Barr Amelia E.

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I.
## JAN'S WEDDING

"Eastward, afar, the coasts of men were seen
Dim, shadowy, and spectral; like a still
Broad land of spirits lay the vacant sea
Beneath the silent heavens – here and there,
Perchance, a vessel skimmed the watery waste,
Like a white-winged sea-bird, but it moved
Too pale and small beneath the vail of space.
There, too, went forth the sun
Like a white angel, going down to visit
The silent, ice-washed cloisters of the Pole."

*– Richter's "Titan."*

More than fifty years ago this thing happened: Jan Vedder was betrothed to Margaret Fae. It was at the beginning of the Shetland summer, that short interval of inexpressible beauty, when the amber sunshine lingers low in the violet skies from week to week; and the throstle and the lark sing at midnight, and the whole land has an air of enchantment, mystic, wonderful, and

far off.

In the town of Lerwick all was still, though it was but nine o'clock; for the men were at the ling-fishing, and the narrow flagged street and small quays were quite deserted. Only at the public fountain there was a little crowd of women and girls, and they sat around its broad margin, with their water pitchers and their knitting, laughing and chatting in the dreamlike light.

"Well, and so Margaret Fae marries at last; she, too, marries, like the rest of the world."

"Yes, and why not?"

"As every one knows, it is easier to begin that coil than to end it; and no one has ever thought that Margaret would marry Jan – he that is so often at the dance, and so seldom at the kirk."

"Yes, and it is said that he is not much of a man. Magnus Yool can wag him here; and Nicol Sinclair send him there, and if Suneva Torr but cast her nixie-eyes on him, he leaves all to walk by her side. It is little mind of his own he hath; besides that, he is hard to deal with, and obstinate."

"That is what we all think, Gisla; thou alone hast uttered it. But we will say no more of Jan, for oft ill comes of women's talk."

The speakers were middle-aged women who had husbands and sons in the fishing fleet, and they cast an anxious glance toward it, as they lifted their water pitchers to their heads, and walked slowly home together, knitting as they went. Lerwick had then only one street of importance, but it was of considerable length, extending in the form of an amphitheater along the shore,

and having numberless little lanes or closes, intersected by stairs, running backward to an eminence above the town. The houses were generally large and comfortable, but they were built without the least regard to order. Some faced the sea, and some the land, and the gable ends projected on every side, and at every conceivable angle. Many of their foundations were drilled out of the rock upon the shore, and the smooth waters of the bay were six feet deep at the open doors or windows.

The utmost quiet reigned there. Shetland possessed no carts or carriages, and only the clattering of a shelty's gallop, or the song of a drunken sailor disturbed the echoes. The whole place had a singular, old-world look, and the names over the doors carried one back to Norseland and the Vikings. For in these houses their children dwelt, still as amphibious as their forefathers, spending most of their lives upon the sea, rarely sleeping under a roof, or warming themselves at a cottage fire; a rugged, pious, silent race, yet subject, as all Norsemen are, to fits of passionate and uncontrollable emotion.

Prominently among the Thorkels and Halcros, the Yools and Traills, stood out the name of Peter Fae. Peter had the largest store in Lerwick, he had the largest fish-curing shed, he was the largest boat owner. His house of white stone outside the town was two stories high, and handsomely furnished; and it was said that he would be able to leave his daughter Margaret £10,000; a very large fortune for a Shetland girl. Peter was a Norseman of pronounced type, and had the massive face and

loose-limbed strength of his race, its faculty for money-getting, and its deep religious sentiment. Perhaps it would be truer to say, its deep Protestant sentiment, for Norsemen have always been Protestants; they hated the Romish church as soon as they heard of it.

If the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-American wishes to see whence came the distinguishing traits of his race, let him spend a few weeks among the Shetland Norsemen, for they have pre-eminently those qualities we are accustomed to pride ourselves upon possessing – the open air freshness of look, the flesh and blood warmth of grip, the love of the sea, the resolute earnestness of being and doing, the large, clear sincerity of men accustomed to look stern realities in the face.

Peter's wife, Thora, was also of pure Norse lineage, and in many an unrecognized way her ancestors influenced her daily life. She had borne four sons, but, in the expressive form of Shetland speech, "the sea had got them;" and her daughter Margaret was the sole inheritor of their gathered gold. Thora was a proud, silent woman, whose strongest affections were with her children in their lonely sea graves. In her heart, deeper down than her faith could reach, lay a conviction that the Faes and Thorkels who had sailed those seas for centuries had "called" her boys to them. And she was always nursing an accusation against herself for a rite which she had observed for their welfare, but which she was now sure had been punished by their death. For often, when they had been tossing on the black North Sea, she had gone to the

top of the hill, and looking seaward she had raised from the past the brown-sailed ships, and the big yellow-haired men tugging at their oars; and in her heart there had been a supplication to their memory, which Peter, had he known it, would have denounced, with the sternest wrath, as neither more nor less than a service to Satan.

But what do we know of the heart nearest to our own? What do we know of our own heart? Some ancestor who sailed with Offa, or who fought with the Ironsides, or protested with the Covenanters, or legislated with the Puritans, may, at this very hour, be influencing us, in a way of which we never speak, and in which no other soul intermeddles.

Thora had one comfort. Her daughter was of a spirit akin to her own. Peter had sent her to Edinburgh, hoping that she would bring back to his northern home some of those lowland refinements of which he had a shadowy and perhaps exaggerated idea. But Margaret Fae's character was not of that semi-fluid nature which can easily be run into new molds. She had looked with distrust and dislike upon a life which seemed to her artificial and extravagant, and had come back to Shetland with every Norse element in her character strengthened and confirmed.

What then made her betroth herself to Jan Vedder? A weak, wasteful man, who had little but his good-natured, pleasant ways and his great beauty to recommend him. And yet the wise and careful Margaret Fae loved him; loved him spontaneously, as the brook loves to run, and the bird loves to sing.

"But bear in mind, husband," said Thora, on the night of the betrothal, "that this thing is of thy own doing. Thou hired Jan Vedder, when thou couldst well have hired a better man. Thou brought him to thy house. Well, then, was there any wonder that ill-luck should follow the foolish deed?"

"Wife, the lad is a pleasant lad. If he had money to even Margaret's tocher, and if he were more punctual at the ordinances, there would be no fault to him."

"So I think, too. But when a man has not religion, and has beside empty pockets, then he is poor for both worlds. It seems, then, that our Margaret must marry with a poor man. And let me tell thee, it was a little thing moved thee, for because Jan had a handsome face, and a bright smile, thou liked him."

"Many a sore heart folks get who set liking before judgment. But if there is good in the lad, then to get married will bring it out."

"That is as it may be. Often I have seen it bring out ill. Can any one tell if a man be good or ill, unless they dwell under the same roof with him? Abroad, who is so pleasant as Ragon Torr? But at home, every body there has to look to his wishes."

At this point in the conversation, Margaret entered. She was a tall, straight girl, with a finely-featured, tranquil face, admirably framed in heavy coils of hair that were yellow as dawn. Her complexion was exquisite, and her eyes blue, and cool, and calm. She was still and passionless in manner, but far from being cold at heart; nevertheless, her soul, with the purity of crystal,

had something also of its sharp angles; something which might perhaps become hard and cutting. She carried herself loftily, and walked with an air of decision. Peter looked at her steadily and said:

"Now, thou hast done ill, Margaret. When a young girl marries, she must face life for herself; and many are the shoulders that ask for burdens they can not bear."

"Yes, indeed! And it is all little to my mind," added the mother. "I had spoken to thee for thy cousin Magnus Hay; and then here comes this Jan Vedder!"

"Yes, he comes!" and Margaret stood listening, the pink color on her cheeks spreading to the tips of her ears, and down her white throat. "Yes, he comes!" and with the words, Jan stood in the open door. A bright, handsome fellow he was! There was no one in all the Islands that was half so beautiful.

"Peter," he cried joyfully, "here has happened great news! The 'Sure-Giver' is in the harbor with all her cargo safe. She came in with the tide. All her planks and nails are lucky."

"That is great news, surely, Jan. But it is ill luck to talk of good luck. Supper is ready sit down with us."

But Thora spoke no word, and Jan looked at Margaret with the question in his eyes.

"It means this, and no more, Jan. I have told my father and mother that thou would make me thy wife."

"That is what I desire, most of all things."

"Then there is little need of long talk. I betroth myself to thee

here for life or death, Jan Vedder; and my father and my mother they are the witnesses;" and as she spoke, she went to Jan, and put her hands in his, and Jan drew her proudly to his breast and kissed her.

