenance with its snub-nose. The young girls bowed low over their work, a suppressed titter arose first from one piece of sewing and then from another.

"Is this the saddler?" asked the priest, rising to his feet.

"Yes," was the reply, as the new-comer limped forward, holding out a hand so astonishingly large and with such broad round finger tips that the priest was forced to look at it as he took it in his own. The hand was offered to the others; and when it came to Magnhild's turn she burst out laughing just as her hand disappeared within it. One peal of laughter after another was heard and suppressed. The priest hastened to remark that they were reading the "Pickwick Club."

"Aha!" observed the saddler, "there is enough to make one laugh in that book."

"Have you read it?" asked the priest.

"Yes; when I was in America. I read most of the English writers; indeed, I have them all in my house now," he answered, and proceeded to give an account of the cheap popular editions that could be obtained in America.

The laughter of young girls is not easily subdued; it was still ready to bubble over when, after the saddler was furnished with a pipe, the reading was resumed. Now to be sure there was a pretext. After a while the priest grew tired and wanted to close the book, but the saddler offered to continue the reading for him, and was allowed to do so. He read in a dry, quiet manner, and with such an unfamiliar pronunciation of the names of the personages and localities introduced that the humor of the text became irresistible; even the priest joined in the laughter which no one now attempted to restrain. It never occurred to the girls to ask themselves why they were all obliged to laugh; they were still laughing when they went up-stairs to go to bed, and while undressing they imitated the saddler's walk, bowed and talked as he did, pronounced the foreign words with his English accent. Magnhild was the most adroit in mimicking; she had observed him the most closely.

At that time she was fifteen, in her sixteenth year.

The next day the girls passed every free moment in the dining-room, which had now been transformed into a work-shop. The saddler told them of a sojourn of several years in America, and of travels in England and Germany; he talked without interrupting his work and with a frequent intermingling of jests. His narratives were accompanied by the incessant tittering of his listeners. They were scarcely aware themselves how they gradually ceased laughing at him and laughed instead at the witty things he said; neither did they observe until later how much they learned from him. He was so greatly missed by the girls when he left that more than half of their time together was occupied in conversation about him; this lasted for many days after he was gone, and never wholly ceased.

There were two things which had made the strongest impression on Magnhild. The first was the English and German songs the saddler had sung for them. She had paid little attention to the text, unless perhaps occasionally; but how the melodies had captivated her!

While singing hymns one Sunday they had first noticed that Skarlie had a fine voice. Thenceforth he was obliged to sing for them constantly. These foreign melodies of his fluttering thither from a fuller, richer life, freer conditions, larger ideas than their own, clung to Magnhild's fancy the entire summer. They were the first pictures which had awakened actual yearning within her breast. It may also be said that for the first time she comprehended what song was. As she was singing her interminable scales one day, before beginning her studies in singing from note, she came to a full realization of the fact that this song without melody was to her like wings beating against a cage: it fluttered up and down against walls, windows, doors, in perpetual and fruitless longing, aye, until at last it sank like the cobwebs, over everything in the room. She could sit alone out of doors with *his* songs. While she was humming them, the forest hues dissolved into one picture; and that she had never discovered before. The density, the vigor in the tree-tops, above and below the tree-tops, over the entire mountain wall, as it were, overwhelmed her; the rushing of the waters of the stream attracted her.

The second thing which had made so deep an impression on her, and which was blended with all the rest, was Skarlie's story of how he had become lame. In America, when he was a young man, he had undertaken to carry a boy twelve years old from a burning house; he had fallen with the boy beneath the ruins. Both were extricated, Skarlie with a crushed limb, the boy unscathed. That boy was now one of the most noted men of America.

It was his lot to be saved, "he was destined to something."

This reminder again! The thought of her own fate had heretofore been shrouded in the wintry mantle of the churchyard, amid frost, weeping, and harsh clanging of bells; it had been something sombre. Now it flitted onward to large cities beyond the seas, among ships, burning houses, songs, and great destinies. From this time forth she dreamed of what she was destined to be as something far distant and great.

CHAPTER III

Late in the autumn all three girls were confirmed. This was such a matter of course to them all that their thoughts were chiefly busied with what they should wear on the day of the ceremony. Magnhild, who had never yet had a garment cut out and made expressly for herself, wondered whether an outfit would now be prepared for her. No. The younger girls were furnished with new silk dresses; an old black dress that had become too tight for the priest's wife was made over for Magnhild.

It was too short both in the waist and in the skirt; but Magnhild scarcely noticed this. She was provided by the governess with a little colored silk neckerchief and a silver brooch; she borrowed the every-day shawl of the mistress of the house; a pair of gloves were loaned her by the governess.

Her inner preparations were not much more extensive than the outer ones.

The day glided tranquilly by without any special emotion. Religious sentiments at the parsonage, as well as elsewhere in the parish, were matters of calm custom. Some tears were shed in church, the priest offered wine and a toast at table, and there was a little talk about what should now be done with Magnhild. This last topic so affected Magnhild that after coffee she went out and sat down alone. She gazed toward the broad rocky path of the land-slide on the verdure-clad mountain, then toward the mighty mass of débris in the midst of the plain, for it was there her home had stood.

Her little brothers and sisters appeared before her, one fair, bright face after another. Her mother came too; and her melancholy eye dwelt lingeringly on Magnhild; even the lines about the mouth were visible. The fine psalm-singing of her mother's gentle voice floated around Magnhild now. There had been sung in church that day one of the hymns her mother used to sing. Once more, too, her father sat on the bench, bowed over the silver work in which he was a master. A book or a newspaper lay at his side; he paused in his work now and then, stole a glance at the page before him, or turned a leaf. His long, delicately cut face inclined occasionally toward the family sitting-room and its inmates. The aged grandparents formed part of the home circle. The grandmother tottered off after some little dainty for Magnhild, while the old grandfather was telling the child a story. The dog, shaggy and gray, lay stretching himself on the hearth. His howl had been the last living sound Magnhild had heard behind her as she was carried downward across the stream. The memory of that awful day once more cast over her childhood the pall of night, thunder, and convulsions of the earth. Covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

The saddler's ballads came floating toward her, bringing a sense of want with their obscure dream images. And there drifted past her a motley throng of those half-comprehended songs and the anecdotes upon which she had often placed false interpretations, until, exhausted by the thoughts, emotions, and yearnings of the day, with an aching void within and a dull feeling of resignation, she fell asleep.

