The Pilots of Pomona eBook

The Pilots of Pomona

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

Contents

Page 1

Chapter I. In Which I Am Late For School.

On a certain bright morning in the month of May, 1843, the little port of Stromness wore an aspect of unwonted commotion. The great whaling fleet that every year sailed from this place for the Greenland fisheries was busily preparing for sea. The sun was shining over the brown hills of Orphir, and casting a golden sheen over the calm bay. Out beyond the Holms the whaling ships lay at anchor, the Blue Peter flying at each forepeak, and between them and the town many boats were passing to and fro.

I remember the day, not so much in connection with the whaling ships themselves as by the fact that their sailing fixes upon my memory the date of other more personal events which I am about to set forth in the following pages. Indeed, I was altogether unaffected by the departure of the ships. As I sat on the edge of one of the tiny stone piers that support the old houses along the shoreline, my bare feet dangling above the clear green water, I thought only of my fishing line and of the row of bright-scaled sillocks that lay on a stone at my side, being quite unmindful that the school bell had long since begun to ring.

A small boat passed within a few yards of the jetty, rowed by Tom Kinlay, one of my schoolfellows.

“Now, then, Ericson,” he cried out as he saw me; “d’ye not hear the bell? Hurry up, lad, or you’ll be late again. Aha! I’ll tell the dominie that you’re sitting there fishing when you should be at the school. Come away now, or ye’ll get your licks.”

Without seeming to hear his warning, I drew in my line with a good young coal fish at the end of it, and quietly counted my catch. There were just three-and-twenty fish, and I could not resist the temptation of making up the even two dozen; so I baited my hook again and cast it into the water, meditating as I did so upon Kinlay’s unnecessary interference.

Now Tom Kinlay, I must tell you, was some twelve months older than I, and, as I had reason to remember, much taller and stronger. In our early school days he had exercised a tyranny over me which I even now recall with feelings partly of indignation against him, and partly of shame in myself for having so foolishly bent under the yoke of his oppression. When we went bathing, as we frequently did, out on the further shores of the bay, he would not scruple to lead us younger lads into the deepest waters, and, when we were far beyond our depth and almost exhausted, he would swim behind us and force us under, for the mere cruel pleasure, I believe, of seeing our struggles and hearing our cries below the surface. From some fancied sense of duty we allowed ourselves meekly to serve and obey him. When we went on a cliff-climbing expedition he would choose to remain in safety up above on the banks holding the rope, while it was we who were sent down the dangerous precipice to harry the sea-birds’ nests.

Page 2

I had not yet forgiven Tom for what he had done a few days earlier than this spring morning. It happened this way:

Four of us had a boat out on the bay, and we sailed about from point to point, fancying ourselves sailors voyaging on foreign seas. Our dinghy, we imagined, was a sailing vessel, and the broad bay of Stromness represented the Atlantic Ocean. The Outer Holm we called “America,” Graemsay Island was “Africa,” and the Ness Point was “Spain,” while a small rock that stood far out in the bay was “St. Helena.” Tom Kinlay was, by his own appointment, our skipper; Robbie Rosson and Willie Hercus were classed able seamen; and my dog, Selta, and I were called upon to do duty for both passengers and cargo, curiously enough, sailing with the ship on every voyage.

We had touched at each of these places in turn, and when we were homeward bound I was landed at an imaginary port in “Spain.” The boat had pushed off, when I called out to the skipper that I would walk home to Stromness if he would take the ship into port.

I had returned home and was seated at dinner, when I thought of the dog and looked about for her. But she had not come back; so I went down to the jetty at the end of the Anchor Close, to see if I could discover the boat or any of the lads. Standing there I heard the dog’s bark across the water, and what was my consternation to see my pet stranded like a castaway on “St. Helena”! She was tethered by a rope to the rock, and could not escape without help. The tide was rising, and the rock barely visible above the water. In a few minutes my dog would be drowned. No boat was near at hand, and there was nothing for it but that I should swim out to the rescue, so I had to strip there on the jetty and plunge in. The swim was a long one, and I reached the rock only just in time. The dog had been marooned on that little island, but Tom Kinlay had fastened up the boat and gone home, caring nothing, and neither of the other lads dared so far offend him as to attempt to rescue poor Selta without his permission.

As I sat fishing on the pier, I was thinking of Kinlay’s attitude towards me, and wondering if I should ever be able to hold my own against him in our outdoor intercourse as easily as I certainly could hold it in our class at school. But soon I was interrupted by feeling another twitch at my line. I hauled in another sillock; and having now completed my two dozen fish, I gathered them and my lines together, thrust my fishhooks into my trousers’ pocket, and went off to school, only staying a few minutes on the way to give the fish to my sister Jessie, and get my slate and books in exchange.

Chapter II. Andrew Drever’s School

Our schoolhouse was situated on the braeside above the main street of Stromness. It was a plain stone building with crow-step gables and a slated roof; and the only indication of its purpose was a large board over the door, upon which Andrew Drever had himself imprinted the word “*School*” in bold black letters on a white ground.

Page 3

The morning's lessons were already well advanced, as I could hear by the hum of voices as I approached. Even Peter, the jackdaw, in his wicker cage at the open doorway, joined in the clatter of tongues. His quick eye noticed me hurrying to the school, and he sidled awkwardly along his perch, put out his long black beak through the bars of his cage, and flapped his wings with unmistakable signs of welcome.

I was very late; so late that I half dreaded going into the school; and to discover if possible what humour the schoolmaster was in, I peeped through the half-open window. In the inner room I could see old Grace Drever seated with her gray cat beside the peat fire, busily twirling her spinning wheel. Nearer to me Mr. Drever himself sat at a high desk, at the side of which hung the inevitable "tawse;" and I did not fail to notice that this instrument of torture had already been used that morning, for it still swung with a gentle motion from side to side, like the pendulum of a lazy clock.

Lest you should suppose that Andrew Drever was a severe taskmaster, however, let me here hasten to assure you that his nature was as sweet as summer. His methods of punishment and reward were the perfection of justice. In stature he was a small man, but his back was broad and strong, and his hands were firm and large. His long, straight hair was as black as the wing of his own jackdaw, and his cheeks, though thin, had a freshness of colour about them that was brought there by the bracing breezes of our native hills.

The class was at the Latin exercises, for Latin formed part of our education, and I could hear Jessie Grey repeating a conjugation. I saw Tom Kinlay looking absently towards the window where I stood, and fearing that he would notice me, I moved a step nearer the door. Then I heard Mr. Drever speak.

"Kinlay," said he, "finish the subjunctive mood, where Jessie Grey left off."

Tom's trembling voice betrayed his ignorance of the-lesson.

"Regor, I am ruled; regeris, thou—"

"No, no," interrupted the master. "What are you thinking of, boy? That's the indicative mood. I asked for the subjunctive. Take your hands out of your pockets, sir, and don't stand there glowering at the whaling ships. They'll not be away till afternoon. Now, the subjunctive mood?"

"I can't say it, sir. I could not get it into my head," whined Tom.

"Can't! do you say? Can't! Was there ever such a word?—Here, you, Halcro Ericson, finish the—Now, where's that lad? Has he not come to the school yet?"

"No, sir," replied two or three voices.

Now that the schoolmaster's attention had been so drawn to my absence, I felt more than ever reluctant to enter.

"Where is he? Does anyone know?" asked Mr. Drever.

"Dinna ken, sir," was the weak response.

Then Tom Kinlay, anxious, I suppose, to retrieve his lost ground, droned out: "He's away down at the shore side, sir. I saw him fishing."

Page 4

“Ah! s-sneak!” hissed one of the boys near him; “what for need you tell?”

“Now, now!” said the master quietly. “None of that. Get along with the lesson.”

He glanced along the row of faces before him.

“Thora Kinlay,” he said, “finish the conjugation where Jessie Grey left off.”

I was again at the window.

Mr. Drever looked towards a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl who stood directly opposite to him. At her throat there was a cowslip—a rare flower in Orkney. She wore a rough, homespun frock, as all the other girls did; but, for some reason which I cannot explain, Thora Kinlay was quite unlike her companions. Such was the refined gentleness of her nature that I can compare her only with the tern—the most beautiful, I believe, of all our sea birds.

“Regerer, I might be ruled; regereris, thou mightst be ruled,” she began, and as she repeated the conjugation, I listened with attention not unmixed with envy, for she was the best scholar in the whole school.

As Thora concluded, the schoolmaster gave her a word of praise, and told her to go to the top of the class, while her brother, Tom, was ordered to the bottom.

Andrew Drever had given these directions, and was leaning with his elbow on the desk, his chin resting on his hand, when his eye was attracted by my moving shadow at the doorway; and amid a sudden silence I entered and took my place at the bottom of the class.

“Good morning, sir!” I said, looking fearlessly into Mr. Drever’s kind face.

“Good morning, Ericson!” said he. “You take your proper place, I notice. But what is the meaning of this lateness? What excuse have you this time?”

“I was down at the shore side catching sillocks,” I boldly answered, “and I just stopped to make up the even number.”

Robbie Rosson here put his hand to his mouth in the form of a speaking trumpet, and whispered: “How many did you catch, Hal?”

“Just two dozen,” I quietly replied, yet not so quietly but Mr. Drever heard me.

“Yes, Ericson,” said he sternly, “you stay to make up the number of your fish. But why do you not remember that you have a duty in making up the number of your class at school?”

“I’m very sorry, sir,” I said; “but I’ll not do it again.”

“See that you do not. I will excuse you this time, but only because you were at the fishing.” Then he added more kindly, “I have myself lost count of time in the same way. And now let me hear your Latin lesson.”

Fortunately I went through the lesson without mistake, and was rewarded by being told to go above Tom Kinlay. As I took my place, however, the next boy to me, Robbie Rosson, gave a great shout of pain, as though a pin had been stuck into him.

“Hello, hello! What’s wrong now?” exclaimed the schoolmaster.

“It’s nothing, sir,” said Robbie, looking extremely uncomfortable.

Page 5

“Nothing! What for did you cry out like that, then?”

“’Twas one of my fishhooks stuck in his leg, sir,” I explained, extracting the offending hook from Rosson’s trousers, and putting it back with others into my pocket.

“Give me the hooks!” demanded Mr. Drever, holding out his hand to receive them. “I don’t know what can possess you, bringing such things to school.”

Then before putting the hooks away in his desk, he examined them with a knowing eye, and I heard him murmur, “Dear me, dear me! You lads beat everything. I cannot think where ye get such good hooks from.”

The lesson was now changed. We all took our seats at the desks for arithmetic, and throughout the morning there were few interruptions further than the necessary disturbance caused by the changing of places as one or another of us was distinguished for reward.

Chapter III. A Half Holiday.

You will have gathered from Andrew Drever’s remark about the fishhooks that he was something of a fisher. He was a fisher; but he was also a naturalist, and he varied the hard duties of the school by making frequent excursions across the hills in search of objects for his favourite study. In addition to the maps and diagrams that hung on the whitewashed walls of the schoolroom there were many cases containing stuffed birds, such as guillemots, terns, owls, and ouzels; and specimens of the small quadrupeds of the locality, including a weasel and a fine pair of otters. All of these specimens had been prepared and stuffed by himself, and upon a side table by the window he kept a collection of curious stones and old coins that he had found on his wanderings.

Andrew’s heart was in both of his occupations. He loved his birds and his curiosities, and I think he loved his pupils. Often, as he sat on his high stool behind his desk, with a severity in his features which his position seemed to demand, I have seen his brown eyes soften as they looked round the circle of faces, and I have known that he had some affection for each one of us. Out of school hours he took great interest in our pursuits, giving to the girls advice in the arrangement of colour in their needlework, and to the boys many a valuable hint for the hooking of trout. He knew no distinctions of rank or social position. A laird’s son was treated by him with the same dignity or kindness that was shown to the son of a poor kelp burner; and the coveted seat at the head of the class was as often occupied by a poor fisherman’s lad as by the better dressed, but not better educated, son of the Inspector of Fisheries, or the bright little daughter of so great a man as Lloyd’s agent.

Towards the close of morning school, Peter, the jackdaw, announced by the fluttering of his wings and his chattering that a stranger was coming to the door, and very soon Mr. Duke, one of the bailies of the town, entered the school. We had learnt to expect something good to come of the bailie's visits, and this occasion was no exception.

Page 6

He sat down on one of the low forms near Mr. Drever's desk, and took from his waistcoat pocket a large silver snuffbox.

"Well, Andrew," he cheerily exclaimed, taking a copious pinch between his finger and thumb and handing the box to the master, "here's a glorious morning for you, eh? Ay, man, and how are all your bairns? I see ye aye keep up your number. And who have you at the head of the class the day? Is it Thora again?"

"Yes," replied Andrew, giving a resounding sneeze and loudly blowing his nose. "Yes, its just Thora again. She's kept it all the morning. You see, sir, they all take the same places before the day's out: whatever way they begin, the smartest are sure to get to the top."

"Ay, ay, just so," mused the bailie, again opening his snuffbox. "They're like a pack o' cards—shuffle them as ye will before the game begins, the honours must still come together at the finish.

"Well, Thora, lassie," he continued, turning round to Thora Kinlay, "and how are ye all up at Crua Breck?"

"Oh, we're all fine, thank you, sir," said the girl; "only Crumpie fell over the Neban bank yestreen and broke her leg."

"Ah, indeed! but that's most serious; poor Crumpie!—and that's the new cow, is it? or is it the old horse?"

"It's the old cow, sir," said Thora, apparently wondering at the bailie's ignorance.

Then Mr. Duke thrust his hand deep into his pocket and brought it out again full of keys and money. He selected one of the coins and handed it to Thora, saying, "There's to you, Thora; that's for getting to the head of the class."

From his seat he then questioned several of us regarding our lessons and our homes, and finally he stood up and addressed us all, saying: "I have come in this morning, bairns, to ask Mr. Drever to give you all a half holiday. The whaling ships are to sail by this afternoon's tide, and as many of you have brothers and fathers aboard, I don't doubt that Mr. Drever will let you away;" and he added, turning to the master, "What do you say, Andrew?"

"I'm sure, sir," said Mr. Drever, "I have no objections to offer;" and he looked out through the window as though to satisfy himself that the weather was suitable for an afternoon's fishing.

Mr. Duke then went into the inner room to have a gossip with old Grace Drever. The schoolmaster pronounced the benediction, and we flocked noisily outside.

As I was leaving with Robbie Rosson, Mr. Drever called me back.

“Don’t leave the hooks here, Ericson,” he said; “you’ll be needing them for the fishing.”

And taking the fishhooks from his desk he again examined them attentively, admiring the fine workmanship displayed in the turn of their points.

“My lad, these are fine hooks for a sea trout,” he continued; “you’ll have gotten them from Kirkwall, no doubt?”

“No,” I said. “Father got them from one of the captains. I’d like if you’d keep some of them, Mr. Drever;” and I offered him three of the best.

Page 7

“Oh no, no!” he exclaimed, “I could not think of taking them from you. I didn’t mean that.

“But maybe, well, maybe I might just have the loan of one of them to try this afternoon. I’m going away to Kirbister to see if I can catch a few sea trout.”

“Kirbister for sea trout!” said I, knowing that on the subject of fishing I might venture to disagree with even so practised an angler as Andrew Drever. “If you’re seeking sea trout you need go no further than the Bush. There’s not a stream in the Mainland equal to the Bush. Take the hooks, sir, and I’ll warrant you’ll bring home a full basket.”

“Well, I’ll take your advice and try the Bush, for it’s aye the lads that find out the best waters. Thank you for the hooks, Halcro. Away with you; and see you’re not so late at the school another morning.”

And as I scampered down the brae, I knew that he was watching me from the door.

In the street I found Tom Kinlay and two other boys waiting for me, and arranging an excursion across the hills to Skaill Bay to hunt for seals. It was an expedition in which I very readily agreed to join, and it was arranged that we should meet early in the afternoon on the moor between Voy and Crua Breck.

Chapter IV. Sandy Ericson, Pilot.

My home was close beside the school. There were only a few steps to skip across the narrow main street, and a turn into the Anchor Close brought me to my mother’s door. Many of my companions, however, had several miles to travel. Tom and Thora Kinlay lived at Crua Breck farm, distant from Stromness four miles; and little Hilda Paterson, the youngest girl in the school, lived at her father’s croft away beyond Stenness, and walked the five miles—barefooted—twice a day.

When I got home the brose for dinner was cooling on the windowsill, and my mother was frying the fish I had caught in the morning. My sister Jessie sat near the window plaiting straw—an industry common in Orkney at that time.

“Hello, Hal! back already?” Jessie exclaimed, putting her work aside as I threw my books and slate in the corner beside her. “Come away and look out for father. He has just brought in a new ship.”