Thora left the room without a glance at the lovers. Peter stood up, and said angrily: "Enough, and more than enough has been said this night. No, Jan; I will not put my palm against thine till we have spoken together. There is more to a marriage than a girl's 'Yes', and a wedding ring."

That was the manner of Jan's betrothal; and as he walked rapidly back into the town, there came a feeling into his heart of not being quite pleased with it. In spite of Margaret's affection and straightforward decision, he felt humiliated.

"It is what a man gets who wooes a rich wife," he muttered; "but I will go and tell Michael Snorro about it." And he smiled at the prospect, and hurried onward to Peter's store.

For Michael Snorro lived there. The opening to the street was closed; but the one facing the sea was wide open; and just within it, among the bags of feathers and swans' down, the piles of seal skins, the barrels of whale oil, and of sea-birds' eggs, and the casks of smoked geese, Michael was sitting. The sea washed the warehouse walls, and gurgled under the little pier, that extended from the door, but it was the only sound there was. Michael, with his head in his hands, sat gazing into the offing where many ships lay at anchor. At the sound of Jan's voice his soul sprang into his face for a moment, and he rose, trembling with pleasure, to

meet him.

In all his desolate life, no one had loved Michael Snorro. A suspicion that "he was not all there," and therefore "one of God's bairns," had insured him, during his long orphanage, the food, and clothes, and shelter, necessary for life; but no one had given him love. And Michael humbly acknowledged that he could not expect it, for nature had been cruelly unkind to him. He was, indeed, of almost gigantic size, but awkward and ill-proportioned. His face, large and flat, had the whiteness of clay, except at those rare intervals when his soul shone through it; and no mortal, but Jan Vedder, had ever seen that illumination.

It would be as hard to tell why Michael loved Jan as to say why Jonathan's soul clave to David as soon as he saw him. Perhaps it was an unreasonable affection, but it was one passing the love of woman, and, after all, can we guess how the two men may have been spiritually related? There was some tie of which flesh and blood knew not between them.

"Michael, I am going to be married."

"Well, Jan – and what then?"

"It will be with me as others; I shall have children, and grow rich, and old, and die."

"Who is it, Jan?"

"Margaret Fae."

"I thought that. Well, thou art sunshine, Jan, and she is like a pool of clear water. If the sun shines not, then the water will freeze, and grow cold and hard."

"Thou dost not like women, Michael."

"Nay, but I trust them not. Where the devil can not go, he sends a woman. Well, then, he will find no such messenger for me. He must come himself. That is well; the fight will be easier."

"When I am married I shall sail my own boat, and thou shalt be always with me, Michael. We will feel the fresh wind blowing in the canvas, and the salt spindrift in our faces, and the boat going as if she were a solan flying for the rock."

"Is that thy thought, then? Let me tell thee that thou art counting thy fish while they are swimming. Until Peter Fae's hands are full of earth, he will not part with one gold piece. Make up thy mind to that."

"Margaret will have her tocher."

"That will be seen; but if thou wants money, Jan, there it is in my chest, and what greater joy can I have than to see it in thy hand – all of it? It would be thy grace to me."

Then Jan rose up and laid his arm across Michael's shoulder; and Michael's lifted face caught the glow of Jan's bending one and the men's souls spoke to each other, though their lips never parted.

The next day proved Michael right. Peter did not name Margaret's tocher. He said he would give Margaret a house with all needful plenishing; and he promised also to pay all the wedding expenses. But there was no word of any sum of ready money; and Jan was too proud in his poverty to ask for his right. He did, indeed, suggest that when he was a house-holder he

should have more wages. But Peter would not see the justice of any such addition. “I give thee all thou art worth, and I will not give thee a Scotch merk more,” he answered roughly. “When it comes to a question of wage, Jan, the son and the stranger are the same to me.” And when Jan told his friend what had been promised, Michael said only: “Well, then, thou wilt have the woman also.”

The twelfth of August is “the fisherman’s foy” in Shetland, and the great feast of the Islands. It was agreed, therefore, that the marriage should take place at that time. For there would be at least two hundred fishing vessels in Brassy Sound at that time, and with most of the fishermen Peter either had had business, or might have in the future.

“For three days we will keep the feast for all who choose to come,” he said; and so, when the procession formed for the church, nearly six hundred men and women were waiting to follow Jan and his bride. Then Jan led her to the front of it, and there was a murmur of wonder and delight. Her dress was of the richest white satin, and her heavy golden ornaments – the heirlooms of centuries – gave a kind of barbaric splendor to it. The bright sunlight fell all over her, and added to the effect; and Jan, with a bridegroom’s pardonable pride, thought she looked more than mortal.

Going to the church, the procession preserved the gravity of a religious rite; but on the return, some one touched lightly the strings of a violin, and, in a moment, hundreds of voices were

chanting:

"It is often that I have said it: In the night thou art my dream, and my waking thought in the morning.

"I loved thee always; not for three months, not for a year, but I loved thee from the first, and my love shall not wither, until death part us.

"Oh, my beloved! My wife! Dearer to me than the light of the day! Closer to me than my hands and feet! Nothing but death shall part thee and me, forever!"

The singing opened their hearts; then came the feast and the dance, that endless active dance which is the kind of riot in which grave races give vent to the suppressed excitement of their lives. It did not please Margaret; she was soon weary of the noise and commotion, and heartily glad when, on the eve of the third day, she was called upon to give the parting toast:

"Here's to the men who cast the net, and the long line," she cried, lifting the silver cup above her head. "And may He hold His hand about them all, and open the mouth of the gray fish!"

"And here's to the bride," answered the oldest fisher present, "and may God give her a blessing in both hands!"

Then they separated, and some went to their homes in Lerwick and Scalloway, and others sailed to Ireland and Scotland, and even Holland; but Peter knew that however much the feast had cost him, it was money put out at good interest, and that he would be very likely to find it again at the next fishing season.

# CHAPTER II.
# A LITTLE CLOUD IN THE SKY

"All the flowers of Love and Happiness blow double."

As it happened that year the peerie, or Indian summer, was of unusual length and beauty. The fine weather lingered until the end of October. These weeks were full of joy to Margaret and to Jan, and in them Jan showed himself in many a charming light. He played well upon the violin, and as long as love was his theme Margaret understood him. He recited to her stirring stories from the Sagas, and she thought only how handsome he looked with his flashing eyes, and flushing face. She never reflected, that the soul which could put life into these old tales was very likely to be a soul akin to the restless adventurous men of which they told. Her home and her love were sufficient for her happiness, and she expected that Jan would measure his desires by the same rule.

But in a few weeks Jan began to weary a little of a life all love-making. Many things, laid aside for a time, renewed their influence over him. He wished to let the romance and exaggeration of his married position sink into that better tenderness which is the repose of passion, and which springs from the depths of a man's best nature. But Margaret was not capable of renunciation, and Jan got to be continually afraid of wounding her sensibilities by forgetting some outward token of

affection. He tried to talk to her of his projects, of his desire to go to sea again, of his weariness of the store. She could understand none of these things. Why should he want to leave her? Had he ceased to love her? Her father was happy in the store. It offended her to hear a word against it. Yet she thought she loved Jan perfectly, and would have deeply resented Michael Snorro's private verdict against her – that she was a selfish woman.

One morning, as the first snow was beginning to fall, a big Dutch skipper in his loose tunic and high cap, and wooden clogs, came stalking into Peter's store, and said, "Well, here at last comes 'The North Star.' Many of us thought she would come no more."

Jan was packing eggs, but he signed to Michael to take his place, and in a few minutes he was among the crowd watching her arrival. She came hurrying in, with all her sails set, as if she were fleeing from the northern winter behind her. Her stout sides were torn by berg and floe, her decks covered with seal skins and jawbones of whales, and amidships there was a young polar bear growling in a huge cask. Her crew, weather-beaten and covered with snow and frost, had the strange look of men from lands unknown and far off. Jan had once sailed in her, and her first mate was his friend. It was like meeting one from the dead. Proudly and gladly he took him to his home. He wanted him to see his beautiful wife. He was sure Margaret would be delighted to welcome a man so brave, and so dear to him.

On the contrary, it was a deep offense to her. Christian

Groat, in his sheepskin suit, oily and storm-stained, unkempt and unshorn, seemed strangely out of place in her spotless room. That he had fought with the elements, and with the monsters of the deep, made him no hero in her eyes. She was not thrilled by his adventures upon drifting floes, and among ice mountains reeling together in perilous madness. The story made Jan's blood boil, and brought the glistening tears into his big blue eyes; but Margaret's pulses beat no whit quicker. Christian Groat was only a vulgar whaler to her, and that Jan should bring him to her hearth and table made her angry.