In the evening Rønnaug, with whom they had become acquainted during the confirmation instructions, made her appearance; she was out at service in the neighborhood and had a holiday in honor of the occasion. She brought with her a whole budget of gossip concerning the love affairs of the parish, and the inexperienced girls sat with wondering eyes listening. It was she who caused the youngest girl to tear her new silk dress. Rønnaug could roll down hill with such incomprehensible speed that she was induced to repeat the feat several times, and this finally led the priest's daughter to try her skill.

Hereafter Rønnaug often dropped in of an evening when her work was done. They all took delight in her wild exuberance of spirits. She was as hearty and as plump as a young foal; she could scarcely keep the clothes on her back because she was all the time tearing them to tatters, and she had never-ceasing trouble with her hair, which would keep falling over her face because she never had it done up properly. When she laughed, and that was nearly all the time, she tossed back her head, and through two rows of pearly teeth, white as those of a beast of prey, could be seen far down her throat.

In the autumn Skarlie came again. There was a difference between the reception now given him and the former one. The three girls surrounded his sledge, they carried in his luggage, notwithstanding his laughing resistance, their laughter accompanied him as he stood in the passage taking off his furs.

Questions without number were showered like hail upon him the first time they sat with him in the work-room; the girls had an accumulation of treasured-up doubts and queries about things he had told them on his previous visit, and many other perplexing themes which they considered him able to solve. On very few topics did Skarlie hold the prevailing opinions of the parish, but he had a way of deftly turning the subject with a joke when pressed too closely for his precise views. When alone with Magnhild he expressed himself more freely; at first he did so cautiously, but gradually increased his plainness of speech.

Magnhild had never viewed her surroundings with critical eyes; she would now laugh heartily with Skarlie over the priest's last sermon, or his indolent life; now over the spider-like activity of the mistress of the house, because it was all described so comically. At the "fat repose" of the governess, even at the "yellow, round heads" of her young friends, Magnhild could now laugh; for the humor with which everything was delineated was so surprisingly original; she did not perceive that this jesting was by degrees undermining the very ground she stood upon.

The quite usual amusement in the country of teasing a young girl about being in love was, meanwhile, directed rather unexpectedly toward Magnhild; she was called "the saddler's wife," because she passed so much time in his society. This reached Skarlie's ears and immediately he too began to call her his "wife," his "tall wife," his "blonde wife," his "very young wife."

The following summer the priest's daughters went to the city for increased opportunities of culture. The governess remained "for the present" at the parsonage.

The saddler came once more in the autumn to complete his work. Magnhild was now, of course, more frequently alone with him than before. He was merrier than ever. One joke that was often repeated by him was about journeying round the world with "his young wife." They met with an immense number of traveling adventures, and they saw many remarkable sights, all of which were so accurately described by Skarlie that they attained the value of actual experiences. But the most ludicrous picture he drew represented the two tramping through the country: Skarlie limping on before with a traveling satchel, Magnhild following in a waterproof cloak and with an umbrella in her hand, grumbling at the heat, dust, and thirst, weary and heartily disgusted with him. Then, having reached their journey's end, they rested in Skarlie's little home in the little town, where Magnhild had everything her own way and lived like a princess all the rest of her life.

It would be impossible to describe the countenance of the priest when the saddler appeared in his study one evening, and taking a seat in front of him asked, after a few cordial, pleasant remarks by way of introduction, whether the priest would object to his marrying Magnhild. The priest was lying on the sofa smoking; his pipe dropped from his mouth, his hand sank with it, his fat face relaxed until it resembled a dough-like mass, in which the eyes peeped forth as wholly devoid of thought as two raisins; suddenly he gave a start that set a quantity of springs beneath him to creaking and grating, and the book that lay upside down on his knee fell. The saddler picked up the volume smiling, and turned over the leaves. The priest had risen to his feet.

"What does Magnhild have to say to this?" asked he.

The saddler looked up with a smile.

"Of course I should not have asked if she were not likely to give her consent," said he.

The priest put his pipe in his mouth, and strode up and down the floor, puffing away. Gradually he grew calmer, and without slackening his speed, he observed: —

"To be sure I do not know what is to become of the girl."

Once more the saddler raised his eyes from the book whose leaves he was turning over, and now laying it aside, he remarked: —

"It is, you know, rather a sort of adoption than a marriage. Down yonder at my house she can develop into whatever she pleases."

The priest looked at him, took a puff at his pipe, paced the floor, and puffed again.

"Aye, to be sure! You are, I believe, a wealthy man?"

"Well, if not precisely wealthy, I am sufficiently well provided to get married."

Here Skarlie laughed.

But there was something in his laugh, something which did not quite please the priest. Still less did he like the tone of indifference with which Skarlie seemed to treat the whole affair. Least of all did he like being so taken by surprise.

"I must speak with my wife about this," said he, and groaned. "That I must," he added decidedly, "and with Magnhild," came as an afterthought.

"Certainly," said the other, as he rose to take leave.

A little while later, the priest's wife was sitting where the saddler had sat. Both hands lay idly open on her lap, while her eyes followed her spouse as he steamed back and forth.

"Well, what do you think?" he urged, pausing in front of her.

Receiving no reply, he moved on again.

"He is far too old," she finally said.