We went out upon the little jetty where I had fished in the morning, at the extremity of the passage in which our house stood, and there we waited and watched for my father’s boat.

With this stone pier my earliest recollections were connected. When I was but an infant my father had carried me out in his great strong arms, and for the first time showed me

the sun rising over the furrowed hills of Orphir. He had directed my childish eyes to the deep green of the sea water as it rippled gently against the wall of our house. It was here that, as a boy, I had, by rolling over the pier like a ball, made a more intimate acquaintance with the element that was to be as familiar to me as my native air. Here, too, I had caught my first fish, and hence despatched to unknown lands my little fleet of wooden boats with their quaint paper sails.

Page 8

The ship that my father had just brought into port was a trim barque, with high, tapering masts and a bright-green hull.

“What’s her name, Hal?” inquired Jessie as the vessel was brought to.

I had accustomed myself to make out ships’ names at great distances, and as the barque swung round with the stream I could read the words “Lydia of Leith” painted on her counter.

“Yonder is father, and there is Uncle Mansie,” said Jessie, as the two men climbed over the ship’s rail and swarmed down into the boat. Then up went the brown sail, and the little Curlew sped blithely past the whaling ships and across the broad bay, and it was not long ere she was moored alongside our jetty and father stepped ashore.

My father was a tall, muscular man, with a long, fair beard, and blue eyes as clear and deep as the summer sky. He was a worthy representative of the old Norse sea king, from whom he was descended, and his descent was shown in his great love of the sea. He was the chief pilot of the port of Stromness, and no man knew so well as he all the dangerous currents and shoals of the Orcadian seas. There was not a flow or a sound between the North and South Ronaldsays, or from Bore Head in the west to the Start in the east that he did not know as well as the eagle knows her corrie, or which he could not navigate on the darkest night. The perils of the whirlpools, of the sunken rocks, and of the wild winter storms which beat in fury upon our iron coasts, were part of his life; and I have heard it said that he had saved more ships from destruction than any other man in Orkney or Shetland. If you had asked anyone in Stromness, What man in all Pomona could least be spared? the reply would have been given, “Sandy Ericson, the pilot.”

I need not say that for these reasons I was proud of my brave father. But it was not from him I learned these things, for he would never say a word in his own praise, and, had I not heard of his hardy bravery from other lips, he might have been to me no more than the gentle, affectionate parent that he ever was.

We left the four men who were the crew of the Curlew to look after the boat, while Uncle Mansie and father came into the house to dinner.

When, being the youngest of the family, I had said grace and we were supping our brose, Uncle Mansie looked over to me and asked: “Well, Hal, are you coming out in the Curlew with us to see the whaling ships away?”

I replied in true Orkney fashion by asking another question:

“How far are you to take them?”

Mansie turned to father, who said: “Och, we’ll take them as far as the Braga Rock anyway. If you’ll come wi’ us, Hal, we’ll stow you snugly in the bow o’ the Curlew, and you’ll get a fine sail. What’s an Orkney lad, whatever, if he’s not to have a taste o’ the dangers o’ the sea? There’s more for him to do than daunder about the hillside with a trout wand over his shoulder.”

Page 9

“’Deed, I dinna ken about that, father,” said my mother, helping me to a plateful of fried sillocks. “If it’s danger you’re wantin’ the laddie to seek, he’s seen o’er many dangers already, I’m thinking. It’s nearly drowned he was, only a week ago, in the Barra Flow, swimming out after a dog that wasna worth the saving; and I have seen him mysel’ dangling over the Breckness cliffs, like a spider, at the end of a rope I would not have trusted to hang Lucky Drever’s cat with! Danger, forsooth! the laddie is always in danger.”

It was like my mother to object to my taking to the sea, even for the pleasure of a sail. Although she well knew that it was the only life open to an Orkney lad, yet she was ever anxious to delay its beginning, and at these words from her my father did not urge me further, but quietly watched me as I rose from the table and took from a rack over the window a small harpoon, the sharp point of which I tested by pressing it against my thumb.

“Oh, there’s a lad!” exclaimed Jessie. “Off to the sealing when he might have a fine sail in the Curlew. I wish I could get such a chance.”

“All right, lad!” interrupted my father. “Away with you to the sealing. You’ll get many another chance of a sail. Who’s going with you?”

“Robbie Rosson and Willie Hercus and—” I added with some hesitation, “Tom Kinlay,” for I knew my father did not entirely approve of Tom as a companion.

“Kinlay again?” he muttered, knitting his brows. “I would advise you not to go with that lad so often. But then you dinna ken what his father is, I suppose.”

It was seldom that I heard my father speak an ill word against any man. I did not ask him any question, but his brief warning was enough to show me that there was some serious cause of enmity between him and Tom’s father, Carver Kinlay.

“Father,” I said, “I’ll not go with Tom if you object.”

“Object!” said he. “What care I for the lad? It’s the father that’s my enemy. His bairns may be better than he. Away to the sealing with you, and may you get good sport!”

And he followed me to the door.

Chapter V. The Hen Harrier.

I lingered about the little quay while my father and the crew were hoisting sail. For a moment I questioned if I should not be happier in the bow of the Curlew, than tramping half a score of miles over rough uninteresting moorland on the chance of capturing a seal; but in the end I was satisfied in keeping to the plan arranged by my companions. I

waited only to see the boat bend over in the fresh breeze as she sailed outward to the ships; then, armed with my harpoon and a knobbed stick, I hastened out of Stromness, followed by my dog.

Selta (so called after one of our native streams) was a long-bodied, long-haired animal, with a touch of the otter hound in her nature. I got her from Colin Lothian, an old “gaberlunzie” man who travelled our countryside. He gave me the dog when she was a young thing, and he had another of the same litter which followed him wherever he went about the island.

Page 10

Selta was notable for her shaggy brown coat and ungainly head, and for her keen scent. One day during the previous winter I had been over to Russadale for my mother, and in coming home I was caught in a snowstorm. The mist was thick and the way obscured by the driving snow, but Selta lowered her nose and led me over the hills in a beeline to Stromness.

She had never before been out with me at the seal catching; but I took her this day, thinking she might prove useful—as indeed she did.

The direct way to Skaill lay along an almost straight road to the northward, by Hamla Voe and the western shores of the loch of Stenness, past the Druid standing stones.

On this May afternoon, as I walked along the familiar road, there was little to attract my attention. The gray stretch of water lay still and cold, and the ploughed fields beyond it were brown and barren. In a more southern clime every tree and bush would be, at that season, putting forth fresh verdure, and the budding hedgerows would be bursting into green beauty; but to me, at that period of my life, the sweet-smelling hawthorn, the golden-fingered laburnum, and the full, rich blossom of an apple orchard were unknown delights. I had never yet seen a real tree, and our highest bushes in Pomona reached scarcely to my shoulder. The land was all gray and barren.

At the old mill of Cairston I was joined by Robbie Rosson, and, instead of continuing by the road, we cut across country, climbing the stone dykes and jumping over the gurgling streams. A walk of three miles brought us to Crua Breck, a small farmhouse on the hillside of the same name, overlooking the Pentland Firth. The ridge tiles of this house ran precisely north and south, and it was a superstition amongst us that this same ridge had the power of deciding whether the north wind should blow towards the German Ocean or the Atlantic; just as King Eric of Orkney could, in his time, change the direction of the winds by altering the position of his cap.

Crua Breck was at least a mile from any other house—unless, indeed, the ruined and tenantless cottage of Inganess merited the name. Carver Kinlay had lived there as long as I could remember; but the fact that the fisher folks often spoke of him as a “ferry jumper” implied that he was still regarded as a foreigner on Orcadian soil.

I had never been inside the Crua Breck house, nor, I may say, did I much covet a visit there, for the inmates of the farm were not distinguished for their friendliness or hospitality, and, with the one exception of Thora, whom I always regarded with a sense of kindliness, and Tom, who was my class fellow, I had little acquaintance with the family.

Had I been more warmly inclined towards them I would have gone up to the door at once and asked for Tom, instead of sitting on the dyke side with Rosson and waiting till he chose to come out to us.

As we sat there, however, Thora Kinlay came past us, driving before her a hen and her brood of chickens, which she had found straying along the cliffs, and of her we asked for Tom. She at once offered to run to the house and bring him, but ultimately Robbie Rosson went instead, with my terrier at his heels.

Page 11

“How is it you are not at the fishing, Halcro?” inquired Thora when we were alone. “I saw the schoolmaster away down at the Bush just now as I came past. He seemed to be catching very little, though.”

“Ah!” I said, “I doubt it’s too clear a day for the trout. We’re off to Skaill Vie to see if we can catch a seal.”

“That will be fine fun,” said Thora, with a touch of envy in her voice. “I wish I was going with you. Will you not take me?”

“Indeed,” I returned, not unwilling that she should join us in our sport, “I’d be real glad if you would come. But here’s Tom, we’ll ask him.”

Robbie and Tom approached across a plot of potatoes. Tom was eating a huge piece of oatcake, and slashing, with a long stick he carried, at the heads of the thistles that grew, all too plentifully, among the potatoes.

Tom was a tall, large-boned lad, and his feet, which were encased in rivlins, or rough hide shoes, projected several inches below his trousers; his arms, too, seemed to have grown far beyond the length of his jacket sleeves. His untidy black hair and dark eyes contrasted strangely with the fair and delicate beauty of his sister Thora. A stranger might have taken Thora to be of pure Norse family, and her adventurous spirit would have justified the belief. But Tom took after his father, whose type was that of a race not uncommon in the north of Scotland, and called—for I know not what reason—“The dark men of Connemara.”

“Tom,” I asked when he was beside us, “what do you say to Thora coming with us to the sealing?”

“What! Certainly not,” replied Tom, who was ever jealous of his sister and loved not to favour her in any way. “What would a lassie do at the sealing? Let her go back home and do her lessons, and try if she can win to the head of the class again.”

“Indeed,” said Thora with suppressed indignation, “it is you who should try to do that, Tom. You’re the eldest and biggest lad in the school, and have never yet been at the head of the class, dunce that you are! But away with you to the sealing. I do not care, for I have adventure of my own. I know where there’s a hen harrier building her nest on the Black Craigs, and it’s not you I will tell where it is, my lad.”

This was a successful parting shot from Thora. She well knew that any lad in Orkney would envy her the discovery of a falcon’s nest, and that Tom, more than any other, would be jealous of her finding what he might have searched for in vain.

“Just fancy that lass finding a harrier’s nest!” he murmured as we went along. “I wonder if it’s true! I bet she only said that out of spite because we would not let her come with

us. But who wants a slip of a girl at such work? She'd only frighten the seals and prevent us from catching any. It's my opinion we have enough of the girls in the school without them joining us in our sports. What do you say, Ericson?"

Page 12

“I don’t know about that,” I said. “For my part I shouldn’t have objected to Thora coming with us. As for the hen harrier, I don’t doubt that what she said was quite true. It’s well known that she’s one of the best cliff climbers of us all.”

“Tut! you always side with the lassies, Ericson. That’s because you’re aye beside them at the head of the class. What was it that old Duke gave her this morning? Was it a bawbee?”

“I took no notice of what it was, Tom,” I replied. “But it was very kind of him to give her anything.”

“It was a sixpence he gave her,” said Robbie Rosson. “I saw the colour of it.”

“A sixpence!” exclaimed Tom. “The sneak that she is! Let’s go back and make her give us a share of it.”

“Get away, man,” said Robbie. “What is it to us though the bailie gave her a dozen sixpences? He’d have given it to any of us if we’d been at the head of the class.”

The discussion upon Thora ended here, and we continued our walk in comparative silence.

Willie Hercus was waiting for us when we reached the hill of Yeskenaby. Hercus was a barefooted, red-haired boy, with gray eyes that were almost hidden in the fatness of his cheeks, and totally so when he laughed, as he invariably did on the least provocation. His brow and nose were covered with brown freckles, like a turkey’s egg; and he wore a large sea jacket that had belonged to his father, one of the crew of the Curlew.

We walked leisurely along the brink of the Black Craigs—a line of steep cliffs bordering the western portion of the Mainland. At times a hoodie crow would fly across our path, or the red grouse be startled from their nests in the freshly-budding heather; and sea fowl in large numbers sailed gracefully over our heads or deep down the cliffs, making the chasms echo with their ceaseless screaming.

We made no attempt to kill or capture any of the birds. One bird, however, we did take, and that more by accident than intention. It happened this way:

My dog was trotting before us, with her nose to the ground, when suddenly she made a run through the short heather after a lapwing, which was, or pretended to be, unable to fly. I think it was trying to decoy the dog away from its nest. As we watched the chase, Tom cried out:

“Look, look, there’s a hawk after them!”

And, indeed, so it was. The lapwing ran with wondrous speed, and before Selta had time to snap at it a hawk had nipped in before the dog's nose in the attempt to rob her of her prey. Unfortunately for the larger bird, however, the dog's snap, intended for the fugitive, came upon the hawk's outstretched neck. The lapwing escaped unhurt, and flew screaming into the air, but Selta held to the hawk till we ran up and helped her. I managed to secure the bird's wings, which flapped about with surprising strength, while Tom held its struggling legs.

"Thraw its neck, thraw its neck!" cried Rosson, now coming up to us.

Page 13

Selta loosened her hold, and Willie Hercus took the hawk's head in his hand, carefully guarding against its sharp beak, gave its neck a rapid twist, and the bird was dead.

"What kind of a bird is it?" eagerly asked Kinlay, whose knowledge of our native birds was as imperfect as his knowledge of Latin conjugations.

"Can you not see it's a harrier—a hen harrier?" I said, as I stretched out the large and beautiful wings of gray-blue feathers and proceeded to bind the bird's feet with a string.

"The very same that Thora spoke of, I'll be bound!" Tom exclaimed with satisfaction, as he evidently thought of his sister's secret of the nest on the Black Craigs.

"What'll we do with it?" asked Hercus. "Is it good for eating?"

"Nonsense, Willie!" said I. "Surely we've birds in plenty without eating hawks! Let's give it to the dominie."

"Ay, let's give it to the dominie," chimed in Robbie Rosson, always ready to agree with whatever I proposed.

"The dominie! What for would you give it to the dominie?" objected Kinlay. "It's my bird. I first saw it."

"Your bird! your bird, indeed!" exclaimed Hercus, putting his hands in his pockets and assuming an attitude of indignant surprise. "Is it the man who first sees the whale that has the blubber? No, no, Ericson's dog caught the bird. Let Hal do as he likes with his own."

I have no doubt that Tom coveted the dead falcon in order to persuade his sister that he had discovered her harrier's nest. When we agreed to keep the bird for the schoolmaster, he accordingly grew gloomy, and the rest of the journey to Skaill was accomplished without his joining in the merry talk, of which there was no lack, you may be sure.

Chapter VI. "Better Gear Than Rats."

Skaill Vic is a large, sheltered inlet of the sea. I have heard that in ancient times it was a meeting place of the Norse vikings, and it is just such a place as a pirate might choose to make his headquarters, being a convenient station from which he could ravage the adjacent shores of Scotland, or sail over to Norway, or even north to Iceland, and safely return to its secluded shelter, to store his treasure in the dark caverns of the rugged cliffs. I may here remind you that Pomona Island was, long ago, the holy land of the Northman, and that the cairns and cromlechs scattered over our hills and plains are to this day associated with the visits of the old viking buccaneers. Andrew Drever, who

was exceedingly well versed in the antique lore of the Orkneys, once told us in school of a Runic inscription he had seen in the Maes Howe at Stenness. It was interpreted to the effect that one of the old vikings “had found much fee in Orkhow,” and that this treasure had been buried “to the northwest.”

“Happy is he,” the legend continued—“Happy is he who may discover this great wealth.”

Page 14

But, of course, no person had ever found trace of it, and Mr. Drever supposed that it must have been swept away by the furious storms that, in wintertime, dash continually against the rocky ribs of the Orcadian coasts.

We got down by a pathway to the sloping beach, which the tide had left bare. At the point where we hoped to find some seals, we observed several men and women gathering seaweed, preparatory to burning it for kelp. This was a disappointment to us, since, if there were any seals about, it was likely they would be scared away by the kelp burners. But we walked along under the high banks as far as the northern extremity of the bay, in expectation of finding some sport on the outer shores.

We sat for a long while talking, as schoolboys will talk, in a sheltered cleft of the headland, which, I believe, had once been a cavern, and was known by the name of the Kierfiold Helyer. Here the force of many an Atlantic storm had so worn away the face of the rocks that the cliff was driven back to the innermost parts of the original cave. Great pieces of granite lay about in disorder, showing where the roof of the cavern had fallen in; and on one of these boulders we sat until we were weary, looking out to the water's edge, in expectation of seeing some seals appear.