Jan was hurt and humiliated. The visit from which he had hoped so much, was a pain and a failure. He walked back into the town with his friend, and was scarcely able to speak. Margaret also was silent and grieved. She thought Jan had wronged her. She had to make a clean cushion for the chair in which the man had sat. She persisted for days in smelling whale oil above the reek of the peat, above even the salt keenness of the winter air. Her father had never done such a thing; she could not understand Jan's thoughtlessness about her.

For two days she was silent, and Jan bore it very well, for he, too, was hurt and angry. On the third he spoke to his wife, and little by little the coolness wore away. But an active quarrel and some hard words had perhaps been better, for then there might have followed some gracious tears, and a loving reconciliation. As it was, the evenings wore silently and gloomily away. Margaret sat, mechanically knitting, her beautiful

face wearing an expression of injury and resignation that was intolerably annoying to a man of Jan's temper. But though she said nothing to her husband during these unhappy hours, the devil talked very plainly in her place.

"Why," he asked Jan, "do you stay beside a sulky woman, when there are all your old companions at Ragon Torr's? There, also, is the song and the tale, and the glass of good fellowship. And who would be so heartily welcome as Jan Vedder?"

Jan knew all this well. But as he did not care to make his wife unhappy, he determined to deceive her. It was snowing, and likely to snow; Margaret would not come down to the store in such weather. So he said to her, "Michael Snorro hath a fever. He can not work. That is a bad business, for it is only I that can fill his place. The work will keep me late, wait not for me." To himself he said: "To leave her alone a few nights, that will be a good thing; when I stay next at my own hearth, she may have something to say to me."

Margaret's nature was absolutely truthful. She never doubted Jan's words. In that love of self which was a miserable omnipresence with her, she was angry with Snorro for being sick and thus interfering in her domestic life, but she fully believed her husband's statement.

Jan spent two evenings at Ragon Torr's, but on the third morning his conscience smote him a little. He looked at Margaret, and wished she would ask, "Wilt thou come home early to-night?" He would gladly have answered her, "I will come

at whatever hour thou desirest." But, unfortunately, Margaret was at that moment counting her eggs, and there were at least two missing. She was a woman who delighted in small economies; she felt that she was either being wronged by her servant, or that her fowls were laying in strange nests. At that moment it was a subject of great importance to her; and she never noticed the eager, longing look in Jan's eyes.

When he said at last. "Good-by to thee, Margaret;" she looked up from her basket of eggs half reproachfully at him. She felt that Jan might have taken more interest in her loss. She had not yet divined that these small savings of hers were a source of anger and heart-burning to him. He knew well that the price of her endless knitting, her gathered eggs, wool, and swans' down, all went to her private account in Lerwick Bank. For she had been saving money since she was a child six years old, and neither father, mother, nor husband knew how much she had saved. That was a thing Margaret kept absolutely to herself and the little brown book which was in her locked drawer. There had been times when Jan could have opened it had he desired; but he had been too hurt and too proud to do so. If his wife could not voluntarily trust him, he would not solicit her confidence. And it had never struck Margaret that the little book was a hidden rock, on which every thing might yet be wrecked. It was there, though the tide of daily life flowed over it, and though it was never spoken of.

All that day Jan was sulky and obstinate, and Peter came

near quarreling with him more than once. But Peter thought he knew what was the matter, and he smiled grimly to himself as he remembered Margaret's power of resistance. Perhaps a fellow-feeling made him unusually patient, for he remembered that Thora had not been brought to a state of perfect obedience until she had given him many a day of active discomfort. He watched Jan curiously and not without sympathy, for the training of wives is a subject of interest even to those who feel themselves to have been quite successful.

During the first hours of the day Jan was uncertain what to do. A trifle would have turned him either way, and in the afternoon the trifle came. A boat arrived from Kirkwall, and two of her crew were far-off cousins. The men were in almost as bad condition as Christian Groat. He would not risk soiling Margaret's chair-cushions again, so he invited them to meet him at Ragon Torr's. As it happened Margaret had an unhappy day; many little things went wrong with her. She longed for sympathy, and began to wish that Jan would come home; indeed she was half inclined to go to the store, and ask him if he could not.

She opened the door and looked out. It was still snowing a little, as it had been for a month. But snow does not lie in Shetland, and the winters, though dreary and moist, are not too cold for the daisy to bloom every where at Christmas, and for the rye grass to have eight or ten inches of green blade. There was a young moon, too, and the Aurora, in a phalanx of rosy spears, was charging upward to the zenith. It was not at all an unpleasant

night, and, with her cloak and hood of blue flannel, a walk to the store would be easy and invigorating.

As she stood undecided and unhappy, she saw a man approaching the house. She could not fail to recognize the large, shambling figure. It was Michael Snorro. A blow from his mighty hand could hardly have stunned her more. She shut the door, and sat down sick at heart. For it was evident that Snorro was not ill, and that Jan had deceived her. Snorro, too, seemed to hesitate and waver in his intentions. He walked past the house several times, and then he went to the kitchen door.

In a few minutes Elga Skade, Margaret's servant, said to her, "Here has come Michael Snorro, and he would speak with thy husband." Margaret rose, and went to him. He stood before the glowing peats, on the kitchen hearth, seeming, in the dim light, to tower to the very roof. Margaret looked up with a feeling akin to terror at the large white face in the gloom above her, and asked faintly, "What is't thou wants, Snorro?"

"I would speak with Jan."

"He is not come yet to his home. At what hour did he leave the store?"

At once Snorro's suspicions were aroused. He stood silent a minute, then he said, "He may have gone round by thy father's. I will wait."

The man frightened her. She divined that he distrusted and disapproved of her; and she could ask nothing more. She left him with Elga, but in half an hour she became too restless to bear

the suspense, and returned to the kitchen. Snorro gave her no opportunity to question him. He said at once, "It is few houses in Shetland a man can enter, and no one say to him, 'Wilt thou eat or drink?'"

"I forgot, Snorro. I am troubled about Jan. What wilt thou have?"

"What thou hast ready, and Elga will get it for me."

A few minutes later he sat down to eat with a calm deliberation which Margaret could not endure. She put on her cloak and hood, and calling Elga, said, "If he asks for me, say that I spoke of my father's house."

Then she slipped out of the front door, and went with fleet steps into the town. The street, which was so narrow that it was possible to shake hands across it, was dark and empty. The shops were all shut, and the living rooms looked mostly into the closes, or out to the sea. Only here and there a lighted square of glass made her shrink into the shadow of the gables. But she made her way without hindrance to a house near the main quay. It was well lighted, and there was the sound and stir of music and singing, of noisy conversation and laughter within it.

Indeed, it was Ragon Torr's inn. The front windows were uncurtained, and she saw, as she hurriedly passed them, that the main room was full of company; but she did not pause until within the close at the side of the house, when, standing in the shadow of the outbuilt chimney, she peered cautiously through the few small squares on that side. It was as she suspected. Jan sat

in the very center of the company, his handsome face all aglow with smiles, his hands busily tuning the violin he held. Torr and half a dozen sailors bent toward him with admiring looks, and Ragon's wife Barbara, going to and fro in her household duties, stopped to say something to him, at which every body laughed, but Jan's face darkened.

Margaret did not hear her name, but she felt sure the remark had been about herself, and her heart burned with anger. She was turning away, when there was a cry of pleasure, and Suneva Torr entered. Margaret had always disliked Suneva; she felt now that she hated and feared her. Her luring eyes were dancing with pleasure, her yellow hair fell in long, loose waves around her, and she went to Jan's side, put her hand on his shoulder, and said something to him.

Jan looked back, and up to her, and nodded brightly to her request. Then out sprang the tingling notes from the strings, and clear, and shrill, and musical, Suneva's voice picked them up with a charming distinctness:

> "Well, then, since we are welcome to Yool,
> Up with it, Lightfoot, link it awa', boys;
> Send for a fiddler, play up the Foula reel,
> And we'll skip it as light as a maw, boys."

Then she glanced at the men, and her father and mother, and far in the still night rang out the stirring chorus:

"The Shaalds of Foula will pay for it a'!
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa'."

Then the merry riot ceased, and Suneva's voice again took up the song —

"Now for a light and a pot of good beer,
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa', boys!
We'll drink a good fishing against the New Year,
And the Shaalds of Foula will pay for it a', boys.

**Chorus:**

"The Shaalds of Foula will pay for it a';
Up with it, Lightfoot, and link it awa'."

Margaret could bear it no longer, and, white and stern, she turned away from the window. Then she saw Michael Snorro standing beside her. Even in the darkness she knew that his eyes were scintillating with anger. He took her by the arm and led her to the end of the close. Then he said:

"Much of a woman art thou! If I was Jan Vedder, never again would I see thy face! No, never!"