"And surely very sly," added the priest, and then pausing again in front of his wife, he whispered: "No one really knows where he comes from, or why he chooses to settle here. He might have a fine workshop in a large city – wealthy, and a smart dog!"

The priest did not use the choicest language in his daily discourse.

"To think she should allow herself to be so beguiled!" whispered the wife.

"Beguiled! Just the word – beguiled!" repeated the priest, snapping his fingers. "Beguiled!" and off he went in a cloud of smoke.

"I am so sorry for her," remarked the wife, and the words were accompanied by a few tears.

This touched the priest, and he said: "See here, mother, we will talk with her, both of us!" then strode heavily on again.

Ere long Magnhild stood within the precincts of the study, wondering what could be wanted of her. The priest was the first to speak: —

"Is it really true, Magnhild, that you have agreed to be the wife of this fellow, the saddler?"

The priest often used the general term "fellow" instead of a proper name.

Magnhild's face became suffused with blushes; in her whole life she could never have been so red before. Both the priest and his wife interpreted this as a confession.

"Why do you not come to us with such things?" asked the priest, in a vexed tone.

"It is very strange you should act so, Magnhild," said the mistress of the house, – and she wept. Magnhild was simply appalled.

"Do you really mean to have him?" asked the priest, pausing resolutely in front of her.

Now Magnhild had never been accustomed to being addressed in a confidential tone. When questioned thus closely she had not the courage to give a frank statement of all that had occurred between her and Skarlie, telling, how this talk of marriage had commenced as a jest, and that although later she had had a misgiving that it was becoming serious, it was so continually blended anew with jests that she had not given herself the trouble to protest against it. How could she, with the priest standing thus before her, enter on so long a story? And so instead she burst into tears.

Well now, the priest did not mean to torment her. What was done could not be undone. He was very sorry for her, and in the goodness of his heart merely wanted to help her lay a solid foundation to her choice. Skarlie was a man of considerable means, he said, and she a poor girl; she certainly could not expect a better match, so far as that went. True, Skarlie was old; but then he had himself said that he designed rather a sort of adoption than a marriage; his only object was Magnhild's happiness.

But all this was more than Magnhild could bear to listen to, and so she rushed from the room. In the passage she fell to crying as though her heart would break; she was obliged to go up to the dark garret in order to avoid attracting attention, and there her grief gradually assumed definite shape. It was *not* because the saddler wanted her that she was in such distress; it was because the priest and his wife did not want her.

This was the interpretation she had put on their words.

When the governess was informed of the affair she differed entirely from the mistress of the house, who could not comprehend Magnhild, for the governess could comprehend the young girl perfectly. Skarlie was a man of fine mind and very witty. He was rich, jovial, rather homely, to be sure, but that was not of such great consequence down at the Point. And she adopted this tone in talking with Magnhild when she finally succeeded in getting hold of her. Magnhild was red with weeping, and burst into a fresh flood of tears; yet not a word did she say.

Somewhat curtly the priest now informed the saddler that as the matter was settled he might as well proceed with the preparations. The saddler desired this himself; moreover, he was now quite through with his work. Eagerly as he strove for an opportunity to speak with Magnhild, he even failed to catch a glimpse of her. He was therefore forced to take his departure without having an interview with her.

During the days which followed Magnhild neither appeared in the sitting-room nor at table. No one attempted to seek her and talk with her; the governess deemed it quite natural that in the face of so serious a step the young girl should wish to be alone.

One day the members of the household were surprised by the arrival through the mail of a letter and large package for Magnhild. The letter read as follows: —

In order to complete our delightful joke, dear Magnhild, I came down here. My house has been painted this summer, within and without, a joke which now almost looks like earnest – does it not?

Beds, household furniture, bedding, etc., are articles that I deal in myself, so these I can purchase from my own stores. When I think of the object I have in view, this becomes the most delightful business transaction I have ever entered into.

Do you remember how we laughed the time I took your measure in order to prove accurately how much too short in the waist your dress was, how much too wide across the shoulders, and how much too short in the skirt? Just by chance I took a note of your exact measurement, and according to it I am now having made: —

1 black silk dress (Lyons taffeta).

1 brown (cashmere).

1 blue (of some light woolen material).

As I have always told you, blue is the most becoming color that you can wear.

Such orders cannot be executed without some delay; but the articles shall be sent as speedily as possible.

For other garments that you may perhaps require I telegraphed to Bergen immediately upon my arrival here; such things can be obtained there ready-made. You will most likely receive them by the same mail which brings you this letter.

As you see (and shall further continue to see), there are sundry jokes connected with this getting married. For instance, I made my will to-day, and in it designated you as my heiress.

With most respectful greetings to the priest and his honored family, I now subscribe myself

Your most obedient jester,

Skarlie.

Magnhild had taken refuge in the garret, with both the letter and the large package. She had plunged forthwith into the letter, and emerging from its perusal perplexed and frightened, she tore open the package and found many full suits of everything pertaining to feminine under garments. She scattered them all around her, blushing crimson, angry, ashamed. Then she sat down and wept aloud.

Now she had courage to speak! She sprang down-stairs to the priest's wife, and throwing her arms about her neck, whispered, "Forgive me!" thrust the letter into her hand, and disappeared.