Skaill Bay was our favourite spot for the sealing, and at the proper season the seals were generally plentiful and not timid. Indeed, so bold were they sometimes, that on a Sabbath morning, when the bell of Sandwick Church, hard by, had been ringing for divine service, I have seen the animals collect in numbers on the beach to listen to the strange sound, which held them so fixed and charmed, that it required an effort to startle them away. Now, however, the seals seemed to have deserted the place, and I was not sorry when Tom Kinlay proposed that we should give up our search for them and return home.

Just as we were moving away I chanced to look along the shoreline, and at some distance from where we stood I detected a moving object in the water, and presently saw what I took to be three seals basking on a bank of sand. Now was our weariness changed to eager desire, and we at once prepared for some good sport.

Leaving our dead falcon on a slab of rock, we quietly distributed ourselves. Willie Hercus approached the seals under cover of a large boulder. I crept along by the foot of the cliffs with Selta, intending to get down to the water's edge, and so work back again to cut off the retreat of the seals; while Kinlay and Rosson did the same on the other side.

We gradually and silently closed round our game. Our approach was, however, somewhat marred by an alarm given by a seagull flying over the seals. The largest animal turned round towards the sea. Its mates took the signal and, with it, made for the water.

Page 15

I gave a word to the dog, and Selta ran forward to meet the middle seal, which she kept at bay as she might have kept a sheep, barking in its face and always getting between it and the water. Tom and Robbie ran after one of the others, while the largest seal, which I had marked as my own prize, managed to escape me and plunge into the sea. I then turned to encounter the seal that the dog and Willie Hercus had arrested. Willie, having no stick or harpoon, was throwing large stones at the animal, which seemed to pay little attention to them, but kept its large, beautiful eyes fixed upon the dog. One of the stones, unfortunately, struck Selta, and when she turned, the seal made its way past. I saw the movement and succeeded in striking the seal on the nose with my knobbed stick. The animal collapsed at once; its head dropped on the sand, and it moved no more.

Meanwhile Robbie and Tom, who had my harpoon, were having a hard fight. Their seal had been struck once with the harpoon on the left shoulder. Tom tried to intercept its retreat, and just as it was entering the water he fell down upon it with all his weight, at the same time grasping its wounded flipper in his two hands. The seal, though weak, drew him some way over the slippery stones and into the sea; but Tom proved victor. Rising on his knees in the water, he wrapped both his arms round the seal, and, with the assistance of Rosson, succeeded in carrying it ashore, where it was finally killed.

We had heavy work conveying our two seals up the beach to the place where we had left our dead bird; and there with our knives we proceeded to secure the skins and the blubber, leaving the carcasses behind for the cormorants and carrion crows.

Willie Hercus and I were finished first, and we carefully folded up our perfect sealskin. But Tom, who was less accustomed to the work, fumbled away awkwardly, muttering to himself when his sharp blade cut into the skin instead of neatly parting it from the body.

As we sat on a rock waiting for our companions, Selta went sniffing about on her own account and rooting into the far corners of the old cave. She at length found her way to the dead hen harrier, as it lay on a slab of flagstone. Hercus called her off as she put her nose too closely to the bird. But Selta was following her instincts; for, in turning the bird with her nose, she disturbed a small rat which was coolly making its meal there. I ran to examine the damage done to the hawk (for I was anxious to give the bird uninjured to Mr. Drever), while Willie followed the dog into the crevice where she had chased the rat. I found the harrier was not much damaged; a few feathers were bitten out and a little of the skin was broken, that was all.

I put my harpoon and stick through the string that secured the bird's legs and slung it over my shoulder, gathered up our sealskin, and went to hurry up Tom and Robbie, for the tide was rising and we had a long journey before us. Tom had just cut the last of the skin from the seal's head, and when he had folded it up, the three of us began our walk towards the further shore of the bay, expecting Hercus to follow with the dog.

Page 16

“Hello! what can be keeping Hercus so long?” asked Robbie, when we had walked some distance.

I told him about the rat that the dog was after, and looked back for Willie. Not seeing him, we concluded he had gone round by the top of the cliffs, and we continued our way a few yards further. Then we heard Hercus calling after us in an excited way.

“Come back, lads, come back!” he shouted; and I looked at the sea line, fearing lest it was the rising tide that Hercus was warning us against.

“I’m not going back,” objected Tom. “We’ve got time to get to the other side long before the water’s up. Besides, I’m hungry. I’m going home.”

“Tut, didn’t we wait for you while you skinned your seal? Let’s go back,” I urged. “Maybe Hercus is hurt.”

“Come away back, Tom,” added Rosson.

So we all returned to where Willie Hercus still remained, and wondered what he could mean by calling us back.

When we entered the chasm we were much surprised to find Hercus lying flat on the shingle, with his right arm deep in a hole he had dug, and the dog at his side, wagging her tail and uttering short barks of excitement.

“Good sakes!” exclaimed Robbie Rosson. “What’s wrong with the lad?”

Much relieved we were to hear Hercus speak. I confess I had felt certain some harm had happened to him.

“Come away,” he said, in a tone which was far from being a cry of pain. “Come away, lads, and give us a hand here. There’s better gear than rats in this hole, I’m thinking.”

And, so saying, he rose to his knees and held out to us a heavy and black piece of metal, which at first I took to be an iron bolt.

“Well, what is it?” I asked, taking the thing in my hand and examining it.

“What is it?” said Hercus. “Can you not see, lad? Why, it’s silver!”

Chapter VII. What The Shingle Revealed.

Now the explanation of Willie’s curious discovery, as we afterwards fully learned, was this: When I took up the dead falcon, Hercus, intent upon witnessing Selta’s skill at

ratting, stood beside the dog as she scraped with her forefeet the shingle from the crevice through which the rat had escaped. Disappointed at losing her prize, the terrier dug and dug away at the shingle and moist sand, scattering it behind her, and burying her nose deep down. Then a strange, grim object was unearthed. In the midst of the stones, Hercus, to his horror, saw lying there a ghastly human skull, with the great cavities where the eyes had been, staring at him. Hesitating at the sight of this frightful spectacle, he at last mustered courage to take the thing in his hand. He was in the act of examining it, when, from one of the hollow eye sockets, out jumped the fugitive rat. Had the jaws of the skull moved in speech, Willie could not have been more terrified than he was by seeing the rat spring from its strange hiding place.

Page 17

Dropping the horrible thing upon the rock at his feet, where the rotten bone broke into fragments, he rushed out upon the beach and called us back. Attracted to the spot again, he watched the dog burrowing in the shingle. Amongst the stones and sand he saw the dull sheen of what he at first supposed was a curious seashell, but which, when he picked up and examined it, he found to be an old coin. Believing that there might be more of these buried in the sand, he went down upon his knees once more to search. He had just discovered the bar of metal when we returned.

“What is it?” he said. “Why, it’s silver?”

We each in turn handled the little bar, and expressed our opinion regarding what Hercus supposed it to be. It was heavy enough, certainly, to be silver; but the improbability of such a piece of the precious metal being left there presented itself, and none of us was quite satisfied until Hercus, taking out his knife, cut and scraped the surface of the ingot and revealed the shining white metal underlying the grit and tarnish that had gathered upon it during the years—perhaps the centuries—it had lain there undisturbed.

By our united efforts we enlarged the hole that Willie and the dog had made, digging with the harpoon and removing with our hands the loosened stones. We found a quantity of antique coins of various sizes, which, by reason of their lightness, I suppose, were much scattered about. Then deeper down below these we came upon a number of large rings, or bracelets, in the form of horseshoes, and several ingots of silver, similar to the one Hercus had first found.

We grew excited in our search; and as the quantity of treasure we unearthed increased, so did we increase our exertions, until there was quite a heap of silver gathered upon the slab of flagstone where we placed it.

At a spot near where Hercus had discovered the skull we found a curious garment, formed of a fine network of rings and chains. It was much broken and torn—though the shoulder bands were preserved, as well as the collar—and we could see that the owner, whoever he might have been, must have had a large and strong body, for the coat was of great weight. Beside it there were what we took to be the remains of a helmet, the ornaments upon which were of a yellow and still untarnished metal, with a large crimson stone set in the front.

Hercus pronounced the metal to be brass; but I never discovered truly what it was, as I did not handle the fragments again, for the reason that (as I happened to notice at the time) Tom Kinlay, who kept silence regarding them, quietly put them in his pocket, allowing us afterwards to suppose that we had left them behind us. I had my suspicions, however, that the ornaments were of pure gold.

In addition to the coat of mail and the helmet, there were three other objects that engaged our special regard. These were a broken belt—made of link rings of bronze—-

the head of a battle axe, and a long sword. The sword, which was in a scabbard embossed with fine ornaments, had a richly-figured handle. It was a heavy weapon, and none of us could draw it from its scabbard, for the rust that encrusted it.

Page 18

When all that it seemed possible to find had been collected, and our digging brought nothing more to light, we opened our two seals' skins—throwing away the blubber, which seemed of little worth to us now that we had possessed ourselves of all this wealth—and lifting the treasure into them we made them into slings, one of which was carried by Tom Kinlay and Willie Hercus, the other by Robbie Rosson and myself. We bore our burdens joyfully as far as the other side of Skaill Bay, just managing to escape the tide that was creeping up to the base of the cliffs.

The last rays of the sun were setting across the broad Atlantic when we reached the top of the headland, and in the gray twilight spreading over the sea we watched the fleet of whaling ships sailing to the westward.

Chapter VIII. Dividing The Spoil.

Resting after the work of carrying our burden up the cliffs, we stood for a space upon the heights above Row Head to watch the sails of the fleet growing smaller as they approached the distant line of the horizon. The leaden sea danced in the fresh breeze, and the sky gradually lost its golden tints and assumed the clear, cold hue of the northern twilight. To the southward, across the moor, rose the dark mountains of Hoy Island, with the moon gleaming pale above them. From the shore came the fresh smell of the seaweed and the plaintive crying of the gulls.

The evening was growing late, and there were still half a dozen miles of rough moorland between Ramna and Stromness. Over the braes of Borwick we travelled at a steady pace. We were light of heart, for we had had a successful expedition, as was proved not only by our dead falcon and the two seals' skins, but, more than all, by the great wealth that those seals' skins carried.

Many were our conjectures as to the meaning of that great horde of silver we had discovered hidden in the sands of Skaill Bay.

"I wonder how it all came there!" mused Robbie, and then he added, "D'ye ken what I think, lads?"

"What think you, then, Robbie?" I asked.

"Well," said he, "I just think it must have been cast there by some shipwreck in the olden time. D'ye mind, Hal, of the story of the wreck of yon Spanish ship on the Carrig-na-Spana?"

"What! the San Miguel?"

"Ay, maybe that was her name, I dinna ken. Well, if you mind, she struck on the reef there, and the skipper dropped all his treasure chests overboard, in mortal fear that the

Orkney wreckers would rob him of them. I suppose he took his bearings, but for many a day the wreckers searched the waters, and never a thing did they find. Well, years and years after that the old skipper's son came to Orkney, and went straight to the spot where the treasure had been sunk and carried it all off to Spain."

Page 19

“But that explains nothing, Robbie,” I argued. “However, we ken well enough that those Spanish ships were aye loaded with gold and precious stones. And then, d’ye not mind of hearing about the Spanish Armada ships that were wrecked on the Orkneys? Now, I wouldn’t be surprised though the gear we have gotten was nothing else than the wreckage of an Armada ship. Even the skull that Willie found, maybe belonged to one of the soldier chaps that came to fight the English. But what is your opinion, Willie? You should know, for it was you who found the treasure.”

“Well, Ericson,” said he wisely, “I just think it was most extraordinary to see the heaps of siller come out of the very sands of the seashore, and in such a desolate place; and beyond that, it was a most providential thing that the dog ran after yon wee rat. What most gets over me, though, is to think of the rat making its nest in the dead man’s skull. Man! what a fright I had when the beast jumped out! As for how the siller came there, I canna just say; but, you mind, the dominie told us in the school that, lang syne, some of those viking lads used to cruise hereabout. Now, I’m thinking that it’s just possible one of them had maybe left the siller for safety in the Kierfiold Cave where I—where we found it, and clean forgotten to go back for it; just as old Betsy Matthew forgot the guineas she hid under the floor in the heel of a stocking.”

“Ay, I dinna doubt it may be so, Willie,” observed Rosson. “But then, what about the dead man’s head?”

“’Deed I canna say what way that could be there. I’m thinking we must e’en refer it to the dominie. He kens all about these things,” said Hercus; and then he turned to Kinlay, who hitherto had expressed no conjecture.

“But what think you of it all, Tom?”

“What do I think!” said Kinlay in a tone of indifference. “I care not what way the silver came there. What does it matter? I’m only thinking what I’ll do with my own share of it.”

Now I confess that I had not before thought anything at all about what we should do with the silver. I was so much interested in the circumstance of our curious discovery of the hidden treasure that the thought of its market value, or of our means of disposing of it, had never entered my head; and I believe Hercus and Rosson were totally ignorant of the fact that our find was really worth more than the mere interest we naturally attached to the articles as curious antiquities. Had I been asked as to the disposal of them, I believe I would have proposed that the whole treasure should be handed over to the care of our schoolmaster, who would doubtless see that we did not lose by any sale he might effect.

Tom Kinlay was the first to suggest the sharing of the silver pieces. We could offer no reasonable objection to a plan which seemed so fair to all of us, and we agreed that before we parted an equal division should be made.

Page 20

Walking along a stretch of bleak moorland bordering the sea, taking always the nearest cuts across the jutting points of rocky headland, we at length approached the quaint graveyard of Bigging. The night was clear, and light almost as day; but Robbie and Willie would, I believe, rather have gone many miles out of our direct way than go near that awesome place.

The ruined chapel and the long, flat tombstones surrounding it, seemed to have an eerie influence upon our imagination, and we could but whistle some merry tune to keep up our hearts. Willie Hercus, though naturally daring, was now especially timid, the remembrance of that skull he had handled having taken such hold of his mind that the simple mention of it by one of us was enough to make his voice sink to a trembling whisper, as though he feared the dead man might come to life again and appear in our midst to accuse us of having disturbed his bones.

I think Tom Kinlay was the only one of us who did not look with superstitious awe into the dark shadows that hung about those ruined walls and silent tombstones; but he was so tall and strong that nothing seemed to daunt him, and soon he made a proposal that went far towards assuring me that he was absolutely fearless.

“Now, lads,” said he, when we were passing the low wall of the burying ground, “let us get in here and spread out our things on one of those flat stones, and then we can share them out. Come along; nobody can disturb us in that quiet burying ground.”

“What!” exclaimed Robbie, betraying his terror at the proposal. “Over there among the graves! Not I. I’m not going into such a place after the sun has gone down. Why, we canna be sure that the ghosts of the dead will not spring out upon us!”

“No, I’m not going in there either,” chimed in Hercus. “We can divide the siller here on the moor just as well as in that fearsome place. Come back, Hal, dinna you gang either.”

“Well, well, what a pack of frightened bairns ye are!” said Kinlay, preparing to enter by the open gate. “Come along. What on earth can ye be feared at?”

Thus taunted for want of courage, Willie and Robbie overcame their superstitious scruples, and we all four made our way in among the graves.

We spread our treasures upon the top of a flat tombstone that was somewhat higher than its neighbours and formed a convenient table for our purpose. The stone was overgrown with lichens and moss, and skirted by a growth of nettles and thistles. As we stood around it in the twilight, surrounded by a wild solitude, we might have been mistaken for a company of pirates dividing their ill-gotten gains.

Whilst Kinlay and Hercus were opening out the two seals' skins my eyes idly wandered over the surface of the tombstone, and were arrested by the inscription carved thereon. There was an epitaph in some foreign language, old and worn, but under this was a name that seemed to be newly cut. It was the name "Thora Quendale."

Page 21

Now the name Thora is not a common one in Orkney, and seeing it on that strange old tombstone naturally made me think of the Thora whom I knew—Tom Kinlay's sister.

"Tom, did you ever notice the name on this grave? It's some woman buried here named Thora."

He turned and read the inscription.

"Ay, I've seen it before. It's some woman that was found drowned at the foot of the Black Craigs, years ago. I dinna ken who she was. I think she was in a shipwreck."

"Oh! Then it was no relation of yours?"

"No. That is, I dinna think it. But I have heard that Thora was named after her."

I asked him to tell me about the wreck; but just then Willie Hercus interrupted, saying:

"Come along, Ericson; you had better be the one to divide the treasure for us. We all ken you'll divide it fairly."