"Jan lied to me! To me, his wife! Did thou think he was at my father's? He is in Ragon Torr's."

"Thou lied to me also; and if Jan is in Ragon Torr's, let me tell thee, that thou sent him there."

"I lied not to thee. I lie to no one."

"Yea, but thou told Elga to lie for thee. A jealous wife knows not what she does. Did thou go to thy father's house?"

"Speak thou no more to me, Michael Snorro." Then she sped up the street, holding her breast tightly with both hands, as if to hold back the sobs that were choking her, until she reached her own room, and locked fast her door. She sobbed for hours with all the passionate abandon which is the readiest relief of great sorrows that come in youth. In age we know better; we bow the head and submit.

When she had quite exhausted herself, she began to long for some comforter, some one to whom she could tell her trouble. But Margaret had few acquaintances; none, among the few, of whom she could make a confidant. From her father and mother, above all others, she would keep this humiliation. God she had never thought of as a friend. He was her Creator, her Redeemer, also, if it were his good pleasure to save her from eternal death. He was the Governor of the Universe; but she knew him not as a Father pitying his children, as a God tender to a broken heart. Was it possible that a woman's sharp cry of wounded love could touch the Eternal? She never dreamed of such a thing. At length, weary with weeping and with her own restlessness, she sat down before the red peats upon the hearth, for once, in her sorrowful preoccupation, forgetting her knitting.

In the meantime, Snorro had entered Torr's, and asked for Jan. He would take no excuse, and no promises, and his white, stern face, and silent way of sitting apart, with his head in his hands, was soon felt to be a very uncomfortable influence. Jan rose moodily, and went away with him; too cross, until they reached the store, to ask, "Why did thou come and spoil my pleasure, Snorro?"

"Neil Bork sails for Vool at the midnight tide. Thou told me thou must send a letter by him to thy cousin Magnus."

"That is so. Since Peter will do nothing, I must seek help of Magnus. Well, then, I will write the letter."

When it was finished, Jan said, "Snorro, who told thee I was at Torr's?"

"Thou wert not at home. I went there, first."

"Then thou hast made trouble for me, be sure of that. My wife thought that thou wast ill."

"It is a bad wife a man must lie to. But, oh, Jan! Jan! To think that for any woman thou would tell the lie!"

Then Jan, being in that garrulous mood which often precedes intoxication, would have opened his whole heart to Michael about his domestic troubles; but Michael would not listen to him. "Shut thy mouth tight on that subject," he said angrily. "I will hear neither good nor bad of Margaret Vedder. Now, then, I will walk home with thee, and then I will see Neil Bork, and give him thy letter."

Margaret heard their steps at the gate. Her face grew white

and cold as ice, and her heart hardened at the sound of Snorro's voice. She had always despised him; now, for his interference with her, she hated him. She could not tolerate Jan's attachment to a creature so rude and simple. It was almost an insult to herself; and yet so truthfully did she judge his heart, that she was quite certain Michael Snorro would never tell Jan that she had watched him through Ragon Torr's window. She blushed a moment at the memory of so mean an action, but instantly and angrily defended it to her own heart.

Jan came in, with the foolish, good-natured smile of alcoholic excitement. But when he saw Margaret's white, hard face, he instantly became sulky and silent. "Where hast thou been, Jan?" she asked. "It is near the midnight."

"I have been about my own business. I had some words to send by Neil Bork to my cousin Magnus. Neil sails by the midnight tide."

She laughed scornfully. "Thy cousin Magnus! Pray, what shall he do for thee? This is some new cousin, surely!"

"Well, then, since thy father keeps thy tocher from me, I must borrow of my own kin."

"As for that, my father hath been better to thee than thou deservest. Why didst thou lie to me concerning Snorro? He has had no fever. No, indeed!"

"A man must ask his wife whether he can speak truth to her, or not. Thou can not bear it. Very well, then, I must lie to thee."

"Yet, be sure, I will tell the truth to thee, Jan Vedder. Thou

hast been at Ragon Torr's, singing with a light woman, and drinking with – "

"With my own kin. I advise thee to say nothing against them. As for Suneva, there is no tongue in Lerwick but thine will speak evil of her – she is a good girl, and she hath a kind heart. And now, then, who told thee I was at Torr's?"

He asked the question repeatedly, and instead of answering it, Margaret began to justify herself. "Have I not been to thee a good wife? Has not thy house been kept well, and thy meals ever good and ready for thee? Has any thing, great or little, gone to waste?"

"Thou hast been too good. It had been better if thou had been less perfect; then I could have spoken to thee of my great wish, and thou would have said, as others say, 'Jan, it would be a joy to see thee at the main-mast, or casting the ling-lines, or running into harbor before the storm, with every sail set, as though thou had stolen ship and lading.' Thou would not want me to chaffer with old women about geese-feathers and bird-eggs. Speak no more. I am heavy with sleep."

And he could sleep! That was such an aggravation of his offense. She turned sometimes and looked at his handsome flushed face, but otherwise she sat hour after hour silent and almost motionless, her hands clasped upon her knee, her heart anticipative of wrong, and with a perverse industry considering sorrows that had not as yet even called to her. Alas! alas! the unhappy can never persuade themselves that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

# CHAPTER III.
# JAN'S OPPORTUNITY

"Thou broad-billowed sea,
Never sundered from thee,
May I wander the welkin below;
May the plash and the roar
Of the waves on the shore
Beat the march to my feet as I go;
Ever strong, ever free,
When the breath of the sea,
Like the fan of an angel, I know;
Ever rising with power,
To the call of the hour,
Like the swell of the tides as they flow."

*– Blackie.*

The gravitation of character is naturally toward its weakest point. Margaret's weakest point was an intense, though unconscious, selfishness. Jan's restless craving for change and excitement made him dissatisfied with the daily routine of life, lazy, and often unreasonable. His very blessings became offenses to him. His clean, well-ordered house, made him fly to the noisy freedom of Ragon Torr's kitchen. Margaret's never-ceasing industry, her calmness, neatness and deliberation, exasperated

him as a red cloth does a bull.

Suneva Torr had married Paul Glumm, and Jan often watched her as he sat drinking his ale in Torr's kitchen. At home, it is true, she tormented Glumm with her contrary, provoking moods; but then, again, she met him with smiles and endearments that atoned for every thing. Jan thought it would be a great relief if Margaret were only angry sometimes. For he wearied of her constant serenity, as people weary of sunshine without cloud or shadow.

And Margaret suffered. No one could doubt that who watched her face from day to day. She made no complaint, not even to her mother. Thora, however, perceived it all. She had foreseen and foretold the trouble, but she was too noble a woman to point out the fulfillment of her prophecy. As she went about her daily work, she considered, and not unkindly, the best means for bringing Jan back to his wife and home, and his first pride in them.

She believed that the sea only could do it. After all, her heart was with the men who loved it. She felt that Jan was as much out of place counting eggs, as a red stag would be if harnessed to a plow. She, at least, understood the rebellious, unhappy look on his handsome face. When the ling fishing was near at hand, she said to Peter: "There is one thing that is thy duty, and that is to give Jan the charge of a boat. He is for the sea, and it is not well that so good a sailor should go out of the family."

"I have no mind to do that. Jan will do well one day, and he

will do as ill as can be the next. I will not trust a boat with him."

"It seems to me that where thou could trust Margaret, thou might well trust nineteen feet of keel, and fifty fathom of long lines."

Peter answered her not, and Thora kept silence also. But at the end, when he had smoked his pipe, and was lifting the Bible for the evening exercise, he said: "Thou shalt have thy way, wife; Jan shall have a boat, but thou wilt see evil will come of it."

"Thou wert always good, Peter, and in this thing I am thinking of more than fish. There is sorrow in Margaret's house. A mother can feel that."

"Now, then, meddle thou not in the matter. Every man loves in his own way. Whatever there is between Jan and Margaret is a thing by itself. But I will speak about the boat in the morning."

Peter kept his word, and kept it without smallness or grudging. He still liked Jan. If there were trouble between him and Margaret he regarded it as the natural initiation to married life. Norse women were all high-spirited and wished to rule; and he would have despised Jan if he had suspected him of giving way to Margaret's stubborn self-will. Though she was his own daughter, he did not wish to see her setting an example of wifely supremacy.

So he called Jan pleasantly and said, "I have saved for thee 'The Fair Margaret.' Wilt thou sail her this season, Jan? She is the best boat I have, as thou well knows. Fourteen hundred hooks she is to carry, and thou can hire six men to go with thee."

It made Peter's eyes feel misty to see the instantaneous change in Jan's face. He could not speak his thanks, but he looked them; and Peter felt troubled, and said, almost querulously, "There, that will do, son Jan; go now, and hire the men thou wants."