The priest's wife did not understand Magnhild's "Forgive me!" but she saw that the young girl was crying and in great excitement. She took the letter and read it. It was peculiar in form, she thought; yet its meaning was plain enough: it indicated a sensible, elderly man's prudent forethought, and deserved credit. An old housewife and mother could not be otherwise than pleased with this, and she carried the letter to the priest. It impressed him in the same way; and he began to think the girl might be happy with this singular man. The mistress of the house searched everywhere for Magnhild, in order to tell her that both the priest and herself were of the opinion that Skarlie's conduct promised well. She learned that Magnhild was in the garret, and so throwing a shawl round her (for it was cold) she went up-stairs. She met the governess on the way and took her with her. Magnhild was not visible; they saw only the articles of clothing strewn over floor, chests, and trunks. They collected these together, discussed them, examined them, and pronounced them admirable. They well knew that such a gift was calculated to embarrass a young girl; but then Skarlie was an elderly man whose privilege it was to take things in a fatherly way. This they told Magnhild when they finally found her. And she had no longer the courage to be confidential. This was because the priest's wife, sustained by the governess, spoke what they deemed sensible words to her. They told her that she must not be proud; she must remember that she was a poor girl who had neither relatives nor future of her own. In the days which followed, Magnhild fought a hard fight in secret. But she lacked energy for action. Where could she have gained it? Where could she go since the priest's family had so evidently grown tired of her?

A little later there arrived a chest containing her dresses and many other articles. Magnhild allowed it to stand untouched, but the governess, who so well understood this bashfulness, attended to having it opened. She and the priest's wife drew forth the contents piece by piece, and not long afterwards Magnhild was trying on dress after dress before the large mirror in the family sitting-room. The doors were locked, the priest's wife and the governess full of zeal. Finally they came to the black silk dress, and Magnhild gradually ceased to be indifferent. She felt a blushing gratification in beholding in the glass her own form encompassed in beautiful fine material. She discovered herself, as it were, point by point. If it chanced to be the face, she had not before this day so fully observed that those she beheld at her side were without distinct outline, while hers – Her vision had been rendered keen by the sense awakened, in the twinkling of an eye, by a handsome, well-fitting garment.

This picture of herself floated before her for many days. Fearing to disturb it she avoided the mirror. Once more she became absorbed in the old dreams, those which bore her across the sea to something strange and great.

But the marriage? At such moments she thrust it from her as though it were a steamer's plank, to be drawn ashore after serving its purpose. How was this possible? Aye, how many times in the years that followed did she not pause and reflect! But it always remained alike incomprehensible to her.

She could neither be persuaded to put on one of the new dresses the day Skarlie came, nor to go out to meet him; on the contrary, she hid herself. Later, and as by chance, she made her appearance. With unvarying consistency she treated both the marriage and Skarlie as though neither in the least concerned her.

Skarlie was in high spirits; the fact was both the priest and his wife took pains to make amends for Magnhild's lack of courtesy, and he reciprocated in the most winning manner. The governess declared him to be decidedly amiable.

The next evening Magnhild sat in the dining-room arranging some articles belonging to the industrial school that must now be sent back. She was alone, and Skarlie entered softly and smiling, and slowly closing the door behind him took a seat at her side. He talked for some time on indifferent subjects, so that she began to breathe freely again; she even ventured at last to look down on him as he sat bent over smoking. Her eyes rested on the bald head, the bushy brows, and the extreme end of the snub-nose, then on his enormous hands and their very singular-looking nails; the latter were deeply set in the flesh, which everywhere, therefore in front also, encompassed them like a thick round frame. Under the nails there was dirt, a fact to which the governess, who had herself very pretty hands, had once called the attention of her pupils as a deadly sin. Magnhild looked at the reddish, bristling hair which completely covered these hands. Skarlie had been silent for a little while, but as if he felt that he was being scrutinized, he drew himself up, and with a smile extended to her one of his objectionable hands.

"Aye, aye, Magnhild!" said he, laying it on both of hers. This gave her a shock, and in a moment she was like one paralyzed. She could not stir, could not grasp a single thought except that she was in the clutches of a great lobster. His head drew nearer, the eyes too were those of a lobster; they stung. This she had never before observed, and she sprang hastily to her feet. He retained his seat. Without looking back Magnhild began to busy herself where she stood with another lot of the industrial work. Therefore she did not leave the room, but a little while later Skarlie did.

The governess decked her in her bridal finery the next day; the mistress of the house too came to look on. This gave her great pleasure, she said. Magnhild let everything be done for her without stirring, without uttering a word and without shedding a tear.

It was the same in the sitting-room. She was motionless. A feeling akin to defiance had taken possession of her. The men-servants and the house-maids sat and stood by the kitchen door, which was ajar, and just inside of it; Magnhild saw, too, the heads of little children. The deacon started the singing as the priest came down-stairs.

Magnhild did not look at the bridegroom. The priest touched on tender chords; his wife shed tears, and so too did the governess; but Magnhild's icy coldness chilled both him and them. The discourse was brief and dealt chiefly in mere generalities. It was followed by congratulations, and a painful silence; even the saddler had lost his smile. It was a relief when they were summoned to dinner.

During the repast the priest, desiring to propose a toast, began: "Dear Magnhild! I trust you have no fault to find with us," – he got no farther, for here Magnhild burst into such convulsive weeping that the priest's wife, the governess, aye, even the priest himself became deeply affected, and there arose a long and painful silence. Finally, however, the priest managed to add: "Think of us!" But these words were followed by the same heart-rending weeping as before, so that no toast was drunk. What this really signified was not clear to any of those present, unless perhaps to the bridegroom; and he said nothing.

While they were at dessert one of the young girls approached the bride and whispered a few words in her ear. Rønnaug was outside and wished to say farewell; she had been waiting ever since the company had gone to table and could stay no longer. Rønnaug was standing on the back porch, benumbed with the cold; she did not wish to intrude, she said. She examined the bride's dress, thought it extraordinarily fine, and drawing off one mitten stroked it with the back of her hand.

"Yes, I dare say he is rich," said she, "but if they had given me a gown of silver I would not" – and she added a few words which cannot be repeated here, and for which Magnhild, her face flaming, administered a good sound box on the ear. The kerchief softened the blow somewhat, but it was seriously meant.

Magnhild returned to the dining-room and sat down, not in her place at the bridegroom's side, but on a chair by the window; she did not wish anything more, she said. It was of no avail that she was entreated to sit with the others at least until they had finished; she said she could not.