The treasure was heaped upon the tombstone, and as I regarded it I foresaw the difficulty of the task before me; for the pieces were obviously of very varied values, and I did not see how I could easily distribute them into four equal shares. But I made the attempt according to the manner that I had seen adopted by the fishermen at Stromness in dividing their fish.

To begin with, there was the sword—apparently the most valuable of all the treasures. Who was to have this? I naturally thought it should go to Hercus, to whom we owed our possession of the wealth, and I remembered that Kinlay already had an equivalent share in the pieces of broken helmet he had appropriated. I handed the sword over to Hercus, therefore. Tom offered no opposition at the time, but he afterwards bartered with Hercus for it, giving him in exchange two of the ingots of silver and the coat of mail which subsequently fell to his share.

The sword and the coat of mail being apportioned to Hercus and Kinlay, I then gave the bronze belt to Rosson, and took for myself some pieces of armour and a fragment of a shield. Then there were twenty-two ingots, or bars of silver, each of about six ounces in weight. Five of these were apportioned to each of us, two being left to be dealt with afterwards.

Next, there were thirteen brooches, such as the Scandinavians—as I learned later on—-were accustomed to use for binding their mantles. They were all of similar pattern, and would weigh, perhaps, three ounces each. Of them we had three apiece. There were three massive torques, or rings, something in the form of horseshoes, the opening being left to admit of their being fastened upon the neck, where the ornaments were worn, I

believe, by the ancients as symbols of rank or command. These articles were composed of a series of rings interlaced, some of them being embossed with rude but curious designs.

Page 22

I saw that we could not each of us have one of these, and here I was again in a difficulty; but since the ingots of silver were of about an equal weight, I took one of them myself and gave an ornament to each of my companions. Hercus, however, would not agree to this, and he showed, truly enough, that the ingots were worth no more than their weight in metal; whereas the rings were of much greater value, on account of being curious specimens of ancient art. He therefore asked me to take a few of the coins in order to make a fair division. The remaining coins, of which there was a considerable quantity, were then counted and equally shared amongst us.

We had now left one ingot of silver, one brooch, some odd fragments of silver, and a small black stone which had a metal ring round it; and the sharing of these cost more trouble than all the other articles together. They were all, so far as we could judge, of unequal values. The stone was considered worthless, except for the little band of metal with which it was clasped. The brooch was only about half the weight of the ingot, and it was not counted precious, because already each of us had three like it, while the small pile of silver fragments was not worth half the ingot {i}. I thought I was acting very fairly when I suggested that Hercus should have what remained, because, I said, if it had not been for him we would have had nothing at all.

“’Deed you’ll do nothing of the kind,” objected Kinlay. “What for should Hercus take all?”

“Well, well,” I said, somewhat ruffled, I admit, at Tom’s greed, “you needn’t be so sulky. Take you and divide the things. You’ll not do it any fairer.”

But Tom saw a way of sharing the things which suited himself, if it did not quite agree with my own views of fairness. To Willie he gave the brooch, to Robbie he passed the pile of fragments; and now he held the two remaining pieces, the ingot of silver and the little black stone. We awaited with much interest his final decision. With an unpleasant flash of his dark eyes he cast the stone to my end of the rude table, and quietly thrust the bar of silver with his other possessions into his capacious pockets.

I tried hard to check the words that rose to my lips. Throughout the afternoon I had noticed Tom’s pointed objections to many things I had done or had proposed to do. He had objected to Thora accompanying us on the sealing expedition. He had disagreed with the disposal of the dead hen harrier; other little incidents, most of which had testified to his deep-rooted selfishness, I had not failed to notice. More than all, I remembered how he had pocketed the jewelled fragments of the helmet, and kept the knowledge of their value from us all. As for the opinions of the other two lads regarding him, it was Willie Hercus who had called him a “sneak” in school that morning, and Robbie Rosson, I knew, had certainly no love for Tom, who had persistently bullied him.

Page 23

“Well, are you not satisfied?” said Kinlay, seeing my undisguised indignation.

“Yes, with my own share,” I replied. “But if you’d taken the smaller piece of siller for yourself, and given Willie Hercus yon piece you’ve taken, I’d have thought you more honourable.”

And then I roundly accused him of having stolen the fragments of the helmet.

“You have stolen the things,” I said. “You saw that they were of more worth than the rest, and you were afraid that we would want a share of them.”

“You’re a liar!” he exclaimed angrily.

“And you’re a thief!” I retorted; and I walked round to him, determined, if necessary, to defend my accusation in a more practical way than by empty words.

Now, I am confident that Kinlay was almost eager for such a chance as this to pay back many debts which his own jealousy had from time to time conjured up against me. For, apart from the fact that I happened to be a little more brilliant than he in our class at school, there were not wanting indications that he was in other ways losing ground in our common race, and circumstances seemed to require that we should each make a final effort now for the upper hand.

Seeing my determined attitude, he regarded it as a challenge, and at once took off his jacket and held it out for Robbie Rosson to take charge of. Robbie promptly showed the tenor of his feelings by allowing the jacket to fall upon one of the gravestones, and by coming to my side. Hercus merely busied himself in pacifying my dog, which had become restless on hearing our high words.

Kinlay and I now stood face to face, and I almost trembled to think of the thrashing that was probably in store for me. He gave the first blow, which struck me soundly on the side of the head and knocked my cap off. I buttoned my jacket tight and closed with my adversary, yet with small success. The fight was for a few moments unequal. Tom was much the taller, and his big feet, with their hide sandals, seemed to grip the elastic turf. His fists, too, were large and hard, and his lunging strokes were enough to stagger one of our native ponies.

Against this superiority I had to depend upon such power of limb and endurance as I had acquired by long practice at cliff climbing and in swimming the strong currents of Scapa Flow. For a time a heavy blow on my chest disabled me, and my right arm was sorely bruised by the many blows it had suffered in guarding my face. Still, I was determined not to give in; and, just as one gets a second wind in swimming, so did I now feel a new and strange strength come upon me. I continued the conflict with renewed energy.

Stepping backward upon one of the flat tombstones, I once more stood ready to receive my opponent. He struck without effect at my face, and while he was recovering his balance I saw my opportunity, and hit him a strong blow between the eyes. He staggered and fell, and I saw that the fight was over. Rising to his feet he did not retaliate, but picked up his jacket, wrapped his store of the treasure into his seal's skin, and wiping the dripping blood from his nose, walked away across the heath in the direction of Crua Breck, muttering a vow of vengeance.

Page 24

The combat had been sharp and effectual; but it was the outburst of an antagonism which had long been gathering strength; it was the practical declaration of an enmity that grew and lasted for many a day.

Chapter IX. Captain Gordon.

I was oppressed with a weight of weariness by the time that I came within sight of Stromness. After leaving Hercus and Rosson over at Yeskenaby, I met not a person until I reached the shores of Hamla Voe. Here, however, on turning from the moorland path into the main road, I saw a stranger resting upon the low wall at the roadside. He was evidently admiring the scene presented by the quiet bay of Stromness.

A barque lay at anchor in the harbour, her tall, tapering masts and taut ropes clearly defined against the gray sky. Beyond the bright beacon light of the Ness, the sloping island of Graemsay could barely be distinguished from the deep purple mountains of Hoy, and along the line of the bay stood the gabled houses of the town, their dimly-lighted windows reflected on the water.

As I approached the stranger, I saw that he was a seafarer.

“Fine night, sir,” I said in salutation as I passed him.

“Ay, very fine. What way is the wind, my lad?”

“Sou’-sou’-west,” I replied, looking up at a few flecks of white cloud in the clear sky.

“Are you going on to Stromness? If so, I will walk along with you. That’s a fine bird you’re carrying. What do you call it?”

“A hen harrier, sir. My dog caught it over on the moor. Is that your barque lying in the bay, sir, the Lydia?”

“Ay; she’s a rakish craft, isn’t she? We’re sailing again in the morning for South America. Do you think we shall have a fair wind, my lad?”

“Yes, if it does not veer round too much to the westward.”

“You appear to have studied the weather,” he said.

“Yes,” I answered. “In Stromness we all notice the wind, and father has taught me to know all the signs of the weather.”

“Then your father is a fisherman, I suppose?” he remarked, as he turned to walk down the brae with me.

“Father’s a pilot,” I said. “I’m Sandy Ericson’s lad.”

“Ericson! Ah! I know Ericson. He’s a splendid fellow, a regular Norseman, in fact.”

And then he proceeded to praise my father as I had so often before heard him praised, and with all of which I did not venture to disagree.

He spoke with me until we reached the entrance to the town, where I noticed Andrew Drever, my schoolmaster, walking in advance of us, carrying his rod under his arm and a string of fish in his hand.

“Good evening, sir!” I said, as we overtook him.

“Hello, Halcro, my lad!” he exclaimed, as cheerily as though he had not seen me for weeks.

“Good evening!” said my sailor companion to the dominie. “I see you have some fine trout there.”

Page 25

“Yes,” said Andrew, when he had returned the greeting. “They’re not so bad, and I’ve had some fine sport with them. Are you coming from Kirkwall?”

“No,” replied the sailor. “I was just up the hill there for a saunter in the gloaming. The gloaming lasts very long here, I notice. What time is it dark in midsummer?”

“In midsummer?” replied Andrew. “Well, it’s seldom darker than this; and on the twenty-first of June you can see the sun even at midnight from the top of the Ward Hill yonder. You’ll belong to one of the ships here, no doubt, sir?”

“Yes, that barque out there with the tall masts.”

“Ay, she came in today. That will be the Lydia, I’m thinking, and you will be Captain Gordon? Bailie Duke was telling me you were in the port. And when do you sail?”

“Tomorrow,” said the captain. “We’re bound for Brazil; but I was wanting to see some people tonight. Pilot Ericson asked me to smoke a pipe with him. Then I have to see Grace Drever, to—”

“Grace Drever!” exclaimed the dominie, evidently wondering what the sailor could want to see his mother for.

“Yes,” continued Captain Gordon. “My ship’s overrun with mice, and I was directed to Grace Drever, who, I am told, deals in all the charms and cantrips a sailor can require.”

“Charms and cantrips!” echoed the schoolmaster. “Why, who on earth has been putting such notions into your head? I doubt if you go to Grace Drever on such an errand you’ll be disappointed, sir.”

“You know the old lady, then?” said the captain.

“Just as well as a man can know his own mother,” replied Andrew.

“Oh! then, you’ll be the schoolmaster? Really, I beg your pardon; but I was told that Mistress Drever had dealings with such things; and although I am not exactly superstitious—”

“Never mind, sir, never mind. It’s just some ignorant lads have been making up the story; and it’s all one to me, for I know well it’s not true. There was once a woman in Stromness, I will allow, who used to sell favourable winds to the sailors. But though there is still a most lamentable amount of superstition in the Orkney folk—belief in witches and warlocks and such nonsense—it’s gradually, just gradually, dying away.”

“No doubt the influence of your schools,” observed the captain, anxious to conciliate.

“Ay, no doubt,” said Andrew. “But what was it you were saying about mice?”

“Why, we’re just infested with them, and I must get either cats or poison for them, or I’ll not say but we may be manned by mice instead of men before we get beyond Cape Wrath.”

“My mother has a cat,” quietly remarked Andrew, “one of the few we have in Orkney. And though she does not deal in witchery, you might bring her to part with Baudrons. Now, if you’ll come home with me and have a taste of these trout—”

“Oh, thanks, thanks, most happy!” said the captain.

Page 26

Now this, I thought, was a very graceful invitation for Andrew Drever to give to a stranger who had only a few moments before implied that his mother was a witch. But it was a kindness such as he was ever showing; and I must add that Captain Gordon was one of those easy-mannered sailors who at once give an agreeable impression. I myself liked him from the very first, and I had afterwards many reasons for rejoicing in the friendship thus casually made.

“I have something here for you, sir,” I said to the schoolmaster, holding up the dead falcon that I carried.

“Oh! come along with us, too, Halcro. Send your dog home, and come and take some supper with me.”

I assented, and continued walking by his side as he talked with the captain.

We had now entered the street of Stromness. It was a narrow passage which one might span with arms outstretched, and paved without a causeway—for it was built when there were no vehicles in Orkney—and crooked as the inside of a whelk shell, suggesting starlight smuggling and romantic meetings. In the windows and obscure corners of the passages dim lamps peeped forth in the darkness, and the flickering firelight in the houses fell upon the stones through the open doorways, whereat sailors stood smoking their pipes and gossiping women talked.

We turned up a little lane that led to the schoolhouse, and my dog trotted home without me, to let my mother know I was near.

Chapter X. The Dominie Explains.

We found Grace Drever preparing the peat fire for frying the fish. The good old woman did not hear us enter, but Andrew was a punctual man, and it was with no show of surprise that his mother at length recognized his presence.

Grace Drever was an active woman, somewhat bent with age, but with no signs of decaying faculties, save in the case of her extreme deafness. Her hair was still black, and her eyesight was quick. Her memory for local events was as good as an almanac to the people of Stromness, and there was something strangely uncanny about her nature that was itself almost an excuse to those who hinted that she had dealings with the underworld. She was one of the older style of inhabitants, who retained the primitive habits and customs of the island, whose spoken language had in it a mixture of the Norse, which distinguished it from the simpler Scotch dialect familiarly used by us of the younger generation, and yet more from the purer English into which we were drilled at school.

Andrew Drever generally spoke good English in the presence of strangers, though he lapsed into the broad native speech in friendly talk with the fisher folk.

“I hae brought Captain Gordon wi’ me to hae a taste o’ the trout,” he said to his mother as we entered the room, where she bent over the fire.

“Gordon! Gordon! I dinna ken ony Gordon. What’s the name o’ his ship?”

Page 27

“He belongs to the Lydia, the barque that cam’ in this forenoon.”

“Aw, yes, I ken his ship, but I dinna ken the captain. Yes, yes, he’ll get a taste o’ the troot, I warrant him that.”

Then turning to Mr. Gordon, she continued: “Ye were never in Stromness afore, captain? No? Ye maun speak loud—it’s terrible dull o’ hearing I am.”

The captain looked at Grace as she applied a strange, shell-like horn to her right ear, and went closer to him.

“The Lydia has a great many mice on board,” said the captain.

“Ay, you’ll be takin’ it out to America for the black folk, no doubt. It’s terrible hot in America, they say. But where got you the ice? Not from Leith?”

“He didna say ice,” interposed Andrew. “The captain says his ship’s full o’ mice.”

“Ah, mice! What for does he not get a cat?”

“It’s your own cat he was wanting to get,” said Andrew.

“My cat! my Baudrons! Troth, I dinna think I could part with Baudrons. I’m terrible fond of Baudrons. Was there not a cat in Stromness forbye mine?”

Grace said this as she selected some of the largest trout and took them away to clean.

As I sat on a chair near the door, weary after my long tramp with the heavy burden of silver and the dead hawk, and somewhat bruised by my fight, Mr. Drever and the captain engaged in a long conversation relating to the Orkneys. But during an interval of their talk I ventured to draw the schoolmaster’s attention to the dead bird that I had brought for him.

“We caught this bird over on the moor the day, sir,” I said, “and I brought it, thinking ye’d like to put it in one o’ your glass cases.”

“Man, Halcro, but that’s a bonny specimen! A harrier, a hen harrier, I declare! ’Deed but it will be a right fine addition to our collection. And what way did ye kill it, d’ye say? Not wi’ a gun, surely?”

“No; it was flying after a peewit, and the dog caught it. Willie Hercus thrawed its neck.”

“Well, well, that’s most amazing. How I wish I’d been with you. I’d rather hae caught a harrier than a hundred sea trout.”

“Did ye get some good fishing at the Bush, sir?” I asked, changing the subject.

“Oh, ay, very good, very good; thanks to those hooks o’ yours, Halcro. I left a dozen trout wi’ Jack Paterson’s wife, and a dozen wi’ Mary Firth, and these I brought home. That’s no sae bad, is it?”

Then, when he had satisfied his admiration of the dead hawk, he took us into the schoolroom, to show the captain his cases of stuffed birds and animals. Already he had determined that he would mount the hawk in the attitude of swooping down upon a lapwing.

It turned out that Captain Gordon was interested in birds, and knew a good deal about their habits. I remember he told us of a swallow which had once flown on board his ship when they were over a thousand miles from any land, and of how the bird, exhausted by its long flight, allowed him to hold it in his hand and feed it with small insects taken from the decayed timbers of the ship.

Page 28

When we were seated at the table over our meal of fried trout, I had to relate my experiences of the afternoon, which I did from beginning to end, omitting only the circumstance of my fight with Kinlay. I did not wish to say anything against a schoolmate, and an account of the fight would have involved unpleasant explanations. The two men listened with attention to my account of the sealing; but they were incredulous when I told them about finding the hidden silver. When the table was cleared, however, and I spread out the contents of the seal's skin, Grace and they gathered round in astonishment and eagerly examined the curiosities by the light of the hanging lamp and the flaming peats.