"First of all, I should like Snorro."

Peter hesitated, but he would not tithe his kindness, and he frankly answered, "Well, then, thou shalt have Snorro – though it will go hard with me, wanting him."

"But we will make it go well with thee on the sea, father."

"As for that, it will be as God pleases. A man's duty is all my claim on thee. Margaret will be glad to see thee so happy." He dropped his eyes as he spoke of Margaret. He would not seem to watch Jan, although he was conscious of doing so.

"A woman has many minds, father. Who knows if a thing will make her happy or angry?"

"That is a foolish saying, Jan. A wife must find her pleasure in the thing that pleases her husband. But now thou wilt have but little time; the boat is to be tried, and the hooks and lines are to go over, and the crew to hire. I have left all to thee."

This pleased Jan most of all. Only a bird building its first nest could have been as happy as he was. When at night he opened the door of his house, and went in with a gay smile, it was like a resurrection. The pale rose-color on Margaret's cheek grew vivid and deep when he took her in his arms, and kissed her in the old happy way. She smiled involuntarily, and Jan thought, "How beautiful she is!" He told her all Peter had said and done. He

was full of gratitude and enthusiasm. He did not notice for a few moments that Margaret was silent, and chillingly unresponsive. He was amazed to find that the whole affair displeased her.

"So, then, I have married a common fisherman after all," she said bitterly; "why, Suneva Torr's husband has a bigger boat than thine."

It was an unfortunate remark, and touched Jan on a very raw place. He could not refrain from answering, "He hath had better luck than I. Ragon Torr gave Glumm Suneva's tocher, and he has bought his own boat with it."

"Why not? Every one knows that Glumm is a prudent man. He never gets on his feet for nothing."

Jan was inexpressibly pained and disappointed. For a moment a feeling of utter despair came over him. The boat lay upon his heart like a wreck. He drank his tea gloomily, and the delicately-browned fish, the young mutton, and the hot wheat cakes, all tasted like ashes in his mouth. Perhaps, then, Margaret's heart smote her, for she began to talk, and to press upon Jan's acceptance the viands which had somehow lost all their savor to him. Her conversation was in like case. She would not speak of the boat, since they could not agree about it; and no other subject interested Jan. But, like all perfectly selfish people, she imagined, as a matter of course, that whatever interested her was the supreme interest. In her calm, even voice, she spoke of the spring house-cleaning, and the growth of her pansies and tulip bulbs, and did not know that all the time Jan was thinking of his

boat, heaving on the tide-top, or coming into harbor so heavy with fish that she would be – in Shetland phrase —*lippering* with the water.

But, after all, the week of preparation was a very happy week to Jan and Snorro; and on the sixteenth of May they were the foremost of the sixty boats that sailed out of Lerwick for the ling ground. There was a great crowd on the pier to see them off – mothers, and wives, and sweethearts; boys, sick and sad with longing and envy; and old men, with the glamor of their own past in their faces. Among them was Suneva, in a bright blue dress, with blue ribbons fluttering in her yellow hair. She stood at the pier-head and as they passed poured a cup of ale into the sea, to forespeak good luck for the fleet. Jan would have dearly liked to see his wife's handsome face watching him, as he stood by the main-mast and lifted his cap to Peter. Margaret was not there.

She really felt very much humiliated in Jan's position. She had always held herself a little apart from the Lerwick women. She had been to Edinburgh, she had been educated far above them, and she was quite aware that she would have a very large fortune. Her hope had been to see Jan take his place among the merchants and bailies of Lerwick. She had dreams of the fine mansion that they would build, and of the fine furniture which would come from Edinburgh for it. Margaret was one of those women to whom a house can become a kingdom, and its careful ordering an affair of more importance than the administration of a great nation. When she chose Jan, and raised him from his

humble position, she had no idea that he would drift back again to the fishing nets.

For the first time she carried her complaint home. But Thora in this matter had not much sympathy with her. "The sea is his mother," she said; "he loved her before he loved thee; when she calls him, he will always go back to her."

"No man in Shetland hath a better business to his hand; and how can he like to live in a boat, he, that hath a home so quiet, and clean, and comfortable?"

Thora sighed. "Thou wilt not understand then, that what the cradle rocks the spade buries. The sea spoke to Jan before he lay on his mother's breast. His father hath a grave in it. Neither gold nor the love of woman will ever keep them far apart; make up thy mind to that."

All this might be true, but yet it humiliated Margaret. Besides, she imagined that every wife in Lerwick was saying, "Not much hold has Margaret Vedder on her husband. He is off to sea again, and that with the first boat that sails." Yet if success could have reconciled her, Jan's was wonderful. Not unfrequently "The Fair Margaret" took twenty score ling at a haul, and every one was talking of her good luck.

During these days Jan and Snorro drew very close to each other. When the baits were set most of the men went to sleep for three hours; but Snorro always watched, and very often Jan sat with him. And oh, the grand solemnity and serenity of these summer nights, when through belts of calm the boats drifted

and the islands in a charmed circle filled the pale purple horizon before them. Most fair then was the treeless land, and very far off seemed the sin and sorrow of life. The men lay upon the deck, with a pile of nets or their folded arms for a pillow, and surely under such a sky, like Jacob of old, they dreamed of angels.

Snorro and Jan, sitting in the soft, mystical light, talked together, dropping their voices involuntarily, and speaking slowly, with thoughtful pauses between the sentences. When they were not talking, Snorro read, and the book was ever the same, the book of the Four Gospels. Jan often watched him when he thought Jan asleep. In that enchanted midnight glow, which was often a blending of four lights – moonlight and twilight, the aurora and the dawning – the gigantic figure and white face, bending over the little book, had a weird and almost supernatural interest. Then this man, poor, ugly, and despised, had an incomparable nobility, and he fascinated Jan.

One night he said to him, "Art thou never weary of reading that same book, Snorro?"

"Am I then ever weary of thee, my Jan? And these are the words of One who was the first who loved me. Accordingly, how well I know his voice." Then, in a fervor of adoring affection, he talked to Jan of his dear Lord Christ, "who had stretched out his arms upon the cross that he might embrace the world." And as he talked the men, one by one, raised themselves on their elbows and listened; and the theme transfigured Snorro, and he stood erect with uplifted face, and looked, in spite of his fisher's suit,

so royal that Jan felt humbled in his presence. And when he had told, in his own simple, grand way, the story of him who had often toiled at midnight with the fishers on the Galilean sea, as they toiled upon the Shetland waters, there was a great silence, until Jan said, in a voice that seemed almost strange to them: "Well, then, mates, now we will look to the lines."

All summer, and until the middle of October, Jan continued at sea; and all summer, whether fishing for ling, cod, or herring, "The Fair Margaret" had exceptionally good fortune. There were many other fishers who woke, and watched, and toiled in their fishing, who did not have half her "takes." "It is all Jan's luck," said Glumm, "for it is well known that he flings his nets and goes to sleep while they fill."

"Well, then, 'it is the net of the sleeping fisherman takes:' that is the wise saying of old times" – and though Snorro did not think of it, the Shetland proverb was but the Norse form of the Hebrew faith: "He giveth his beloved in their sleep."

Still, in spite of his success, Jan was not happy. A married man's happiness is in the hands of his wife, and Margaret felt too injured to be generous. She was not happy, and she thought it only just that Jan should be made to feel it. He had disappointed all her hopes and aspirations; she was not magnanimous enough to rejoice in the success of his labors and aims. Besides, his situation as the hired skipper of a boat was contemptible in her eyes; her servant was engaged to a man in the same position. Another aggravating circumstance was that her old schoolmate,

the minister's niece (a girl who had not a penny piece to her fortune) was going to marry a rich merchant from Kirkwall. How she would exult over "Margaret Vedder who had married a common fisherman." The exultation was entirely imaginary, but perhaps it hurt as much as if it had been actually made.

Success, too, had made Jan more independent: or perhaps he had grown indifferent to Margaret's anger, since he found it impossible to please her. At any rate, he asked his friends to his house without fear or apology. They left their footmarks on her floors, and their fingermarks upon her walls and cushions, and Jan only laughed and said, "There was, as every one knew, plenty of water in Shetland to make them clean again." Numberless other little things grieved and offended her, so little that, taken separately, they might have raised a smile, but in the aggregate they attained the magnitude of real wrongs.

But, happy or miserable, time goes on, and about the middle of October even the herring fishing is over. Peter was beginning to count up his expenses and his gains. Jan and Snorro were saying to one another, "In two days we must go back to the store." That is, they were trying to say it, but the air was so full of shrieks that no human voice could be heard. For all around the boat the sea was boiling with herring fry, and over them hung tens of thousands of gulls and terns. Marmots and guillemots were packed in great black masses on the white foam, and only a mad human mob of screaming women and children could have made a noise comparable. Even that would have wanted the piercing

metallic ring of the wild birds' shriek.