The departure took place shortly after coffee was served. An incident had meanwhile occurred which suppressed all emotion, of whatever nature it might be. It was that the bridegroom suddenly appeared, looking like a shaggy beast, carrying a fur cape, fur boots, a short coat, a hood, fur gloves, and a muff. He let them fall in front of Magnhild, saying with dry earnestness, —

"All these I lay at your feet!"

There burst forth a peal of laughter in which even Magnhild was forced to join. The whole bridal party gathered about the things which were spread over the carpet, and every one was loud in praise. It was evidently not displeasing to Magnhild either, in the face of a winter journey, — for which she had been promised the loan of a variety of wraps, — to have such presents lavished upon her.

In a few moments more Magnhild was attired in her blue dress, and she was enough of a child or rather woman to be diverted by the change. Shortly afterwards the new traveling wraps were donned, piece by piece, amid the liveliest interest of all, which reached its height when Magnhild was drawn before the mirror to see for herself how she looked. The horse had been driven round, and Skarlie just now came into the room, also dressed for traveling, and wearing a dog-skin coat, deer-skin shoes and leggings, and a flat fur cap. He was nearly as broad as he was long, and in order to raise a laugh, he limped up to the mirror, and, with dry humor in his face, took his stand beside Magnhild. There followed a burst of laughter, in which even Magnhild herself joined — but only to become at once entirely mute again. Her silence still hung over the parting. Not until the parsonage was left behind did she become again dissolved in tears.

Her eyes wandered listlessly over the snow-covered heap of ruins on the site of her childhood's home; it seemed as though there were that within herself which was shrouded in snow and desolation.

The weather was cold. The valley grew narrower, the road led through a dense wood. One solitary star was visible.

Skarlie had been cutting figures in the snow with his whip; he now pointed the latter toward the star and began to hum, finally to sing. The melody he had chosen was that of one of the ballads of the Scottish highlands. Like a melancholy bird, it flitted from one snow-laden fir-tree to another. Magnhild inquired its meaning, and this proved to be in harmony with a journey through the depths of a forest. Skarlie talked further about Scotland, its history, his sojourn there.

Once started, he continued, and gradually broke into such merry anecdotes that Magnhild was astonished when they stopped to rest; astonished that she had been able to laugh, and that they had driven nearly fourteen miles.

Skarlie helped her out of the sledge and ushered her into the inn, but he himself went directly out again to feed the horse.

A stylish looking young lady sat by the hearth in the guest-room warming herself, scattered over the benches around were her traveling-wraps; they were of such fine material and costly fur that Magnhild grew curious and felt obliged to touch them. The traveling-suit the lady wore, so far as material and style was concerned, made the same impression on Magnhild as she might have gained from a zoölogical specimen from another quarter of the globe. The lady's face possessed youth and a gentle melancholy; she was fair and had languishing eyes and a slightly-curved nose. Her hair, too, was done up in an unfamiliar style. Pacing the floor was a slender young man; his traveling boots stood by the hearth and his feet were cased in small morocco slippers, lined with fur. His movements were lithe and graceful.

"Are you Skarlie's young wife?" inquired the hostess, quite an old woman, who had placed a chair by the hearth for Magnhild. Before Magnhild could reply, Skarlie came in with some things from the sledge. The bald head, half protruding from the shaggy furs, the deer-skin shoes, sprawling like monstrous roots over the floor, attracted the wondering gaze of the young lady.

"Is this your wife?" repeated the hostess.

"Yes, this is my wife," was the cheerful reply, as Skarlie limped forward.

The young man fixed his eyes on Magnhild. She felt herself growing fiery red beneath his gaze. There was an expression entirely new to her in his face. Was it scorn? The lady, too, now looked at her, and at the same moment the hostess begged Magnhild to take a seat by the fire. But the latter preferred remaining in the dark, on a bench in the farthest corner.

It was fully ten o'clock when the Point was reached, but every light there had been extinguished, even in the house in front of which the sledge stopped. An old woman, awakened by the jingling of the bells, came to the street door, opened it and looked out, then drew back and struck a light. She met Magnhild in the passage, cast the light on her and said finally, "I bid you welcome."

A strong smell of leather filled the passage; for the work-room and shop were to the left. The loathsome odor prevented Magnhild from replying. They entered a room to the right. Here Magnhild hastily removed her traveling-wraps; – she felt faint. Without casting a glance about her, or speaking to the woman who was watching her from behind the light, she then crossed the floor and opened a door she had espied on coming into the room. She first held the light in, then stepped in herself and closed the door after her. The woman heard a rumbling within and went to the door. There she discovered that one of the beds was being moved. Directly afterward Magnhild reappeared with the candle. The light revealed a flushed face. She looked resolute.

She now told the woman she had no need of her services.

The saddler did not come in for some time; for he had been seeing to the horse, which he had borrowed for the journey. The light was still on the table. There was no one up.

CHAPTER IV

Two years had passed since that evening, and the greater part of a third.

Magnhild was quite as thoroughly accustomed to the new daily routine as she had been to the old.

The priest visited her three or four times a year; he slept in the room over the workshop usually occupied by Skarlie when he was at home. During the day the priest visited at the captain's, or the custom-house officer's, or at the home of the chief of police. His coming was called the "priestly visitation."

There was chess-playing in the day-time and cards in the evening. The priest's wife and young lady daughters had also been seen at the Point a few times. In the lading-town there was scarcely any one with whom Magnhild associated.

Skarlie and she had taken one trip to Bergen. Whatever might there have happened or not happened, they never undertook another, either to Bergen or elsewhere.

Skarlie was more frequently absent than at home; he was engaged in speculations; the workshop was pretty much abandoned, though the store was still kept open. A short time after her arrival, Magnhild had received an invitation from the school committee – most likely through Skarlie's solicitation – to become the head of the industrial school. Henceforth she passed an hour or two every day at the public school; moreover, she gave private instructions to young girls who were grown up. Her time was employed in walking, singing, and a little sewing; she did very little reading, indeed. It was tedious to her.