Captain Gordon weighed the bars of silver in an imaginary balance in his hand, and gave his opinion as to their weight. The neck rings and brooches also engaged his attention; but Andrew Drever found greater interest in the ancient coins, which he carefully examined, endeavouring to decipher the rough inscriptions upon them. Most of the coins were foreign, but there were two which he recognized as English—a Peter's penny of the tenth century, and an older coin, which he told me was nearly a thousand years old, bearing the name Aethelstan Rex. I cannot describe his delight in looking over these little pieces of silver, or his satisfaction when I offered to let him take charge of them until we determined what should be done with the collection.

When the interest in my treasures had somewhat abated, Mr. Drever and the captain exchanged conjectures concerning the probable origin of what we had discovered at Skaill Bay. They could come to no issue by all their arguments, until I chanced to mention once more the incident of the rat and its curious hiding place in the skull.

"A skull! a human skull!" exclaimed the dominie. "Why, that explains it all. I can see it now. I can see it clearly!"

"See what clearly?" inquired the captain.

"This," said Andrew with a tone of conviction, "that what the lads have discovered is nothing less than the grave of Kierfiold Haffling, the great viking of Orkney."

Then turning to the captain he continued: "You see, Captain Gordon, it was the custom of the old sea kings to bury their dead heroes in caves on the seashore, or to place the body in a boat and send it drifting to sea on its long voyage. In either case it was usual to dress the hero in full battle array, with helmet, sword, and shield, to enable him to fight his way to Valhalla. These relics here of Ericson's, and those that the other lads have gotten, are just such things as would be buried in a viking's grave. The human skull in their midst puts the matter beyond a doubt."

"Curious, very curious!" murmured Captain Gordon. "But, sir, how do you identify this supposed grave with that of the particular warrior you have mentioned?"

Page 29

“Kierfiold Haffling? Oh, well, you see, captain, I may be making a mistake; but, as it happens, I have seen a runic inscription over at Stenness which expressly states that the Jarl Haffling was buried with his earthly treasures to the northwest of the Maes Howe. Now, the Bay of Skaill, where the lads made the discovery, is exactly northwest of Stenness. The one thing that surprises me is that the treasure was not found long since, for the inscription has clearly indicated its position, and has further stated that ’happy is he who discovers this great wealth.’ It seems to me, however, that no person ever thought of searching within the tide line.”

“But, after all,” said the captain, “the wealth does not seem so enormous. Why, I would hesitate to offer a ten-pound note for the whole lot.”

“No, it is not indeed enormous, in a worldly sense, I admit. But you must consider the importance of the discovery from what I may call an archaeological point of view. You see the relics have a historical value, Mr. Gordon.”

The schoolmaster then turned to me and said:

“I think, Halcro, it’s a pity that you lads didn’t keep these things all together, and bring them here as ye found them. What for did ye divide them, as though they were so many blackberries? Ye couldn’t do anything with them—ye can’t sell the things.”

“It was Tom Kinlay said he thought we should share them, sir. I didn’t think we were doing wrong.”

“Tom Kinlay kens nothing about such matters, Halcro. Just you get the three other lads to bring each his share to me. I will look after it and see that ye dinna lose anything. You see, although ye found the treasure, you lads, it doesn’t rightly belong to you. No doubt ye’ll be rewarded in some way for your find; but I must tell you that the law will not let you keep it to yoursels. A person finding treasure of this sort can have only a third part of its value. Is that not so, Mr. Gordon?”

“Yes,” said the captain, “I fancy you’re right, Mr. Drever. Of course you refer to the law of treasure trove?”

“Exactly,” agreed the master. Then turning to me, he continued:

“You see, Halcro, the Crown will claim a share of it, and the laird gets another part. So ye’d better let the other lads ken about this. Let them understand that they are breaking the law if they keep their discovery a secret.”

“Yes, sir, I’ll tell Rosson and Hercus before school time in the morning.”

“And Kinlay?” said Mr. Drever, looking questioningly in my face.

“Maybe you’d better speak to him yoursel, sir,” I returned, almost afraid to say that my companionship with Tom was at an end.

“Hello! what’s in the wind in that quarter? A quarrel, eh? I have noticed that scratch on your cheek. Has that anything to do with Kinlay?”

I put my hand to my cheek and found that there was blood there. I had received a scratch that I was before unconscious of.

Page 30

“Well, sir,” I said, “Kinlay and I did have a bit of a fight over at Bigging. There was a dispute over the sharing of the treasure.”

And then I thought of the small black stone that Tom had given me as an equivalent of the bar of silver he had appropriated for himself. It was not amongst the articles I had shown to the schoolmaster and the captain. I thought that I had perhaps left it lying on the gravestone; but searching my pockets, I at last found it in one of them, where I had carelessly thrust it when the fight began. I placed it on the table before Captain Gordon, who examined it curiously.

“What d’you make of this, sir?” asked he, turning to the dominie. “The stone, if it is a stone at all, looks worthless; and yet I see this ring round it is the only piece of metal that is neither silver nor bronze, but gold.”

“Gold!” I exclaimed, bending over to look at it.

“Yes, gold undoubtedly,” said the captain.

Grace Drever, who had said little during the examination of the store of silver coins and ingots beyond asking questions as to the manner of our finding it, and giving utterance to such ejaculations as “Losh me!” and “Saw ever onybody the likes o’ that?” now took the black stone in her hand, and having pondered over it for a while, said, holding up her finger to me:

“Laddie, take care of this peerie {ii} thing. It will be of more worth to thee than all the other gear together.”

I did not quite understand. The gold ring, I thought, could not surely be worth more than that heap of silver. And yet Grace was so serious in what she said that I could scarcely doubt her word.

I was about to ask her for an explanation when we were interrupted by the lifting of the latch of the door, and a rush of cold air made the lamp light flicker.

Chapter XI. My Sister Jessie.

We all turned to the door to see the cause of this interruption. It was my sister Jessie who entered, and paused on the threshold as she observed the presence of a stranger. She wore no covering on her head, and her brown hair fell in natural curls on her shoulders and about her neck.

Captain Gordon rose politely and stood with his hands clasping the back of his chair. Jessie raised her large dark eyes towards him for a moment and looked confused.

I think this was the first time in my life that I felt conscious that my sister was more beautiful than any other Orkney girl I knew, with the one exception of Thora Kinlay. She was at that time nineteen years of age; she was tall and graceful, and very easy in her movements. It is true she had no accomplishments, such as those of Bailie Duke's daughters; but her education in Mr. Drever's school had been sound, and she could keep house as well as any fisherman's wife in Orkney, and row a boat as well as any lad.

"Was it Halcro ye were seeking, Jessie?" asked old Grace, as though my sister's presence there was a matter of as little concern to her as the presence of the old German clock in the corner of the room.

Page 31

“Yea,” said Jessie. “His dog came home without him, and we were feared he had gone ower the cliffs, or that some other mischance had happened him.

“Where have ye been, Halcro, so late as ye are? You should have been in your bed lang syne.”

As I went to the nail for my cap, the dominie introduced Captain Gordon to Jessie. She greeted the sailor without ceremony—for in Orkney we are not demonstrative in this particular. But the officer held out his hand, and she took it with evident confusion. I think she could not have failed to notice the difference between this handsome young man and the gray-haired, toddy-drinking captains who usually came into Stromness and hung about our home in the Anchor Close.

Captain Gordon did not sit down again. Perhaps the mention of the name Ericson reminded him of his appointment with my father. But he had not yet effected his purpose of securing Grace Drever’s cat, and he turned to the old woman, asking her again if she would part with Baudrons.

Grace, I do not doubt, had been impressed by the open-hearted bearing of the captain, and I had noticed his kindly way of addressing her, so that she might hear him without effort. But she looked fondly at her cat as he sat before the crimson fire, licking his lips after the fish bones he had eaten. Few mice or rats came in his way, but—luck for Baudrons—there was an abundance of fish, and the wild birds that Andrew brought home supplied him with many a stolen banquet.

There was one ruling passion in Baudrons, and that was his desire to gain possession of the noisy jackdaw which so often disturbed him with its steady shining eyes as they looked down at him from behind the wicker bars of the cage. I believe Baudrons anticipated the death of Peter as the crowning achievement of his life; and had he been consulted in the matter of the Lydia he might have shown some reluctance to enter the community of mice before he had compassed the jackdaw’s death.

Grace was finally prevailed upon—much to the satisfaction of the dominie—to give up her cat; and it was arranged that I should take Baudrons out to the ship before school time on the following morning.

I was preparing to leave with Jessie and Captain Gordon, when Mrs. Drever called me to her near the fire.

“Come here, Halcro, laddie. Tak the peerie stone, see, and have a care that ye dinna lose it;” and she handed to me the little black stone.

Mr. Drever was standing beside her, and I looked to him to ask if I should take possession of this much of the viking’s treasure.

“Take it, take it, Halcro,” he said. “There can be no harm in your keeping it—at least until we find whether the authorities claim it or not. I canna think that there would be any money value in it to speak of. But you’d better be careful not to lose it at any rate.”

“But the thing is of no use to me, sir, is it?” I asked.

Page 32

“That’s for you to find out, Halcro,” said he. “You see it is a sort of charm, or amulet. The old Scandinavian vikings used to carry such things about with them, in the belief that by so doing they would be protected from all personal harm. Our Jarl Haffling, I suppose, wore this same amulet at his neck to ensure his safety through the perils of the battle and the storm. No doubt he believed that the possession of such a talisman gave him a charmed existence. The sea could not drown him, sword could not wound him, fortune favoured him, so long as he wore this little stone on his breast.”

“And yet, sir, the Jarl Haffling came to his grave in the Bay of Skaill,” I said incredulously.

“Ay, lad, so he did, so he did. But we must suppose that Odin, the god of the Norsemen, had thought it time to reward him by calling him off from his earthly battles to the Halls of Valhalla.”

Captain Gordon here approached us, and whilst he and Mr. Drever were bidding each other goodnight, I stood looking into the fire, meditating upon the strange thing my schoolmaster had told me. I put the little stone securely into my breast pocket, feeling the new responsibility I bore in being guarded by such a mysterious influence; for I did not doubt that the protection given by my talisman to the dead viking would now be extended to myself.

Grace Drever had some instructions to give me regarding the taking away of her cat, and when I left her my sister Jessie and Captain Gordon were already walking together down the brae. I soon overtook them. Jessie was questioning the captain about his ship.

“Father was saying she’s a very good ship,” said she; “but I think mysel’ that her masts are ower high; and if ye were taken in one o’ the spring gales off the Orkneys you’d find that they are, Mr. Gordon.”

“Did the pilot say that our masts are too high, Miss Ericson?” asked the captain.

“Nay, I was thinkin’ it mysel’,” said Jessie, “when I saw the barque lying near the Holms. High masts are good, I will allow, for carrying a heap o’ sails, but our whaling ships never have masts so high as yours.”

“Well, but you must understand,” urged the sailor, “that we are not bound for Davis Straits as your whalers are that went out today. In the tropical seas, where there is often a calm lasting several days, we need high masts and widespread sails, Miss Ericson.”

“Yes, I ken that well enough,” argued Jessie. “But I have seen many a good ship wrecked on the Black Craigs in the spring time, and I can aye tell when a ship will come back safe to Stromness.”

Captain Gordon seemed to treat my sister’s criticism of his ship very lightly; but as events turned out, her warning was perhaps justifiable.

When we turned into the Anchor Close, we found my father standing at the house door, smoking his pipe and looking out for us.

“Where has the lad been?” he asked of Jessie before he greeted the captain.

Page 33

“I found him up at the dominie’s,” she explained.

And then she held out her hand to Mr. Gordon.

“Fare ye well, Captain Gordon!” she said; “fare ye well, and a good voyage to you!”

And she glided past him into the house.

“Was the lass speakin’ wi’ you, skipper?” asked my father.

“Yes,” said Gordon. “She was telling me that my barque’s masts are too high.”

“Ay! but it’s no’ sae often that she’ll speak wi’ a man. She’s a blate lass wi’ maist folk. But what kens she about a vessel’s masts, I wonder?”

My father, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets, then stepped down to the jetty and looked through the darkness towards the Lydia.

“Ay, but I’m no that sure about it either, Skipper. The masts are higher than ordinary. But ye’ll come ben the house and smoke a pipe, maybe?”

“Thank you, pilot, I don’t mind—just for a half hour before I go out to the ship.”

My father thereupon led the way within, and placed an easy chair for Mr. Gordon under the large hurricane lamp that hung from the low ceiling, and cast its yellow light about the room. The skipper glanced rapidly at the dark, old-fashioned furniture, at the high-backed chairs, cushioned with the skins of seals, the strong teak-wood sideboard, and the heavy round table, upon which stood a quaint Dutch spirit bottle and a couple of horn drinking cups. He looked at the several pictures of ships battling with terrible storms, and at the pensive porcupine in its dusty glass case, and then at the array of firearms and harpoons above the door of the press bed. My dog Selta lay sound asleep upon a large polar-bear skin before the fire. Had he approached her and looked up the wide chimney he might have seen there the remains of our winter stock of smoked geese and hams hanging in the midst of the “reek.”

“I suppose you have been sailing foreign a good deal in your time, pilot?” said Mr. Gordon, when he was seated.

He had got this notion, no doubt, from having observed the many foreign ornaments and weapons about the room.

“No,” said my father, “I hae never been abroad. All my life has been spent in the Mainland.”

“You mean Scotland—the mainland of Scotland?” said the captain, not seeming to understand the meaning of the “Mainland,” which I may here explain is our local name for Pomona island—the largest of the Orkneys.

“No, I didna mean Scotland, skipper—though, to be sure, I hae been over there many a time. We call this the Mainland, where we are just now. Many folks make the same mistake about that. I mind of a skipper named Jock Abernethy. Jock had a brig o’ his ain, though he kent naething aboot navigation, whatever. Weel, a lang while past it is noo, he was takin’ his brig frae Portree, in Skye, across to the West Indies. His crew was nae better nor himsel’. Weel, when they had been at sea twa or three months, Jock cam on deck ae mornin’, and, ‘Donald,’ says he to his mate, ’d’ye not see land yonder to starboard?’

Page 34

"'Ay, sir,' says Donald; 'I'm just thinkin' it will be the West Indies.'

"'You're right there, Donald, the West Indies it is,' says Jock. 'See, yonder's the black folk sittin' waitin' for us!' and he pointed to the cormorants perched on the rocks.

"So the brig was hauled round, and when she was near inshore a pilot boat cam oot to them. Jock hailed the pilot: 'What land is that?' he cried.

"'It's the Mainland!' sings out the pilot.

"'What! the mainland o' America?' asks Jock, thinkin' he had missed the Indies.

"'No, ye duffer, the Mainland o' Orkney, to be sure,' says the pilot. 'What other Mainland is there?'"

As I sat on my low stool by the fire, my mother and Jessie being in the inner room, I took the viking's charm from my pocket and examined it. Captain Gordon had lighted his pipe, and when my father's anecdote was finished he said:

"Now, Halcro, my lad, lay aft here and let us have another look at that magic stone of yours."

And then, as I handed it to him, he proceeded to tell my father of our discovery of the treasure.

The two men discussed the probable value of what we had found, and I felt some disappointment in their estimate of what the dominie might be able to sell the relics for.

"It is very good to find these things," said my father, blowing a mist of tobacco smoke from amidst his beard. "But what use are they, whatever? Nae use ava! The dominie might send them to the museum folk at Edinburgh, and he would get mebbe a pickle pounds for them—hardly enough for the lads to buy an auld boat wi'. I wouldna be bothered wi' the things."

"What was it the old woman was saying about this stone, though, Halcro?" asked the captain.

I repeated what Grace Drever told me—how the stone might protect me from accident and from the monsters of the sea; from the kraken and the kelpie, the warlocks and the wirracows; and how, having the charm at my neck, I need never fear climbing a cliff or entering upon the most dangerous adventure.

"And do you believe all this, my lad?" asked Captain Gordon, taking his pipe from his lips and addressing me.

“Well,” I returned, with an earnestness that must have shown that I had not the smallest doubt upon the matter, “auld Grace Drever said it was ‘as true as death,’ and the dominie did not deny that it was ‘just possible.’ What for should I not believe it? and what for would the stone be bound with the gold ring and buried with the other gear if it were not of some value beyond ordinary?”

“Och! but I dinna doot there will be something in the stone,” said my father, who, at the mention of the dominie’s belief, cast away all questioning. “And it will not be the first time I have heard of such cantrips.”