Suddenly Snorro leaped to his feet. "I see a storm, Jan. Lower and lash down the mast. We shall have bare time."

Jan saw that the birds had risen and were making for the rocks. In a few minutes down came the wind from the north-east, and a streak of white rain flying across the black sea was on top of "The Fair Margaret" before the mast was well secured. As for the nets, Snorro was cutting them loose, and in a few moments the boat was tearing down before the wind. It was a wild squall; some of the fishing fleet went to the bottom with all their crews. "The Fair Margaret," at much risk of loss, saved Glumm's crew, and then had all she could manage to raise her mizzen, and with small canvas edge away to windward for the entrance of Lerwick bay.

Jan was greatly distressed. "Hard to bear is this thing, Snorro," he said; "at the last to have such bad fortune."

"It is a better ending than might have been. Think only of that, Jan."

"But Peter will count his lost nets; there is nothing else he will think of."

"Between nets and men's lives, there is only one choice."

Peter said that also, but he was nevertheless very angry. The loss took possession of his mind, and excluded all memory of his gains. "It was just like Jan and Snorro," he muttered, "to be troubling themselves with other boats. In a sudden storm, a boat's crew should mind only its own safety." These thoughts were in his heart, though he did not dare to form them into any clear

shape. But just as a drop or two of ink will diffuse itself through a glass of pure water and defile the whole, so they poisoned every feeling of kindness which he had to Jan.

"What did I tell thee?" he said to Thora, bitterly. "Jan does nothing well but he spoils it. Here, at the end of the season, for a little gust of wind, he loses both nets and tackle."

"He did well when he saved life, Peter."

"Every man should mind his own affairs. Glumm would have done that thing first."

"Then Glumm would have been little of a man. And thou, Peter Fae, would have been the first to tell Glumm so. Thou art saying evil, and dost not mean it."

"Speak no more. It is little a woman understands. Her words are always like a contrary wind."

Peter was very sulky for some days, and when at last he was ready to settle with Jan, there was a decided quarrel. Jan believed himself to be unfairly dealt with, and bitter words were spoken on both sides. In reality, Peter knew that he had been hard with his son, harder by far than he had ever intended to be; but in his heart there had sprung up one of those sudden and unreasonable dislikes which we have all experienced, and for which no explanation is possible. It was not altogether the loss of the nets – he did not know what it was – but the man he liked, and praised, and was proud of one week, he could hardly endure to see or speak to the next.

"That ends all between thee and me," said Peter, pushing a

little pile of gold toward Jan. It was a third less than Jan expected. He gave it to Margaret, and bade her "use it carefully, as he might be able to make little more until the next fishing season."

"But thou wilt work in the store this winter?"

"That I will not. I will work for no man who cheats me of a third of my hire."

"It is of my father thou art speaking, Jan Vedder; remember that. And Peter Fae's daughter is thy wife, though little thou deservest her."

"It is like enough that I am unworthy of thee; but if I had chosen a wife less excellent than thou it had perhaps been better for me."

"And for me also."

That was the beginning of a sad end; for Jan, though right enough at first, soon put himself in the wrong, as a man who is idle, and has a grievance, is almost sure to do. He continually talked about it. On the contrary, Peter held his tongue, and in any quarrel the man who can be silent in the end has the popular sympathy. Then, in some way or other, Peter Fae touched nearly every body in Lerwick. He gave them work, or he bought their produce. They owed him money, or they expected a favor from him. However much they sympathized with Jan, they could not afford to quarrel with Peter.

Only Michael Snorro was absolutely and purely true to him; but oh, what truth there was in Michael! Jan's wrongs were his wrongs; Jan's anger was but the reflection of his own.

He watched over him, he sympathized with him, he loved him entirely, with a love “wonderful, passing the love of woman.”

# CHAPTER IV.
# THE DESOLATED HOME

"For we two, face to face,
God knows are further parted
Than were a whole world's space
Between."

"Lost utterly from home and me,
Lonely, regretful and remote."

Jan now began to hang all day about Ragon Torr's, and to make friends with men as purposeless as himself. He drank more and more, and was the leader in all the dances and merry-makings with which Shetlanders beguile their long winter. He was very soon deep in Torr's debt, and this circumstance carried him the next step forward on an evil road.

One night Torr introduced him to Hol Skager, a Dutch skipper, whose real cargo was a contraband one of tea, brandy, tobacco and French goods. Jan was in the very mood to join him, and Skager was glad enough of Jan. Very soon he began to be away from home for three and four weeks at a time. Peter and Margaret knew well the objects of these absences, but they would have made themselves very unpopular if they had spoken

of them. Smuggling was a thing every one had a hand in; rich and poor alike had their venture, and a wise ignorance, and deaf and dumb ignoring of the fact, was a social tenet universally observed. If Jan came home and brought his wife a piece of rich silk or lace, or a gold trinket, she took it without any unpleasant curiosity. If Peter were offered a cask of French brandy at a nominal price, he never asked any embarrassing questions. Consciences tender enough toward the claims of God, evaded without a scruple the rendering of Cæsar's dues.

So when Jan disappeared for a few weeks, and then returned with money in his pocket, and presents for his friends, he was welcomed without question. And he liked the life; liked it so well that when the next fishing season came round he refused every offer made him. He gained more with Hol Skager, and the excitement of eluding the coast guard or of giving them a good chase, suited Jan exactly. The spirit of his forefathers ruled him absolutely, and he would have fought for his cargo or gone down with the ship.

Snorro was very proud of him. The morality of Jan's employment he never questioned, and Jan's happy face and fine clothing gave him the greatest pleasure. He was glad that he had escaped Peter's control; and when Jan, now and then, went to the store after it was shut, and sat an hour with him, no man in Shetland was as proud and happy as Michael Snorro. Very often Jan brought him a book, and on one occasion it was the wondrous old "Pilgrim's Progress," full of wood-cuts. That book

was a lifelong joy to Snorro, and he gave to Jan all the thanks and the credit of it. “Jan brought him every thing pleasant he had. He was so handsome, and so clever, and so good, and yet he loved him – the poor, ignorant Snorro!” So Snorro reasoned, and accordingly he loved his friend with all his soul.

At Jan’s house many changes were taking place. In the main, Margaret had her house very much to herself. No one soiled its exquisite cleanliness. The expense of keeping it was small. She was saving money on every hand. When Jan came home with a rich present in his hand, it was easy to love so handsome and generous a man, and if Jan permitted her to love him in her own way, she was very glad to do so. The tie between man and wife is one hard to break. What tugs it will bear for years, we have all seen and wondered at; and during this interval if there were days when they were wretched, there were many others when they were very happy together. The conditions rested mainly with Margaret. When she could forget all her small ambitions and disappointments, and give to her husband the smile and kiss he still valued above every thing, then Jan was proud and happy and anxious to please her. But Margaret was moody as the skies above her, and sometimes Jan’s sunniest tempers were in themselves an offense. It is ill indeed with the man who is bound to misery by the cords of a woman’s peevish and unreasonable temper.

For a year and a half Jan remained with Hol Skager, but during this time his whole nature deteriorated. Among the Shetland fishermen mutual forbearance and mutual reliance was

the rule. In position the men were nearly equal, and there was no opportunity for an overbearing spirit to exercise itself. But it was very different with Skager's men. They were of various nationalities, and of reckless and unruly tempers. The strictest discipline was necessary, and Jan easily learned to be tyrannical and unjust, to use passionate and profane language, to drink deep, and to forget the Sabbath, a day which had been so sacred to him.

In his own home the change was equally apparent. Margaret began to tremble before the passions she evoked; and Jan to mock at the niceties that had hitherto snubbed and irritated him. Once he had been so easy to please; now all her small conciliations sometimes failed. The day had gone by for them. The more she humbled herself, the less Jan seemed to care for her complaisance. To be kind too late, to be kind when the time for kindness is passed by, that is often the greatest injury of all.

At the end of eighteen months Jan and Skager quarreled. Skager had become intimate with Peter Fae, and Peter was doubtless to blame. At any rate, Jan was sure he was, and he spent his days in morose complaining, and futile threats of vengeance – futile, because the poor man's wrath always falls upon himself. When Peter heard them he could afford to say contemptuously – "It is well known that Jan Vedder has a long tongue and short hands;" or, "Between saying and doing the thing is a great way."