Directly after she came there, Rønnaug had appeared at the Point, and had hired out at the nearest "skyds" (post-station), in order to earn money speedily for the purchase of a ticket to America. She was determined to live no longer the life of an outcast here, she said.

Magnhild took charge of Rønnaug's money for her, and was alarmed to note how rapidly it increased, for she had her own thoughts about the matter. Now the ticket was bought, Magnhild would be entirely alone.

Many were the thoughts called forth by the fact that the journey across the sea to new and perhaps great experiences should be so easy for one person and not for another.

One morning after a sleepless night, Magnhild took her accustomed walk to the wharf to watch the steamer come in. She saw the usual number of commercial travelers step ashore; the usual number of trunks carried after them; but this day she also observed a pale man, with long, soft hair and large eyes, walking around a box which he finally succeeded in having lifted on a wagon. "Be careful! Be careful!" he repeated again and again. "There must be a piano in the box," thought Magnhild.

After Magnhild had been to school, she saw the same pale man, with the box behind him, standing before the door of her house. He was accompanied by the landlord of one of the hotels. Skarlie had fitted up the rooms above the sitting-room and bed-chamber for the accommodation of travelers when the hotels were full. The pale stranger was an invalid who wished to live quietly.

Magnhild had not thought of letting the rooms to permanent guests and thus assuming a certain responsibility. She stood irresolute. The stranger now drew nearer to her. Such eyes she had never beheld, nor so refined and spiritual a face. With strange power of fascination those wondrous eyes were fixed on her. There was, as it were, two expressions combined in the gaze that held her captive, one behind the other. Magnhild was unable to fathom this accurately; but in the effort to do so she put her forefinger in her mouth, and became so absorbed in thought that she forgot to reply.

Now the stranger's countenance changed; it grew observant. Magnhild felt this, roused herself, blushed, gave some answer and walked away. What did she say? Was it "Yes" or "No"? The landlord followed her. She had said "Yes!" She was obliged to go up-stairs and see whether everything was in readiness for a guest; she did not rely very implicitly on her own habits of order.

There was great confusion when the piano was carried up; it took time, too, to move the bed, sofa, and other articles of furniture to make room for the instrument. But all this came to an end at last, and quiet once more prevailed. The pale stranger must be tired. Soon there was not a step, not a sound, overhead.

There is a difference between the silence which is full and that which is empty.

Magnhild dared not stir. She waited, listened. Would the tones of the piano soon fall upon her ear? The stranger was a composer, so the landlord had said, and Magnhild thought, too, she had read his name in the newspaper. How would it be when such a person played? Surely it would seem as though miracles were being wrought. At all events, something would doubtless ring into her poor life which would long give forth resonance. She needed the revelation of a commanding spirit. Her gaze wandered over the flowers which decorated her window, and on which the sun was now playing; her eyes sought the "Caravan in the Desert," which hung framed and glass covered by the door, and which suddenly seemed to her so animated, so full of beautifully arranged groups and forms. With ear for the twittering of the birds in the opposite neighbor's garden and the sporting of the magpies farther off in the fields, she sat in blissful content and waited.

Through her content there darted the question, "Will Skarlie be pleased with what you have done? Is there not danger of injury to the new sofa and the bed too? The stranger is an invalid, no one can tell" – She sprang to her feet, sought pen, ink, and paper, and for the first time in her life wrote a letter to Skarlie. It took her more than an hour to complete it. This is what she wrote: —

I have let the rooms over the sitting-room and bed-chamber to a sick man who plays the piano. The price is left to you.

I have had one of the new sofas (the hair-cloth) carried up-stairs and one of the spring beds. He wants to be comfortable. Perhaps I have not done right.

Magnhild.

She had crossed out the words: "Now I shall have an opportunity to hear some music." The heading of the letter had caused her some trouble; she finally decided to use none. "Your wife," she had written above the signature, but had drawn her pen through it. Thus fashioned, the letter was copied and sent. She felt easier after this, and again sat still and waited. She saw the stranger's dinner carried up to him; she ate a little herself and fell asleep, – she had scarcely had any sleep the previous night.

She awoke; there was yet no sounds of music above. Again she fell asleep, and dreamed that the distance between the mountain peaks had been spanned by a bridge. She told herself that this was the bridge at Cologne, a lithograph of which hung on the wall near the bed-chamber. Nevertheless it extended across the valley from one lofty mountain to the other, supported by trestle-work from the depths below. The longer she gazed the finer, more richly-colored the bridge became; for lo! it was woven of rainbow threads, and was transparent and radiant, all the way up to the straight line from crest to crest. But crosswise above this, the distance was spanned by another bridge. Both bridges began now to vibrate in slow two-fourths time, and immediately the entire valley was transformed into a sea of light, in which there was an intermingled play of all the prismatic hues; but the bridges had vanished. Nor were the mountains any longer visible, and the dissolving colors filled all conceivable space. How great was this? How far could she see? She grew positively alarmed at the infinity of space about her and awoke; – there was music overhead. In front of the house stood a crowd of people, silently gazing at the upper window.

Magnhild did not stir. The tones flowed forth with extreme richness; there was a bright, gentle grace over the music. Magnhild sat listening until it seemed as though these melodious tones were being showered down upon head, hands, and lap. A benediction was being bestowed upon her humble home, the world of tears within was filled with light. She pushed her chair farther back into the corner, and as she sat there she felt that she had been found out by the all-bountiful Providence who

had ordered her destiny. The music was the result of a knowledge she did not possess, but it appealed to a passion awakened by it within her soul. She stretched out her arms, drew them in again, and burst into tears.