And he told us of a man named Willie Reoch, a fisherman, who was preserved from the great Bore of Papa Westray in some such way. Willie Reoch and three other fishers were away at the saith fishing, and when their boat was driven by the wind near to the Bore, they were drawn under by the whirling current and swamped. Reoch had round his neck a charm which Bessie Millie, the witch, had given to him, and so was the only one saved.

Page 35

“Na, na,” continued my father, “I dinna doot there will be something wondersome in the stone; and if any person would have such a thing, who would it be but the Norseman?”

Thus did I become convinced in my mind that, by the possession of that little gold-encircled stone, I bore a charmed life.

That night I lay with my precious talisman under my pillow. I thought of the events of the afternoon, and, remembering my fight with Tom Kinlay, attributed my victory over him to the influence which that talisman, then in my pocket, had already begun to work. I tried to imagine what kind of adventures had befallen the old viking whose bones we had disturbed, and wondered if I should ever encounter any similar perils. My opportunities of adventure were fewer than his could have been; but I determined to give my full trust to the mysterious aid in which Jarl Haffling had trusted in the ancient days. Then I heard my father unmooring the boat from the pier to take Captain Gordon out to his ship, and as the sound of the oars in the rowlocks died away in the night I fell asleep.

Chapter XII. A Tragedy And A Transportation.

I was up and about on the following morning when the town was yet asleep. A cool, dewy mist hung in the air, and the rising sun spread a rosy bloom on the eastern sky. When I arrived at Andrew Drever’s house there was no one moving within, but the door was not locked, and quietly lifting the latch I went inside to find the cat Baudrons, that I might take him out to the Lydia according to my promise.

I made so little noise that even the jackdaw did not seem to notice my entrance, and I looked to his cage on the side table. To my surprise the cage door was standing wide open and Peter was not there. But presently, from the school room, I heard him chattering and croaking. Following the sound of his voice I discovered the bird perched high upon the dominie’s desk looking down at Baudrons, who crouched below him on the floor in the very act of preparing to spring, his checks swelled out and his great tail lashing the dusty floor. The door creaked as I opened it, and before I could interfere the cat was upon the desk with Peter struggling in his claws. Peter left a few black feathers in Baudron’s possession, and escaping, flew over to the table by the window, where he hopped about with the greatest coolness, muttering, “William the Conqueror, ten sixty-six”—words which he had gathered from our history lessons in the school. Baudrons was after him in a moment.

And now followed a terrible encounter. Instead of flying away the bird deliberately met the cat and stabbed at him valiantly with his long, heavy beak. They fell over on the floor together, and as they struggled, amid much noise of growling and chattering and flapping of wings, I flung my cap at them, trying to effect a separation. Alas! before I could help the dominie’s pet, the cat had the uppermost of him, and ran off into the schoolmaster’s private room with the jackdaw held firmly in his teeth.

Page 36

I followed, and tried to make the animal loosen his grip of poor Peter. He growled and spat as I approached him, and, fearing for the jackdaw's life, I hammered with my fist upon the door of the schoolmaster's press bed and called out: "Mr. Drever! Mr. Drever!"

The dominie opened the bed door and sprang out to the rescue, his red woollen nightcap upon his head. But his help was of little use. We managed to get the cat away from his prey; but the bird was fatally injured, blood was dripping from his neck as the good man took him up in his hands caressingly.

"Poor Peter, poor Peter!" said he; "who has done this thing?"

"William the Conqueror," faintly uttered the bird.

Then giving a few feeble croaks, he died in the schoolmaster's hands.

Andrew Drever's tender emotion grew into anger as he thought of the murderer of his pet jackdaw, and he paced the room vowing vengeance against his mother's cat, which had now escaped into comparative security on the top of the kitchen cupboard.

"Come down here, ye wretch!" he exclaimed, taking up a knife from the table and holding it up threateningly. "Come down here, ye foul fiend. How dare ye touch a feather o' my Peter's wing?"

"Dinna kill the cat, sir," I interposed, reminding him that I was there to take the animal aboard the Lydia.

"Man, Halcro," said Andrew, sobering down, "I wish you had taken him away yestreen. But come, let us catch the brute and away with him, for he shall not bide in this house another hour."

While Mr. Drever got an empty meal bag and held it open, I took a long broom handle, and, standing on a chair, forced the cat to come down. We chased the animal about the room until we cornered him, when, putting the meal bag over his head, we made him a secure prisoner. Tying up the bag with a string, and cutting some breathing holes, I carried the captive cat away, leaving Andrew Drever to grieve over the death of Peter the jackdaw.

When I rowed out to the Lydia in my little boat, the mist had melted away in the warmth of the sun. The gray town, with its blue film of peat smoke slowly rising into the clear air, was reflected upon the smooth water that lapped and lisped against the stone piers. The bubbling track of my boat as she plunged and curtsied in obedience to the oar strokes alone disturbed the calm surface of the bay; but beyond the shelter of the harbour a brisk breeze fluttered the Blue Peter at the barque's foremast, and I did not fail to notice that it came from a favourable quarter.

Father was already aboard when my boat scraped gently along the ship's side, and he threw a rope end down to me to climb up by.

Captain Gordon shook hands with me when I reached the quarterdeck.

"Well, my lad," said he, "how d'ye think the Lydia looks for sea?"

"She looks well and trim," I said, untying the mouth of the meal bag; "but I notice she has a slight list to the port side."

Page 37

“A list to port!” said he looking forward. “Ha! that’s unlucky. I wish it had been to starboard; but as it’s not much, the men may not notice it. I fancy they’ll see more of ill luck in this cat.”

When I opened the bag, Baudrons escaped with a good dusting of flour on his fur. The cat looked wildly uneasy; he showed no signs of that gentle docility which Grace Drever admired in him; but with his cheeks puffed out and the loose skin about his nose and head drawn up in uncanny wrinkles, he dashed across the deck once or twice, lashing his tail from side to side like a savage brute, and then, approaching the main hatchway, he made a great spring down the hold, there to enjoy himself amongst the mice.

Chapter XIII. In Which I Receive A Present.

While all was busy on deck, Captain Gordon took my father and me below to his cabin. It was a neatly fitted-up room with many books and pictures and maritime instruments that interested me. What most attracted my attention was the captain’s private collection of fishing tackle and his armoury. There were some fine landing nets and rods with bright brass rings and reels, and the artificial flies were quite confusing in their number and variety. In the armoury were several six shooters of different patterns, and many double-barrelled guns and ornamented rifles. Captain Gordon allowed me to handle some of these, and he explained their mechanism to me.

One little fowling piece that I examined was so light and so beautifully made that I returned to it again and again while the captain and my father were talking together. It had a long steel barrel with delicate engraving upon it, and a carved stock. I was admiring the spring of the trigger work when Captain Gordon asked me if I was a good shot.

“I have never fired a gun in my life,” I said.

To my surprise he said, “You may have that gun in your hand if you’ll accept it.”

“O, but I canna think of taking it from you, captain!” I replied.

“No, no, he’ll shoot himself,” objected my father; “and that will not be so good as if he fell ower the cliffs. What will the lad want wi’ a gun?”

“But I’d like to give it him, pilot. He’ll soon learn how to use it properly.

“Won’t you, Halcro?

“And as for shooting himself, why, remember the magic stone, pilot.”

Father muttered something to the effect that it was very good of the captain; and I, who was overwhelmed with gratitude for his kindness, feebly added my thanks. So Captain Gordon gave me the fowling piece, together with a canister of gunpowder, and sufficient swan shot, I thought, to kill all the wild fowl in Orkney.

As I was leaving the ship, joyous in the possession of these ample materials for a whole summer of sport, and was bidding farewell to Captain Gordon, the mate came towards us at the rail and touched his hat.

Page 38

“Well, Marshall, d’you want anything sent ashore?” asked the skipper.

“Yes, sir,” said Marshall, “I want to tell you that the men are grumbling about this cat being brought aboard. You know how superstitious they are. They want the lad to take it away with him again.”

“Their objections are silly and childish, Marshall,” said Mr. Gordon. “They know that the ship is overrun with mice.”

“Yes, yes, sir; that’s all very well. But they won’t have the cat aboard; and I think you’d better have the beast sent off.”

“The men are a pack of fools. What harm can the poor cat do them, I’d like to know? They think it’s unlucky, I suppose. Well, if they will have it so, send a couple of them down the hold to capture the animal. We must just bear the mice if the cat cannot remain. Look smart, now, the boy’s in a hurry to get to his school.”

Two men were then sent below to search for Baudrons, and I waited for their return. In about a quarter of an hour one of them came to say that the cat could not be found.

“Very well, then, I can’t keep the lad here any longer. We must send the cat ashore with the pilot.”

Then the captain turned to me.

“Goodbye, Halcro, my lad!” he said; “perhaps we’ll be back in Orkney on our homeward voyage. Maybe you’ll be a pilot yourself by that time, and bring us into port. Goodbye!”

“Goodbye, Captain Gordon!” I murmured; and at that I slipped over the taffrail and was soon sitting in my boat again, rowing back to the town.

Chapter XIV. Thora.

On my way to the school that morning I chanced to meet Hercus and Rosson coming down one of the side alleys.

“I say, lads,” I began, “d’ye ken what Dominie Drever says about the siller things we found at Skaill?”

“No! what is it, Hal?” asked Hercus.

“Why, he says that it was an old sea king’s grave that we discovered—one of those viking lads that we read about in the history book.”

“You don’t say so!” exclaimed Rosson.

“Yes, and he says that we must take all the siller to him at the school. There’s some law about it all, and we canna keep the things. We maun give them up.”

“Will ye give your share up, Hal?” asked Hercus.

“I hae done so already,” I said. “I left it wi’ the dominie yestreen.”

The lads looked at each other, but neither offered any objection.

“Oh, very well!” said Rosson, “I’ll bring mine down i’ the mornin’.”

“And I mine,” echoed Hercus.

During the first lesson in school it was noticed that Tom Kinlay was absent.

“Where is your brother this morning, Thora?” asked Mr. Drever.

“Please, sir,” said Thora, “I was to tell you that he’s not to come to the school again. They’re buildin’ a new boat for father at Kirkwall, an’ Tom’s to be aboard of her.”

Page 39

I thought it curious that Carver Kinlay should have a boat built in Kirkwall, and not by our own local builder, Tammy Lang, of Stromness. And what could this new boat be intended for?

“Ay, Thora, but that’s somewhat sudden!” said the dominie. “Why did he not wait till the end o’ the week?”

Thora raised her blue eyes in my direction as though she would appeal to me for an explanation. I did not then know, however, that the true and immediate cause of Tom’s absence was that he was not in a fit condition to appear among his companions that morning on account of the blow I had given him during our fight on the previous evening.

After school time Thora came to me and told me of her brother’s return from the sealing expedition; of how he rushed into the house with his nose bleeding. And she explained that, as they sat at their porridge in the morning, she had noticed the purple patches under his eyes and the swelling of the bridge of his nose.

I own that I felt extremely sorry for having inflicted these injuries upon Tom, nor could I wholly hide from Thora the actual cause of them. But when Mr. Drever asked about him Thora knew as little of that cause as I did of the effect of my blow upon Tom’s nose.

Notwithstanding the many little quarrels between her brother and herself, Thora was too generous to be glad at his misfortune; but I fancied there was a glance of satisfaction in her eyes when I said to her:

“It was a fight that we had, Thora. Tom and I quarrelled over some old siller things we found across at Skaill when we were at the sealing.”

“And which of ye beat the other, Halcro?” she asked, with almost a boy’s interest in a stand-up fight. “But I needna ask that, surely; for I can see fine that Tom had the worst of it. If it werena for that wee scratch on your cheek I wouldn’t hae kenned ye had been in a fight; but as for Tom, why, he’s just a perfect sight to look upon!”

I need hardly say that my quarrel with Kinlay did in no wise alter the friendship that existed between Thora and me. I had for her a fondness which Tom’s bullying and tyranny had no power to diminish. Thora, indeed, was a girl whom none except those who were influenced by envy could help admiring. She was the favourite of all the school, and amongst us, her only enemy was her brother. My own sympathy with her was all the greater because I knew that she was so much the subject of his rule. I knew how he had forced her to obey him, and to bend before all his humours and his whims, and I was sorry for, whilst I was still unable to help her. In this servitude we had been companions, in common with Rosson and Hercus; and many a time had she come to

me, with tears in her eyes, to tell me of some new act of tyranny that she had suffered at her brother's hands.

On one such occasion I found her down at the shore side with little Hilda Paterson. She had been going out on the bay to paddle about in a small boat that Tom was in the habit of using. He saw the two girls taking the oars, and straightway he ordered them ashore, striking Thora on the cheek, himself taking possession of the boat.

Page 40

The two girls were standing in their disappointment on the beach when I came up and heard their story.

“Never mind, Thora,” I said. “Come along wi’ me. I’ll get my father’s dinghy, and we three will go for a fine sail.”

I rowed them out beyond the Holms, for it was a bright calm day; and when we got out into the breezy bay the mast was stepped, the little lug sail hoisted, and then we went speeding over to Graemsay island like a sheer water skimming the waves. Graemsay was our imagined El Dorado, and on the voyage we fancied ourselves encountering many surprising adventures. Shipwrecks and sea fights were by no means uncommon events. We threw spars of wood over the stern, and at the cry of “Man overboard!” the ship was put about to pick him up. But while we easily overcame these imagined disasters, there were some real dangers to encounter, and in the midst of our merry talk and laughter we had ever to keep a careful watch on the conduct of the boat, and to look out for the safest channels and the sunken rocks. Hilda, who regarded the approach of an imagined iceberg with complacency, became really timid when she noticed a heavy squall coming towards us from the outer sea; and until the sail had been lowered, and our bow hove round to meet the breeze and let it pass, I believe she was not quite confident that I was able to manage the boat in safety.

Thora had often referred to this pleasant sail, and the few primroses I had gathered for her on the banks of a rivulet running down one of the Graemsay glens she had worn at her neck for many days. Many a time when, from our place in the class, she had seen through the window the red-sailed fishing boats battling with the sudden gusts of wind in the rapid currents of the Sound, she would look as though she would remind me of the way we had managed the dinghy in the same dangerous flow. Thus did she begin to trust me, as mariners trusted my father.

If it had not been that during the lessons, in common with his pupils, Andrew Drever took a secret pleasure in looking through the little window across Stromness harbour, and, from his position at the desk, watching the movements of the shipping, it is probable he would have erected some curtain there. The window offered a distraction to us all, for it often took our attention from our tasks, and caused many interruptions in the course of the day. But, as I have indicated, Andrew was not a severe taskmaster, and that, perhaps, was one reason of our affection for him.

This morning his glances were divided between the empty bird cage at the door and the barque now making ready for sea. His poor jackdaw with its chattering—a sound once so monotonous and wearying, now most earnestly wished for—was gone, but the murderer of his pet, the brutal Baudrons, was now closely stowed away under the main hatches of the Lydia, and the dominie had his revenge.

Page 41

There was at least one other pair of eyes watching the trim barque, as her unfurled canvas caught the breeze and she sped away like a graceful gull. To my sister Jessie, whom, after school, I found sitting by the little pier at the Anchor Close, the vessel seemed to be carrying away one who had suddenly awakened in her a new interest in life. Captain Gordon had spoken but little with her, he was still but a stranger, but so seldom did she have speech with any man, that this meeting with one so brave and handsome as the captain of the Lydia naturally made a deep impression upon her.

I should not, however, have remarked anything unusual in Jessie—except perhaps that she was less active with her fingers—had not my mother, who came out to wash some dishes in the sea, taken notice of my sister's vacant eyes.

"One would fancy, Jessie," said my mother—"one would fancy that there was no wind out yonder that you send so many sighs to fill the captain's sails. What like a man is he?"

"Dinna ask such questions, mother," said Jessie. "I saw him only in the gloaming. His voice was like the sighing of the waves and his eyes were like the seal's. Ah! he'll not come back again to Stromness, never again;" and as Jessie gave another sigh the ship disappeared behind the Ness.

For long afterwards Jessie would speak of Captain Gordon, and I noticed with what concern she heard each reference to him, made by either myself or my father. Even the gun which the captain had given me was some sort of a solace to her, for whenever I was cleaning the weapon she would take it in her hands and admire the elegant workmanship displayed in the ornamented stock and the bright steel barrel, and then lay it down with a gentle sigh, and I knew she was thinking of Mr. Gordon.

Chapter XV. In Which The Viking's Amulet Is Proved.

I availed myself of an early opportunity of trying my new gun. One afternoon I found Robbie Rosson down at the shore side. He was standing near to my boat, which was moored to the jetty, and looking as though he would give anything for a sail in her.

"Are ye going for a sail today, Hal?" he asked meekly.