In a few weeks even Ragon Torr got weary of Jan's ill-temper and heroics. Besides, he was in his debt, and there seemed no prospect of speedy work for him. Upon the whole,

it was a miserable winter for the Vedders. Jan made very little. Sometimes he killed a seal, or brought in a bag of birds, but his earnings were precarious, and Margaret took care that his table should be in accordance. She had money, of course, but it was her own money, and a thing with which Jan had no right. She ate her meager fare of salt fish and barley bread with a face of perfect resignation; she gave up her servant and made no complaints, and she did think it a most shameful injustice that, after all, Jan should be cross with her. It did not strike her, that good meal, even though she had procured it from her own private hoard, might have been a better thing than the most saintly patience. There is much said about the wickedness of doing evil that good may come. Alas! there is such a thing as doing good that evil may come.

One afternoon in early spring Jan saw a flock of wild swans soaring majestically on their strong wings toward a lake which was a favorite resting place with them. He took his gun and followed after. They were gathered in the very middle of the lake; his dog could not swim so far, neither could his shot reach them. It seemed as if every promise mocked him. Sulky and disappointed, he was returning home when he met the Udaller Tulloch. He was jogging along on his little rough pony, his feet raking the ground, and his prehistoric hat tied firmly on the back of his head.

But in spite of his primitive appearance he was a man of wealth and influence, the banker of the island, liked and trusted

of all men – except Peter Fae. With Peter he had come often in conflict; he had superseded him in a civil office, he had spoken slightingly of some of Peter's speculations, and, above all offenses, in a recent kirk election he had been chosen Deacon instead of Peter. They were the two rich men of Lerwick, and they were jealous and distrustful of each other.

"Jan Vedder," said Tulloch, cheerily, "I would speak with thee; come to my house within an hour."

It was not so fine a house as Peter's, but Jan liked its atmosphere. Small glass barrels of brandy stood on the sideboard; there was a case of Hollands in the chimney corner; fine tobacco, bloaters, and sturgeons' roes were in comfortable proximity. A bright fire of peats glowed on the ample hearth, and the Udaller sat eating and drinking before it. He made Jan join him, and without delay entered upon his business.

"I want to sell 'The Solan,' Jan. She is worth a thousand pounds for a coaster; or, if thou wishes, thou could spoil Skager's trips with her. She is half as broad as she is long, with high bilge, and a sharp bottom; the very boat for these seas – wilt thou buy her?"

"If I had the money, nothing would be so much to my liking."

"Well, then, thy wife brought me £50 yesterday; that makes thy account a little over £600. I will give thee a clear bill of sale and trust thee for the balance. 'Tis a great pity to see a good lad like thee going to waste. It is that."

"If I was in thy debt, then thou would own a part of me. I like well to be my own master."

"A skipper at sea doth what he will; and every one knows that Jan Vedder is not one that serves. Remember, thou wilt be skipper of thy – own – boat!"

Jan's eyes flashed joyfully, but he said, "My wife may not like I should use the money for this purpose."

"It is a new thing for a man to ask his wife if he can spend this or that, thus or so. And to what good? Margaret Vedder would speak to her father, and thou knows if Peter Fae love thee – or not."

These words roused the worst part of Jan's nature. He remembered, in a moment, all the envy and wonder he would cause by sailing out of harbor skipper of his own boat. It was the very temptation that was irresistible to him. He entered into Tulloch's plan with all his heart, and before he left him he was in a mood to justify any action which would further his desire.

"Only give not thy thoughts speech, Jan," said Tulloch at parting; "and above all things, trust not thy plans to a woman. When will thou tell me 'yes' or 'no'?"

"To-morrow."

But Jan was not the man to hold counsel with his own soul. He wanted human advice and sympathy, and he felt sure of Snorro. He went straight to him, but the store was still open, and Peter Fae was standing in the door, three of his neighbors with him. He looked at Jan scornfully and asked – "Well, how many swans did thou get?"

"I have been after a purchase, Peter Fae."

"Good. How wilt thou pay for it, then?"

"I will take my own to pay for it."

Peter laughed, and turning away, answered, "Why, then, do I speak to thee? Only God understands fools."

This conversation irritated Jan far more than many an actual wrong had done. "I have indeed been a fool," he said to Snorro, "but now I will look well to what concerns my own interest."

Then he told Michael of Tulloch's offer, and added, "At last, then, I have the sum of my wife's savings, and I will show her she has been saving for a good end. What dost thou think, Snorro?"

"I think the money is thine. All thine has been hers, or she had not saved so much; all hers ought then to be thine. But it is well and right to tell her of Tulloch's offer to thee. She may like to give thee as a gift what else thou must take without any pleasure."

Jan laughed; it was an unpleasant laugh, and did not at all brighten his face, but he resolved to a certain extent on taking Snorro's advice. It was quite midnight when he reached his home, but Margaret was sitting by a few red peats knitting. She was weeping, also, and her tears annoyed him.

"Thou art ever crying like a cross child," he said. "Now what art thou crying for?"

"For thy love, my husband. If thou would care a little for me!"

"That is also what I say. If thou would care a little for me and for my well-doing! Listen, now! I have heard where I can buy a good boat for £600. Wilt thou ask thy father for so much of thy tocher? To have this boat, Margaret, would make me the happiest

man in Shetland. I know that thou can manage it if thou wilt. Dear wife, do this thing for me. I ask thee with all my heart." And he bent toward her, took the knitting away, and held her hands in his own.

Margaret dropped her eyes, and Jan watched her with a painful interest. Did she love him or her £600 better? Her face paled and flushed. She looked up quickly, and her lips parted. Jan believed that she was going to say – "I have £600, and I will gladly give it to thee." He was ready to fold her to his breast, to love her, as he had loved her that day when he had first called her "wife." Alas! after a slight hesitation, she dropped her pale face and answered slowly – "I will not ask my father. I might as well ask the sea for fresh water."

Jan let her hands fall, and stood up. "I see now that all talk with thee will come to little. What thou wants, is that men should give thee all, and thou give nothing. When thou sayest, 'thy love, husband,' thou means 'thy money, husband;' and if there is no money, then there is ever sighs and tears. Many things thou hast yet to learn of a wife's duty, and very soon I will give thee a lesson I had done well to teach thee long since."

"I have borne much from thee, Jan, but at the next wrong thou does me, I will go back to my father. That is what I shall do."

"We will see to that."

"Yes, we will see!" And she rose proudly, and with flashing eyes gathered up her knitting and her wool and left the room.

The next morning Jan and Tulloch concluded their bargain.

"The Solan" was put in thorough order, and loaded with a coasting cargo. It was supposed that Tulloch's nephew would sail her, and Jan judged it wisest to show no interest in the matter. But an hour after all was ready, he drew the £600 out of Tulloch's bank, paid it down for the boat, and sailed her out of Lerwick harbor at the noon-tide. In ten minutes afterward a score of men had called in Peter Fae's store and told him.

He was both puzzled and annoyed. Why had Tulloch interfered with Jan unless it was for his, Peter's, injury? From the secrecy maintained, he suspected some scheme against his interests. Snorro, on being questioned, could truthfully say that Jan had not told him he was to leave Lerwick that morning; in fact, Jan had purposely left Snorro ignorant of his movements. But the good fellow could not hide the joy he felt, and Peter looked at him wrathfully.

It was seldom Peter went to see his daughter, but that evening he made her a call. Whatever she knew she would tell him, and he did not feel as if he could rest until he got the clue to Jan's connection with Tulloch. But when he named it to Margaret, he found she was totally ignorant of Jan's departure. The news shocked her. Her work dropped from her hand; she was faint with fear and amazement. Jan had never before left her in anger, without a parting word or kiss. Her father's complaints and fears about Tulloch she scarcely heeded. Jan's behavior toward herself was the only thought in her mind. Peter learned nothing from her; but his irritation was much increased by what he considered

Margaret's unreasonable sorrow over a bad husband. He could not bear a crying woman, and his daughter's sobs angered him.

"Come thou home to thy mother," he said, "when thy eyes are dry; but bring no tears to my house for Jan Vedder."

Then Margaret remembered that she had threatened Jan with this very thing. Evidently he had dared her to do it by this new neglect and unkindness. She wandered up and down the house, full of wretched fears and memories; love, anger, pride, each striving for the mastery. Perhaps the bitterest of all her thoughts toward her husband arose from the humiliating thought of "what people would say." For Margaret was a slave to a wretched thraldom full of every possible tragedy – she would see much of her happiness or misery through the eyes of others.