Long after the music had ceased, – the crowd was gone, the musician still, – Magnhild sat motionless. Life had meaning; she, too, might gain access to a rich world of beauty. As there was now song within, so one day there should be singing around about her. When she came to undress for the night she required both sitting-room and bed-chamber for the purpose, and more than half an hour; for the first time in her life she laid down to rest with a feeling that she had something to rise for in the morning. She listened to the footsteps of her guest above; they were lighter than those of other people; his contact with the furniture, too, was cautious. His eyes, with their kindly glow of good-will, and the fathomless depths beyond this, were the last objects she saw distinctly.

Indescribable days followed. Magnhild went regularly to her lessons, but lost no time in getting home again, where she was received by music and found the house surrounded by listeners. She scarcely went out again the rest of the day. Either her guest was at home and she was waiting for him to play, or he had gone out for a walk, and she was watching for his return. When he greeted her in passing she blushed and drew back. If he came into her room to ask for anything, there ran a thrill through her the moment she heard the approach of his footsteps; she became confused and scarcely comprehended his words when he stood before her. She had, perhaps, not exchanged ten words with him in as many days, but she already knew his most trifling habit and peculiarity of dress. She noticed whether his soft brown hair was brushed behind his ears, or whether it had fallen forward; whether his gray hat was pushed back, or whether it was drawn down over his forehead; whether he wore gloves or not; whether he had a shawl thrown over his shoulders or not. And how was it in regard to herself? Two new summer dresses had been ordered by her, and she was now wearing one of them. She had also purchased a new hat.

She believed that in music lay her vocation; but she felt no inclination to make any kind of a beginning. There was enough to satisfy her in her guest's playing, in his very proximity.

Day by day she developed in budding fullness of thought; her dream-life had prepared her for this; but music was the atmosphere that was essential to her existence: she knew it now. She did not realize that the refined nature of this man of genius, spiritualized and exalted by ill-health, was something new, delightful, thought-inspiring to her; she gave music alone the credit for the pleasure he instilled into her life.

At school she took an interest in each scholar she had never experienced before; she even fell into the habit of chatting with the sailor's wife who did the work of her house. There daily unfolded a new blossom within her soul; she was as meek as a woman in the transition period, which she had never known. Books she had heard read aloud, or read herself at the parsonage, rose up before her as something new. Forms she had not noticed before stood out in bold relief, – they became invested with flesh, blood, and motion. Incidents in real life, as well as in books, floated past like a cloud, suddenly became dissolved and gave distinct pictures. She awoke, as an Oriental maiden is awakened, when her time comes, by song beneath her window and by the gleam of a turban.

CHAPTER V

One morning as Magnhild, after making her toilet, went into the sitting-room, humming softly to herself and in joyous mood, to open the window facing the street, she saw a lady standing at the open window of the house opposite.

It was a low cottage, surrounded by a garden, and belonged to a government officer who had moved away. Vines were trained about the windows of the house partially covering them, and the lady was engaged in arranging one of the sprays that was in the way. Her head was encircled with ringlets, which were rather black than brown. Her eyes sparkled, her brow was low but broad, her eyebrows were straight, her nose was also straight but quite large and round, her lips were full, her head was so beautifully poised on her shoulders that Magnhild could not help noticing it. The open sleeves had fallen back during the work with the vines, displaying her arms. Magnhild was unable to withdraw her eyes. When the lady perceived Magnhild, she nodded to her and smiled.

Magnhild became embarrassed, and drew back.

Just then a child approached the lady, who stooped and kissed it. The child also had ringlets, but they were fair; the face was the mother's, and yet it was not the mother's, it was the coloring which misled, for the child was blonde. The little one climbed upon a chair and looked out. The mother caught hold of the vine again, but kept her eyes fixed on Magnhild, and her expression was a most singular one. Magnhild put on her hat; it was time for her to go to school; but that look caused her to go out of the back door and return by the same way, when she came home an hour later.

He was playing. Magnhild paused for a while in her little garden and hearkened, until finally she felt that she must go in to see what effect this music had upon the beautiful lady. She went into her kitchen and then cautiously entered her sitting-room, shielding herself from observation. No; there was no beautiful lady at the window opposite. A sense of relief passed over Magnhild, and she went forward. She was obliged to move some plants into the sunshine, one of her daily duties, but she came very near dropping the flowerpot into the street, for as she held it in her hands the lady's head was thrust into the open window.

"Do not be frightened!" was the laughing greeting, uttered in tones of coaxing entreaty for pardon, that surpassed in sweetness anything of the kind Magnhild had ever heard.

"You will allow me to come in; will you not?" And before Magnhild could answer, the lady was already entering the house.

The next moment she stood face to face with Magnhild, tall and beautiful. An unknown perfume hovered about her as she flitted through the room, now speaking of the lithographs on the wall, now of the valley, the mountains, or the customs of the people. The voice, the perfume, the walk, the eyes, indeed the very material and fashion of her dress, especially its bold intermingling of colors, took captive the senses. From the instant she entered the room it belonged to her; if she smelled a flower, or made an observation concerning it, forthwith that flower blossomed anew; for what her eyes rested upon attained precisely the value she gave it.

Steps were heard above. The lady paused. Magnhild blushed. Then the lady smiled, and Magnhild hastened to remark: "That is a lodger – who" —

"Yes, I know; he met me last evening at the wharf."

Magnhild opened her eyes very wide. The lady drew nearer.

"My husband and he are very good friends," said she.

She turned away humming, and cast a glance at the clock in the corner between the bed-room wall and the window.

"Why, is it so late by your time here?" She drew out her own watch. "We are to walk to-day at eleven o'clock. You must go with us; will you not? You can show us the prettiest places in the wood behind the church and up the mountain slopes."

Magnhild promptly answered, "Yes."

"Listen: do you know what? I will run up-stairs and say that you are going with us, and then we will go at once – at once!"