"Ay, I'll go, if you'll come with me, Robbie," I agreed. "If ye like we'll take a run o'er to Hoy Head. I'll bring my gun, and we'll have a shot at the geese."

Robbie's face brightened up at the prospect, and I went indoors to fetch the gun and a supply of ammunition; also my climbing ropes, in case we needed them.

We were soon in the boat. Robbie took the oars and rowed out until we could hoist the little sail, and then we rounded the Ness and got out into Hoy Sound. The wind was

westward, and the current in our favour, so that we had a grand sail across the sound to the Kame of Hoy—Robbie at the tiller, and I sitting near him on the windward gunwale. How our boat danced along and curtsied on the green curling waves! How her bows lifted and fell and sent a belt of foam alongside and away behind us in a bubbling track! O, it was glorious, that sail across to Hoy! Sitting there in the sunshine, the fresh breeze blowing in our faces, we had nothing to do but tend the helm and keep the boat well to the wind, and away we sped.

Page 42

Our enjoyment of the sail was so full that we spoke but little. We talked of Tom Kinlay's work on his father's new boat, and made surmises as to the nature of the trade or traffic it was to be engaged in; but whether the boat was to be sent to the saith fishing, or to be used as a tender to the ships, we could not tell.

There was one thing that Robbie wanted to set his mind easy about, and that was the viking's amulet. In common with all the lads in the school, he had heard of the wonderful powers attributed to this little stone; and, like them, he was thoroughly credulous of its ability to preserve me from personal harm, vet anxious as I was myself to put it to the proof.

"I'd like fine if we could have a chance of adventure today," he said, taking the stone in his hand as it hung by a cord from my neck. "How can we be sure that the thing will be the saving of you, if ye dinna put it to the trial?"

"We'll see, we'll see," I said. "But there's no use seeking danger for the sake of trying the effects of the charm. Maybe we'll find the danger without seeking it, however, and then we'll have the proof."

As we sailed swiftly under the high cliffs of Hoy Head we watched the mad plunging of the landward-rushing waves, and saw them hurl themselves at the great rocks, leaping in clouds of spray. What a rattle and a roar each wave made on the pebbles of the beach as it drew back before returning to the charge! And in the midst of the foam the sea birds circled and screamed in their flight.

We had some difficulty in finding a safe landing place among the surge; but at last we steered the boat into the quiet Bay of the Stairs, and soon drove her nose into the stony beach and drew her well up out of the water, fastening her painter round a large rock.

Safely landed, Robbie shouldered the climbing ropes and I took the gun, having a stock of dry powder and shot in my pockets. We climbed over some large boulders into the next creek, where, as we had expected, we found a multitude of noisy sea birds, some floating on the clear pools on the shore; others running about among the sea-worn stones or seeking food with busy beaks in the bright green and crimson weeds that lay in patches among the pebbles. The ledges of the cliffs were crowded with gulls, whose plumage was as snowy as the very foam that the high waves scattered over their ranks. In a little cove at the extremity of the bay were scores of kittiwakes, chattering over some dead fish thrown up by the sea.

Here was a rare hunting ground for two eager young sportsmen! Close to us a couple of turnstones, smart little birds in brown, with bright-red legs and beaks, were busy on a heap of kelp. I levelled my gun at them, and was about to fire, when Robbie stayed my hand and pointed to a large cormorant sheltered in a deep niche of the cliff and looking

darker even than the dark rock over its head. I altered the direction of my aim, keeping well out of the bird's sight, with my back against a wall of granite.

Page 43

It was well for me that I did so, for without this support in the rear I should surely have fallen. When I drew the trigger I received a fearful blow in the chest from the butt of the gun and a thump on the back from the rock. The report of the gun sounded loud through the chasms, and the echo was repeated along the line of the cliffs and far over among the glens, as though a whole volley of musketry had been fired. Birds flew about in all directions, uttering wild cries of warning to each other. The air was crowded with flying gulls.

When the smoke cleared away we looked for our cormorant, and there he was, perched on the same bald point of rock, coolly preening his black feathers. Then, as we ran up towards him, he stretched forth his long neck, raised his wings, and sped away across the sea. Either I had missed my shot, or the bird's tough skin had felt no sensible touch. And where now were all our birds? Far out over the gray sea they flew, secure from the range of our gun.

We waited long for their return, but only an occasional kittiwake soared high above us, and some, bolder than the rest, presently returned to their brooding places on the cliffs. We could not think of firing while the gulls were on the wing, they swept past us so quickly. We therefore scrambled over some abutting rocks into a further bay, and still onward along the rough beach as far as the stack of Hellia—a great steep rock standing out in the sea under the frowning height of St. John's Head—and here we found as large a number of birds as we had formerly seen.

We had arranged to take our shots turn about, and now it was Robbie's turn. Having charged the gun, we stood quiet for a time, patiently awaiting our chance. A carrion crow flew to a rock between us and the water's edge. Robbie was ready. He took a deliberate and steady aim and fired. A feather dropped from the bird as it took flight.

"Man, Hal, I think that hit him!" exclaimed Robbie, running up to secure the feather.

"Ay," said I. "But I'm thinking we both want some practice, Robbie. We'll have no birds today, I reckon. Let's put up some cock-shy on yon rock and fire at it. There's no use shooting at the birds. We'll hit them, maybe; but we'll not kill anything, I'm feared."

So we erected a tall stone on the top of a rock, and, standing some paces from it, practised firing at the object until we could hit it, perhaps, once out of half a dozen tries. But we soon got tired of this play, and I proposed climbing up to the top of the cliffs, for all the birds seemed to be flying high.

Walking along to a broken cleft of the headland, where a burn came down from the hills through a long gorge, we turned up the ravine and mounted the heights. No sooner were we up there, however, than we found that the birds were all below us on the beach.

We were making our way up the ravine, Robbie carrying the climbing lines and I the loaded gun, when a large sea bird with wide-sweeping wings flew just over our heads. Without thinking of hitting him, but simply wishing to empty the gun of its charge in case of accident, I took aim and fired. The great bird faltered in its flight, one of its wings seemed to lose all power, and then with a circling swoop he came down with a thud upon a grassy knoll beside the stream.

Page 44

It was a fine solan goose. He was quite dead when we reached him, for I had shot him under the right wing.

My good fortune excited Robbie to such a degree that he would not be satisfied without again trying a shot. So we loaded the gun once more, and about half a mile further up the glen he had the luck to knock over a small rabbit. This was the extent of our sport.

To climb up this wild and desolate glen was no easy matter, for I must tell you that St. John's Head, the summit of which we had to cross before getting back to our boat (for the tide would not allow of our return by the beach), stood above the sea to a height considerably over a thousand feet. The goose and our climbing ropes were also tiring burdens, and we had many times to take rest beside the stream and quench our thirst in its cool water. Some distance above the sea the ground became smoother, and broken rocks gave place to short heather, which was softer for our bare feet.

When at last we reached the top of the Head, and our trouble was over, we sat down on the breezy front of the hill and looked far away across the restless water, where the sea line melted into the blue haze of the Scotch coast. Nearer to us the water itself was blue, then pale green with bands of purple above beds of weed, and over all the white waves curled into foaming crests, silent to us as snow. Southward, along the cliffs, a high steeple rock—the Old Man of Hoy—stood like a sentinel guarding the coast, his head on a level with the cliff behind him; and rounding Rora Head were the brown sails of a few fishing craft making for Stromness.

"Come, Robbie," I said, when we had feasted our eyes on this scene. "Come, we must be getting home. The tide has turned this long while past, and we'll be hungry before we're back to Stromness."

We were, indeed, already somewhat hungry, and regretted we had not brought food with us instead of the climbing ropes, which had not so far been required. To think of getting anything to eat where we were was needless, for we were on the most desolate part of the Hoy island, and not a house was there for miles away.

The walk back along the ridge of the cliffs was easy, the ground sloping downward in our favour. About a mile further on we came to the cliffs below which our boat was moored. But, alas! we had been sadly out in our reckoning. The boat was afloat, deep down there, tugging desperately at her rope and grinding her sides against a rock. To get down to her was now a problem. From our high position we could see how the tide had risen well above the rocks by which we had climbed from one bay to the other, and our only course was to descend by the steep precipice surrounding the creek wherein the boat was moored. There was no possible way down except by the use of the ropes, and this was an extremely difficult and dangerous undertaking, for the cliffs rose fully three hundred feet in height, and our lines, of which we had two, would scarcely, when

joined together, measure more than half that length. For we used them for the cliffs of Pomona, which are not in any place so high as those of Hoy.

Page 45

We had a long consultation first, as to which of us should make the descent. Robbie offered to go down, as he was the lighter weight and I the stronger for holding the upper end of the rope. Yet I was a little afraid of letting him undertake so difficult an adventure, being conscious that he had had less practice at cliff climbing than I.

“Robbie,” I said, “let me go down. You can hold the line—” and then suddenly remembering my magic stone, I added, “and remember, Robbie, that I have this little stone to keep me from harm.”

At once Robbie cast away all fear and became quite confident.

“What fools we were not to think of that!” he exclaimed. “Come away, let us tie the lines together, and you’ll go down as safe as a bird, Hal. Hooray! we have a chance of testing the worth of the stone after all!”

Robbie’s confidence gave me courage—or was it the remembrance of the viking’s charm that made me bold? However it be, I now thought no more of going down this unfamiliar precipice than if it had been one of those that were so well known to me on the Mainland.

Having tied the two ropes securely together, we looked for a convenient point at which to make the descent. We went out to the furthest part of the embayed cliff, and looking over to the opposite precipice saw a suitable spot less steep than the rest, and where also, some distance below the brink, there was a projecting pinnacle of rock which might serve as a pillar round which to secure the rope.

We took the climbing line and cast one end of it over the cliff, letting it fall as far down as the pinnacle I have mentioned. Robbie then held the rope, with the help of a boulder of rock round which he secured it, and I proceeded to lower myself down the steep. It was easy work getting to the pinnacle; but this was only the beginning. I whistled up to Robbie when I had gained a sure footing, and he let down the rest of the rope. And now I had to manage everything else unaided, for Robbie could not, with what contrivances he had on the top of the cliff, have been of any further help. Before I had cast the rope over the point of rock, he was across at the far side of the embayment, where he could watch my progress and give me directions.

Having passed the line over the rock pillar and allowed the two ends to hang down in equal lengths, I climbed over, and with considerable difficulty caught hold of the double rope, by which I let myself slowly and cautiously down, now holding to the face of the rocks with hand and foot, now swarming down by the ropes alone, until a cry from Robbie warned me that I was coming to the end of the lines. Fortunately I was able to reach a ragged point where I could once more get a firm foothold.

Page 46

Resting there, I reflected that I was not yet halfway down the precipice; and now I had to think of how I should manage to haul the rope down and secure it to another projecting rock. The only suitable point I could see was some yards away from me to the right side, and I had to climb upward again before I could find a shelf by which to approach it. After a tedious attempt—during which my magic stone came very near to proving its power—I at last reached the desired place. A gull fluttered away with a wild cry as with bleeding fingers I held on to the ledge of rock; and there I found, nestling upon their bed of moss and weeds, a pair of woolly little chicks which stared strangely at my intrusion.

My safety, perhaps even my life, depended upon my getting astride of that small rocky point where the young gulls sat. In my extremity I took hold of one of the chicks, intending to throw it down the cliffs; but the mother bird flew towards me with such piteous cries that even in my danger I could not be so cruel, so I removed the little ones to a crevice close at hand and seated myself upon their nest, thankful of the refuge it afforded. And now I heard a shrill whistle from Robbie Rosson, by which I understood that, seeing my comparative safety, he was going to find some place where he could get down to the beach, there to wait until I should bring the boat round for him.

But I must say that I thought my chances of ever getting round to him were very small. I was not by any means so safe as he seemed to think, for being once seated on that shelf of the cliff I found that my next difficulty would be to turn round with my face to the rock in order to continue the perilous descent.

I had now to get my rope down from the height above me. First then I tied one end of the line round my body so that the rope might not fall, and, allowing the other end to hang slack, began to haul away. Things went well for a few moments, and the rope answered to every pull I gave. But, alas! there came a check. I had let loose the wrong end, and the knot by which we had connected the two lines had caught in some crevice. Try as I might I could not loosen it; yet I was not certain that its hold was firm enough for me to venture climbing up again by the portion of the rope that I held in my grasp.

My thoughts were fearful. Here was I, stranded on this ledge of rock, midway up the face of a steep precipice, the sea roaring far beneath me, and with no obvious means of escape either above or below.

My boat looked small away deep down there as she tugged at her mooring line and tossed wildly about in the rising tide. O, how I wished that I was seated at her helm, and in sight of my beloved Stromness!

Instinctively I felt for my magic stone. It hung safely under my knitted shirt. I trusted in the security it gave me, and my courage was renewed. The way out of my predicament was so hopeless, my danger so great, that I solemnly resolved, should I ever reach

home again, to attribute my escape from this peril to the intervention of the viking's talisman.

Page 47

Long and wearily I waited, contemplating the difficulties of my situation, and in the end I almost determined to hazard the further descent without the help of the rope, trusting merely to the skill of my hands and feet.

My first endeavour was to get back along the shelf of rock until the rope should hang perpendicularly. Accordingly I restored the young seagulls to their nest, turned myself round with my face to the cliff, and, with much difficulty, retraced my way for some distance. I was in a half-creeping position, holding by the right hand to niches of the cliff, when, a sharp corner of stone digging into my knee, I stumbled, and would surely have fallen far down upon the rocks of the beach, had I not still held firmly to the rope.

The sudden jerking, however, did one good thing; it loosened the knot from the place where it had been held in the rock above, and the rope itself came down by its own weight until it hung from my waist where I had tied it.

The further descent was now performed with comparative ease, and in the manner I had at first intended. I hung the rope at half its length over a point of rock, seeing now that it had a free run, and allowing the two ends to fall. Then I swarmed down the double line until I found another suitable place for hanging the rope by. Thus making the descent by repeated stages, I stepped at last upon the level rocks of the beach, sincerely thankful for my escape from so great peril.

When I scrambled over the rocks towards the boat I found she was floating in full three fathoms of water, so that my only course was to swim out to her. This, however, was a small matter after what I had gone through. I stripped myself on one of the outlying rocks, and plunging into the water soon reached the boat and clambered over the stern. I was obliged to “slip the anchor,” for the painter was tied deep below the water and had to be sacrificed. But I did not take long to recover my clothes and dress myself, and then I took to the oars with a will and rowed along the shore in search of Robbie.

Steep and frowning looked the great cliff that I had come down. I regarded it with a new interest, and felt some sense of pride and satisfaction in my narrow escape from so serious a danger. Again I took my viking’s stone in my fingers, and my faith in it was complete.

Robbie was patiently waiting for me seated on one of the outer rocks in a further bay. His face brightened as he saw me rounding the point.

“Man, Ericson,” he exclaimed joyfully, “I’m real glad to see ye again! I e’en thought ye’d met wi’ some mischance. I was terribly feared!”

“Feared, were you? Well, so was I; but I managed all right, you see, thanks to the viking’s charm.”

Robbie brought on board the gun, with his rabbit and the dead gannet. And then we rowed back to Stromness. It was long past sundown when we rounded the Ness point, and the beacon lights were streaming over the bay, but we reached the little quay at the end of the Anchor Close without any mishap. Both of us were very hungry after our sport.

Page 48

On that evening, I remember, I spent a very happy time at the home fireside. My uncle Mansie was there, with my father, and my mother, and Jessie. It was almost the first occasion on which I was permitted to join in the conversation with my elders. But the evening has ever since had a pathetic interest in my memory; for, as it turned out, it was the very last time that our family sat together in an unbroken circle.

“Ye’re gettin’ to be quite a good boatman, Hal, to gang all that way under sail,” said Mansie; and then he turned to my father, saying, “When are we to hae the lad aboard the Curlew, Sandy?”

“Weel,” replied my father, putting his great brown hand with affection upon my shoulder, “I hae been thinkin’ it was about time he joined us. The lad has been at the school lang enough, mebbe.

“Are ye at the head o’ the class yet, Halcro?”

“Nay, father, he’s no that yet,” interposed Jessie, “for Thora is aye before him.”

“Thora can read better than I can,” I said, “and she kens mair geography. She’s better at the Latin, too; but the dominie says I’m the best at history, and writin’, and accounts.”

“Ye’ll no need very muckle Latin to be a pilot, however,” said my father. “But it’s a pity ye’re not better at the geography. How many islands have we in Orkney? Can you tell me that?”

“Seventy-two—twenty-eight islands and forty-four holms.”

“And can ye name them all, the twenty-eight islands?”