She felt bitterly that night that her married life had been a failure; but failures are generally brought about by want of patience and want of faith. Margaret had never had much patience with Jan; she had lost all faith in him. "Why should she not go home as her father told her?" This question she kept asking herself. Jan had disappointed all her hopes. As for Jan's hopes, she did not ask herself any questions about them. She looked around the handsome home she had given him; she considered the profitable business which might have been his on her father's retirement or death; and she thought a man must be wicked who could regard lightly such blessings. As she passed a glass she gazed upon her own beauty with a mournful smile and thought anew, how unworthy of all Jan had been.

At daybreak she began to put carefully away such trifles of household decoration as she valued most. Little ornaments bought in Edinburgh, pieces of fancy work done in her school days, fine china, or glass, or napery. She had determined to lock up the house and go to her father's until Jan returned. Then he would be obliged to come for her, and in any dispute she would at least have the benefit of a strong position. Even with this thought, full as it was of the most solemn probabilities, there came into her niggardly calculations the consideration of its economy. She would not only save all the expenses of housekeeping, but all her time could be spent in making fine knitted goods, and a great many garments might thus be prepared before the annual fair.

This train of ideas suggested her bank book. That must certainly go with her, and a faint smile crossed her face as she imagined the surprise of her father and mother at the amount it vouched for – that was, if she concluded to tell them. She went for it; of course it was gone. At first she did not realize the fact; then, as the possibility of its loss smote her, she trembled with terror, and hurriedly turned over and over the contents of the drawer. "*Gone!*" She said it with a quick, sharp cry, like that of a woman mortally wounded. She could find it nowhere, and after five minutes' search, she sat down upon her bedside, and abandoned herself to agonizing grief.

Yes, it was pitiable. She had begun the book with pennies saved from sweeties and story-books, from sixpences, made by knitting through hours when she would have liked to play. The

ribbons and trinkets of her girlhood and maidenhood were in it, besides many a little comfort that Jan and herself had been defrauded of. Her hens had laid for it, her geese been plucked for it, her hands had constantly toiled for it. It had been the idol upon the hearthstone to which had been offered up the happiness of her youth, and before which love lay slain.

At first its loss was all she could take in, but very quickly she began to connect the loss with Jan, and with the £600 he had asked her to get for him at their last conversation. With this conviction her tears ceased, her face grew hard and white as ice. If Jan had used her money she was sure that she would never speak to him, never see him again. At that hour she almost hated him. He was only the man who had taken her £600. She forgot that he had been her lover and her husband. As soon as she could control herself she fled to her father's house, and kneeling down by Peter's side sobbed out the trouble that had filled her cup to overflowing.

This was a sorrow Peter could heartily sympathize with. He shed tears of anger and mortification, as he wiped away those of his daughter. It was a great grief to him that he could not prosecute Jan for theft. But he was quite aware that the law recognized Jan's entire right to whatever was his wife's. Neither the father nor daughter remembered how many years Jan had respected his wife's selfishness, and forgiven her want of confidence in him; the thing he had done was an unpardonable wrong.

Thora said very little. She might have reminded Peter that he had invested all her fortune in his business, that he always pocketed her private earnings. But to what purpose? She did not much blame Jan for taking at last, what many husbands would have taken at first, but she was angry enough at his general unkindness to Margaret. Yet it was not without many forebodings of evil she saw Peter store away in an empty barn all the pretty furniture of Margaret's house, and put the key of the deserted house in his pocket.

"And I am so miserable!" wailed the wretched wife, morning, noon, and night. Her money and her husband supplied her with perpetual lamentations, varied only by pitiful defenses of her own conduct: "My house was ever clean and comfortable! No man's table was better served! I was never idle! I wasted nothing! I never was angry! And yet I am robbed, and betrayed, and deserted! There never was so miserable a woman – so unjustly miserable!" etc.

"Alas! my child," said Thora, one day, "did you then expect to drink of the well of happiness before death? This is the great saying which we all forget: *There*– not here —*there* the wicked cease from troubling; *there* the weary are at rest. *There* God has promised to wipe away all tears, but not here, Margaret, *not here*."

# CHAPTER V.
# SHIPWRECK

"A man I am, crossed with adversity."

"There is some soul of goodness in things evil;
Would men observingly distill it out."

No man set more nakedly side by side the clay and spirit of his double nature than Jan Vedder. No man wished so much and willed so little. Long before he returned from his first voyage, he became sorry for the deception he had practiced upon his wife, and determined to acknowledge to her his fault, as far as he saw it to be a fault. He was so little fond of money, that it was impossible for him to understand the full extent of Margaret's distress; but he knew, at least, that she would be deeply grieved, and he was quite willing to promise her, that as soon as The Solan was clear of debt, he would begin to repay her the money she prized so much.

Her first voyage was highly successful, and he was, as usual, sanguine beyond all reasonable probabilities; quite sure, indeed, that Tulloch and Margaret could both be easily paid off in two years. Surely two years was a very short time for a wife to trust her husband with £600. Arguing, then, from his own good

intentions, and his own hopes and calculations, he had persuaded himself before he reached Lerwick again that the forced loan was really nothing to make any fuss about, that it would doubtless be a very excellent thing, and that Margaret would be sure to see it as he did.

The Solan touched Lerwick in the afternoon. Jan sent a message to Tulloch, and hastened to his home. Even at a distance the lonely air of the place struck him unpleasantly. There was no smoke from the chimneys, the windows were all closed. At first he thought "Margaret is gone for a day's visit somewhere – it is unlucky then." But as he reached the closed gate other changes made themselves apparent. His Newfoundland dog, that had always known his step afar off, and came bounding to meet him, did not answer his whistle. Though he called Brenda, his pet seal, repeatedly, she came not; she, that had always met him with an almost human affection. He perceived before his feet touched the threshold how it was: Margaret had gone to her father's, or the animals and poultry would have been in the yard.

His first impulse was to follow her there and bring her home, and he felt in his pocket for the golden chain and locket he had brought her as a peace-offering. Then he reflected that by the time he could reach Peter's house it would be the tea-hour, and he did not intend to discuss the differences between Margaret and himself in Peter's presence. Thora's good influence he could count upon; but he knew it would be useless either to reason with or propitiate Peter. For fully five minutes he stood at his bolted

door wondering what to do. He felt his position a cruel one; just home from a prosperous voyage, and no one to say a kind word. Yes, he could go to Torr's; he would find a welcome there. But the idea of the noisy room and inquisitive men was disagreeable to him. Snorro he could not see for some hours. He determined at last that the quiet of his own lonely home was the best place in which to consider this new phase of affairs between him and his wife, and while doing so he could make a cup of tea, and wash and refresh himself before the interview.

He unfastened the kitchen shutter and leaped in. Then the sense of his utter desolation smote him. Mechanically he walked through the despoiled, dusty, melancholy rooms. Not a stool left on which he could sit down. He laughed aloud – that wretched laugh of reckless sorrow, that is far more pitiful than weeping. Then he went to Torr's. People had seen him on the way to his home, and no one had been kind enough to prevent his taking the useless, wretched journey. He felt deeply wounded and indignant. There were not half a dozen men or women in Lerwick whose position in regard to Jan would have excused their interference, but of that he did not think. Every man and woman knew his shame and wrong. Some one might have warned him. Torr shook his head sympathetically at Jan's complaints, and gave him plenty of liquor, and in an hour he had forgotten his grief in a drunken stupor.

The next morning he went to Peter's house to see his wife. Peter knew of his arrival, and he had informed himself of all that

had happened in Torr's room. Jan had, of course, spoken hastily and passionately, and had drunk deeply, and none of his faults had been kept from Margaret. She had expected him to come at once for her, to be in a passion probably, and to say some hard things, but she also had certainly thought he would say them to her, and not to strangers. Hour after hour she watched, sick with longing and fear and anger, hour after hour, until Peter came in, stern and dour, and said:

"Get thee to thy bed, Margaret. Jan Vedder has said words of thee this night that are not to be forgiven, and he is now fathoms deep in Torr's liquor. See thou speak not with him – good nor bad," and Peter struck the table so angrily, that both women were frightened into a silence, which he took for consent.

So when Jan asked to see his wife, Thora stood in the door, and in her sad, still way told him that Peter had left strict orders against his entering the house.

"But thou, mother, wilt ask Margaret to come out here and speak to me? Yes, thou wilt do that," and he eagerly pressed in Thora's hand the little present he had brought. "Give her this, and tell her I wait here for her."

After ten minutes' delay, Thora returned and gave him the trinket back. Margaret wanted her £600 and not a gold locket, and Jan had not even sent her a message about it. His return had brought back the memory of her loss in all its first vividness. She had had a dim hope that Jan would bring her money with him, that he had only taken it to frighten her; to lose this hope was to

live over again her first keen sorrow. In this mood it was easy for her to say that she would not see him, or speak to him, or accept his gift; let him give her back her £600, that was the whole burden of her answer.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.