She gave Magnhild's hand a gentle pressure, opened the door and sped swiftly up the stairs. Magnhild remained behind – and she was very pale.

There was a whirling, a raging within, a fall. But there was no explosion. On the contrary, everything became so empty, so still. A few creaking steps above, then not another sound.

Magnhild must have stood motionless for a long time. She heard some one take hold of the door-knob at last, and involuntarily she pressed both hands to her heart. Then she felt an impulse to fly; but the little fair curly head of the child, with its innocent, earnest eyes, now appeared in the opening of the door.

"Is mamma here?" the little one asked, cautiously.

"She is up-stairs," replied Magnhild, and the sound of her own voice, the very purport of the words she uttered, caused the tears to rise in her eyes and compelled her to turn her face away.

The child had drawn back its head and closed the door. Magnhild had no time to become clear in her own mind about what had occurred; for the child speedily came down-stairs again and into her room.

"Mamma is coming; she said I must wait here. Why are you crying?" But Magnhild was not crying now. She made no reply, however, to the child, who presently exclaimed: "Now mamma is coming."

Magnhild heard the lady's step on the stair, and escaped into her bedroom. She heard the interchange of words between mother and child in the adjoining room, and then to her consternation the bedroom door was opened; the lady came in. There was not the slightest trace of guilt in her eyes: they diffused happiness, warmth, candor through the whole chamber. But when her gaze met Magnhild's the expression changed, causing Magnhild to drop her eyes in confusion.

The lady advanced farther into the room. She placed one hand on Magnhild's waist, the other on her shoulder. Magnhild was forced to raise her eyes once more and met a grieved smile. This smile was also so kind, so firm, and therefore so persuasive, that Magnhild permitted herself to be drawn forward, and presently she was kissed – softly at first, as though she were merely fanned by a gentle breath, while that unknown perfume which always accompanied the lady encompassed them both, and the rustle of the silk dress was like a low whisper; then vehemently, while the lady's bosom heaved and her breath was deeply drawn as from some life-sorrow.

After this, utter silence and then a whispered: "Come now!" She went on in advance, leading Magnhild by the hand. Magnhild was a mere child in experience. With contending emotions she entered the pretty little cottage occupied by the lady, and was soon standing in the midst of open trunks and a wardrobe scattered through two rooms.

The lady began a search in one of the trunks, from which she rose with a white lace neckerchief in her hand, saying: "This will suit you better than the one you have on, for that is not at all becoming," and taking off the one Magnhild wore, she tied on the other in a graceful bow, and Magnhild felt herself that it harmonized well with her red dress.

"But how have you your hair? You have an oval face and your hair done up in that way? No" – and before Magnhild could offer any resistance she was pressed down into a chair. "Now I shall" – and the lady commenced undoing the hair. Magnhild started up, fiery red and frightened, and said something which was met with a firm: "Certainly not!"

It seemed as though a strong will emanated from the lady's words, arms, fingers. Magnhild's hair was unfastened, spread out, brushed, then drawn loosely over the head and done up in a low knot.

"Now see!" and the mirror was held up before Magnhild.

All this increased the young woman's embarrassment to such a degree that she scarcely realized whose was the image in the glass. The elegant lady standing in front of her, the delicate perfume,

the child at her knee who with its earnest eyes fixed on her said, "Now you are pretty!" – and the guest at the opposite window who at this moment looked down and smiled. Magnhild started up, and was about to make her escape, but the lady only threw her arms around her and drew her farther into the room.

"Pray, do not be so bashful! We are going to have such a nice time together;" and once more her attention was full of that sweetness the like of which Magnhild had never known. "Run over now after your hat and we will start!"

Magnhild did as she was bid. But no sooner was she alone than a sense of oppression, a troubled anxiety, wrung her heart, and the lady seemed detestable, officious; even her kindness was distorted into a lack of moderation; Magnhild failed to find the exact word to express what distressed her.

"Well? Are you not coming?"

These words were uttered by the lady, who in a jaunty hat, with waving plume, beamed in through the window. She tossed back her curls, and drew on her gloves. "That hat becomes you very well indeed," said she. "Come now!"

And Magnhild obeyed.

The little girl attached herself to Magnhild.

"I am going with you," said she.

Magnhild failed to notice this, because she had just heard steps on the stairs. Tande, the composer, was coming to join them.

"How your hand trembles!" cried the little one.

A hasty glance from the lady sent the hot blood coursing up to Magnhild's neck, cheeks, temples – yet another from Tande, who stood on the door-steps, not wholly free from embarrassment, and who now bowed.

"Are we going up in the wood?" asked the little girl, clinging tightly to Magnhild's hand.

"Yes," replied the lady; "is there not a path across the fields behind the house?"

"Yes, there is."

"Then let us go that way."

They went into the house again, and passed out of the back door, through the garden, across the fields. The wood lay to the left of the church, and entirely covered the plain and the tower mountain slopes. Magnhild and the child walked on in advance; the lady and Tande followed.

"What is your name?" asked the little girl.

"Magnhild."

"How funny, for my name is Magda, and that is almost the same." Presently she said: "Have you ever seen papa in uniform?"

No, Magnhild never had.

"He is coming here soon, papa is, and I will ask him to put it on."

The little girl continued to prattle about her papa, whom she evidently loved beyond all else upon earth. Sometimes Magnhild heard what she was saying, sometimes she did not hear. The pair walking behind spoke so low that Magnhild could not distinguish a single word they were saying although they were quite near. Once she gave a hasty glance back and observed that the lady's expression was troubled, Tande's grave.

They reached the wood.

"Just see! here at the very edge of the wood is the most charming spot in the world!" exclaimed the lady, and now she was radiant again, as though she had never known other than the most jubilant mood. "Let us sit down here!" and as she spoke she threw herself down with a little burst of delight and a laugh. Tande seated himself slowly and at a little distance, Magnhild and the child took their seats opposite the pair.

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