“Yes, the dominie taught us them last Martinmas;” and I proceeded to name them, from the North Ronaldsay down to the Muckle Skerry of Pentland.

“Very good!” said my father; “and d’ye ken ony thing about the sounds? Where’s the Sound o’ Rapness?”

“There’s a puzzle for ye, Hal,” said my mother.

“Ah! I warrant the laddie kens it,” said Mansie.

“Is it not between Westray and Fara?” I ventured doubtfully.

“Right again!” exclaimed Mansie, slapping his knee. “Oh! we’ll mak’ a pilot o’ the lad yet.”

“Ay,” said my father, “we maun hae him aboard the first fine day.”

“Dear me, father,” objected my mother, “d’ye really think it wise to tak’ the laddie frae the school, an’ him gettin’ on sae weel wi’ the dominie?”

“Tut, goodwife,” said he, “the laddie maun begin to learn the piloting some time; an’ the sooner the better, say I.

“Hand me over the tobacco jar, Jessie.”

Chapter XVI. Wherein I Go A-Fishing.

A few days after the sailing of the Lydia the weather broke. The morning mist lay heavy on the islands, and the lofty Ward Hill of Hoy hid his crown in the lowering clouds; the Bay of Stromness was glassy calm. High above the rain goose shrieked its melancholy cry, and the sea mews and sheldrakes, even the shear waters and bonxies, flew landward to the shelter of the cliffs. On the upland meadows the cows sniffed the moist air and refused to eat, and the young lambs sought the protection of their parents’ side.

Page 49

My sister Jessie, with evident thought of Captain Gordon, noticed these signs of approaching storms.

But if to her they portended ill, to me they meant good sport; for what could be more favourable to a day's fishing than a sprinkle of rain and a good westerly wind?

Telling my mother one Saturday morning that I would stay over Sunday at my uncle Mansie's farm at Lyndardy, I started off with my fishing tackle and my dog, with the intention of catching a few trout in the stream I had so strongly recommended to the schoolmaster.

The dog was certainly no necessary companion for a fishing excursion; but Selta had learned to follow me on such occasions without interfering with my sport, and I got into the way of talking with her, and found comfort in her dumb companionship.

Passing through the hamlet of Howe, I reached the Bush at a point where that wide stream runs into Scapa Flow by the Bay of Ireland. This, I had found, was a favourite resting place for sea trout before running into the lochs, and here I enjoyed good sport for the whole morning.

I fished upstream—as I think a true angler should do—for though, as Andrew Drever held, fishing downward was the easier method of the two, especially with the wind at his back, yet I preferred my own way, just as I preferred fishing with artificial fly to fishing with bait, merely because it was more difficult and more surely exercised my skill.

The third cast I made filled me with an enthusiasm I long had known. A sudden jerk at the line and a fish was hooked. I paid out more line as the trout darted off, then drew in as it slackened again. Once more, as the fish felt the strain, he plunged off. I saw him jump, and his scales flashed in the gray light like a bright blade of steel, a loop of line gathering round him. At length the prize was taken, and a fine sea trout was brought exhausted to the bank.

Thus I fished, now wading to the knees in the rapid stream, now sitting on a large stone readjusting my flies. Before noon the rain fell heavily, but by the time that I reached the Bridge of Waithe my basket was full, and I walked along the road as far as Clouston, the dog following in the wet with drooping, draggling tail, and ears dripping with the rain.

My clothes were wet through and I was cold, and, wishing for shelter and a bite of food, I turned across the heath to Jack Paterson's croft. I opened the door of the little cottage without knocking, and found Jack and his wife Jean at home, with their family of six waiting for their midday meal. Hilda, the eldest girl, was arranging some wooden dishes on the table ready for the potatoes.

Poor as the place was, I received a true and simple welcome, and I was glad of the shelter and the warmth, for the wind was whistling round the eaves and the heavy rain pelting against the little window.

Page 50

Jack Paterson was a poor crofter, who added to his scanty means by going to the deep-sea fishing, or, out of the fishing season, by burning kelp. These occupations, combined with the produce of his croft, made up, I am afraid, a very poor living. The cottage was small, so small that I always wondered how so large a family could live in its one little room with any comfort. In the middle of the clay floor, on a stone slab, was a large peat fire, the smoke of which escaped by a hole in the roof, where the rain came through. By the side of the fire were two large high-backed chairs entirely wisped round with straw, so that none of the framework could be seen. In a great three-legged pot, which hung over the flaming peats by a chain from the bare rafters, some potatoes were boiling, and whilst they were cooking Jean Paterson cleaned and fried some of my fish, which came, I think, as a welcome addition to the family's meal.

Jack Paterson was a very tall, muscular man, with a long red beard and soft brown eyes. His hands were the largest I have ever seen; but the right one wanted a finger. This, I believe, was the only exception that one could make in saying that Jack was absolutely perfect in his great manhood. He would have made a splendid man-o'-war's man, and the press gang had more than once tried to secure him.

Not till long afterwards, when, as pilots, we were out at sea together one clear starlight night, did he tell me how his finger was lost. It happened at a time when the press gang were more than usually busy in Orkney pressing men for a frigate that lay in Stromness harbour. The blue jackets had had their eyes upon Jack Paterson, but Jack, who was just about to be married to Jean Nicol, did not intend being caught; and he said to Jean one day that rather than enter the navy, he would cut one of his fingers off, and so make himself unfit for service.

One dark night he was walking along one of the country lanes with his sweetheart when a body of tars fell upon him, and, after a sharp fight, carried him off to an old stable in the town that served as a temporary lockup. Very early the next morning Jean Nicol knocked gently at the stable door.

"Are ye there, Jack?" said she.

"Yes," replied Jack; and his warders, who were two foretop men, allowed him to speak with her through the keyhole.

"I've brought your release," said Jean. "Put your hand under the door and I'll give it to you."

Jack put his right hand through under the door, and felt something cold placed across his forefinger. Then there was a knock as of a mallet upon a chisel, and with a cry of anguish he drew in his hand streaming with blood. Jean had cut off his finger. Now, a man with a lame hand is of small account in the service, and so when the lieutenant

came and saw Jack's condition he released him, with a round curse at having lost so fine a man, and the frigate sailed away.

Page 51

Jean got her punishment, however, and so did Paterson. Soon after their marriage, and when Jack's hand was healed, he one day met a man-o'-war's man who belonged to Stromness, and had been among the pressed men. Jack heard from him of the cruise of the frigate, and of a fight with the enemy, and a great store of prize money that every man had shared. That prize money was a sore lump in Jack's throat ever afterwards.

While I was talking with Paterson in his cottage, my dog sat comfortably before the warm fire, the steam rising from her wet hair. She did not appear to like leaving the cosy place; but when we had finished the meal, and I was once more dry and warm, I started off again in the pouring rain and the rising wind.

I did not wish to continue my fishing in such boisterous weather, but contemplated a hasty walk over to my uncle's farm. Our way lay westward in the face of the wind. The walk over the wet peat moss was difficult and tiring, and when I reached the Ring of Brogar I was glad to avail myself of the shelter afforded by the giant Druid stones that stand and wait by the loch of Stenness.

All was desolation around: not a house was to be seen, nor any living thing but my dog and a few wild birds that flew quickly past. The only sounds were the beating of the rain and the distant roar of the Atlantic waves upon the coast.

A slight lull in the tempest urged me on, and soon I had left far behind me those mysterious old stones, that seemed through the misty rain to waken into life. Like a procession of priests they appeared to pass with bent heads and slow and stately pace along the margin of the great stretch of water.

Crossing the swollen burn which connects the lochs of Cluny and Stenness, and thinking only of my destination, I was called back by a sharp bark from my dog. I turned, and found her encountering a large otter that had been slipping down to the stream. Now, I had the angler's hatred of otters, which abounded in these waters. Many a time had I seen a prime fish lying dead on the banks with a single bite taken out of the shoulder, and I looked upon the otter as the common poacher of the neighbourhood. I went to the help of Selta, for the dog was crouched down ready to spring upon the otter when it should run out from behind the large stone where it had retreated.

I cautiously removed the stone, and the animal slipped downward towards the water.

"Now, now, Selta!" I exclaimed; and the dog made a rush at its prey.

The otter, thus intercepted, showed fight. Selta made a snap at its back, and raised her forepaw to hold her enemy down. The otter caught the foot in its mouth, and I heard the bones crunch in the vicious bite. Selta lost hold and fell over the otter's back; her foot was released; but the otter, bringing up its head between the dog's front legs, grasped

Selta's throat with its sharp teeth. With a piteous whine the dog tried to spring away, but her leg was too much broken to support her, and the two animals rolled over on the flat stone, the otter uppermost, still with its teeth in the dog's throat.

Page 52

And now I saw my first chance of interfering. I grasped the otter by the back, and tried to drag it away. I had no boots on my feet, or I might have used them. All I could do was to plant my foot on the animal's back, and stand with all my weight upon it. The otter thereat turned savagely upon me, and, unfortunately for myself, not even the possession of the viking's charm could save me from those sharp teeth.

With a fierce snarl the otter took hold of the back of my ankle, its teeth penetrating the skin and tearing it over. I had sense to bend down and grasp the animal with my hands and rapidly snap its backbone, finishing my work by dashing a heavy stone upon its head. Forgetting my own hurt, I then turned to look after my dog.

Selta was lying upon the wet stone, the blood trickling from her throbbing neck. I knelt down beside my faithful companion, and took the injured foot in my hand. The dog had strength only to raise her head in recognition, with a mournful look in her pleading eyes.

"My poor doggie!" I moaned, utterly cast down; and my falling tears were mingled with Selta's blood. The dog was dead.

Chapter XVII. How The Golden Rule Was Kept.

My first thought on leaving the scene of this combat was to let the dead otter lie where it had fallen; but I remembered that young Thora Kinlay had once in my hearing expressed a wish to have an otter's skin, of which to make a pair of gloves, and I determined to make use of the animal I had killed. But I could not carry both the otter and my poor Selta, whom I had already determined to lay to rest in the sea, and my only course was to strip the otter of its skin then and there. This I did with help of my pocketknife, and in spite of the heavy rain that poured in streams down my back.

You will imagine the physical discomforts of my further journey. The ground was marshy and sodden, and I sank deep into it at every step I took. My clothing was wet through and through, and my dog, which I carried over my shoulder, was a burden so heavy and inconvenient that only my love for my late companion and respect for her lifeless body gave me sufficient strength to bear it for so great a distance. And then the rain fell incessantly, and the wind was full in my face.

Carver Kinlay's farm of Crua Breck was on my way to my uncle's, and I thought I would stay there a few moments as I passed, to leave the otter skin for Thora, and maybe get shelter and a drink of warm milk. But not till I was almost at the door did I remember about my recent fight with Tom.

In its exposed position on the bleak hillside the farmstead felt the full force of the gale as it beat in fury against the front of the house. The rain and the salt spray from the sea pelted upon the windows, and laid low all Thora's flowers in the little garden. The large

fuchsia bush, which in summertime dangled its drooping blossoms in rich profusion, seemed the only plant capable of withstanding the rough blast; and the great gaunt jaws of the Greenland whale, that formed an archway at the gate, trembled in the tempest.

Page 53

I went up to the door, and opening it stood within the shelter of the porch for a while, and heard someone reading aloud. Soon I gathered courage enough to approach the inner door, and look through its little window into the room. A rousing fire of peats and dried heather was blazing on the hearth, around which the family were gathered in a half circle. In an armchair, with a open book on his knee, sat Carver himself. By his side sat his wife knitting a stocking, the firelight glinting on her fair hair. Near to her were a ploughman and a herd boy, also a young woman who did the light field work on the farm and milked the cows, made butter, and helped in the house. Tom sat by the fire opposite his father, and I could see that he was polishing with a piece of leather one of his silver coins. Thora, whose silken hair and beautiful face I regarded with greater satisfaction than any other feature of this group, sat apart from the others, as though she did not care, or had not been invited, to draw her stool nearer to the warmth.

Carver Kinlay, black bearded and hoarse of voice, was reading aloud to his family, and seemed to be expecting from them an attention to the Holy Word which he certainly did not sincerely give to it himself. When he came to the end of a passage which he considered required expounding, he would take off his reading spectacles and wipe them with a corner of his wife's white apron.

"Now, I have explained many times before about this, bairns," he was saying as he looked towards Thora and Tom. "It is a rule, a golden rule, that the merest child might understand. Nothing can be more beautiful or more important, and it just contains these few words: 'Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you.' Now keep this precept in mind, all of you, for ye canna misunderstand it. But, just to make the thing clear—

"Never mind the cat, Thora; just pay attention to the lesson—

"Just to make the thing clear, let us suppose an example. Now, then, supposin', for instance, that Thora here saw a basin full o' milk with thick cream on the top o' it, and that her teeth were watering for just one lick. She ought to say to herself: 'Now, here's a basin full o' good cream; I'd like fine to take one lick of it. But it's the cream for making the butter of. Now, supposin' I was your mother, how would I like my daughter Thora to come and—'"

"Oh! Look, look!" cried Thora, "pussy's tail's burnin'!"

"Confound you, Thora!" exclaimed her father, angered at this interruption. "Can you not pay attention, and let pussy mind her own tail? I say, if you were your mother, how would you like your daughter Thora to lick the cream?"

"Tut, goodman!" interposed Mrs. Kinlay, "what does the lass ken about being a mother? Go on with the reading."

“Odd, goodwife, I’m but supposin’ the thing; and the plainer it is the better, and the easier to understand. However, what verse was it, Thora?”

Page 54

“It was the fourteenth you left off at,” said Thora.

“Aweel, then, the fifteenth: ’Now, when he’—Odd, but I think we read that before.”

“Nay, you didna read it before, father, for it was the fourteenth verse you left off at.”

“Nay, I’m sure it couldn’t be that, for I remember readin’ ’Now, when he,’ before.”

“But I’m sure, father, ye’re wrong,” persisted Thora. “Look you if the fourteenth doesn’t end with ‘people,’ and ‘people’ was the last word you read.”

“‘People, people!’” said Carver, searching for the place. “Odd, lassie, I see no ‘people.’ There’s one verse that ends with ‘people,’ but it’s not the fourteenth. It had been that, ye silly lass, instead o’ the fourteenth.”

“Well, well, goodman, what dos’t matter what verse you left off at,” said his wife. “A good tale’s none the worse of being told twice.”

“Nay, but,” said Thora, “just look for fun and see what the fourteenth verse ends with.”

“Fun, lassie! fun!” exclaimed Carver, as though he was seriously shocked. “Would you speak o’ fun and the Holy Scripture lying open before you?”

“O, but, father, I had no mind. A body canna aye be minding. Look and see not for fun, then.”

“Tut, tut!” said the mother, becoming impatient, “can you not begin at the fifteenth verse? What dos’t matter if ye read it before?”

“Aweel, then, the fifteenth verse, ‘Now, when he’”—

“Listen, father!” cried Thora, again interrupting, “did you not hear something?”

“Well did I hear something, and I hear it yet—the rain pelting on the window. I’m sure you’ve heard it this two hours and more.”

“Nay, but it was like something twirling at the handle of the door.”

“You hear things nobody else hears, Thora. Who could be at the door on a day like this? You just think you hear things. I was sure ‘people’ was not the last word.”

Carver listened, however, for a time. The rain beat harder than ever on the windows, and from the neighbouring cliffs came the sound of the waves like a rumbling of distant thunder. But as he looked up from his book I knocked gently on the door.

“Who’s there?” he asked in a gruff tone that had in it no echo of charity.

Thora rose from her seat and came towards the door, where I stood in a stream of water that ran from my wet clothes.

“Oh, Halcro!” she exclaimed as she looked down at my cold, bare feet and saw the blood issuing from the wound in my ankle. “Oh, Halcro, what has happened?” and she opened wide the door to admit me.

“What does the lad want here?” asked Carver.

I had never been asked such a question before. I had been accustomed to go about the island all my boyhood, and to walk in at any door I came to with the assurance that no person would question me as to what I wanted. At length, without going further than the threshold, I said:

Page 55

“I was thinking you would give me shelter for a short time on a day like this.”

“On a day like this,” replied he, “none but a fool would think of travelling; and if it’s shelter you’re seeking here, young Ericson, I say no!” and the unfeeling “No” was echoed by all the others in the room, with one exception. That exception was Thora.

I saw the girl’s hands quickly clench when she heard this unkind dismissal, and in her blue eyes the tears welled up and stole gently down her fair cheeks.

I felt that the “No” could be easily withstood, but the tears in Thora’s eyes overcame me. I gave her a look of thanks, closed the door behind me, and again faced the storm, first going round to the back of the house to take up in my arms the body of my poor dog. I hung up the otter’s skin on a hook in the byre, where I believed Thora would discover it, and so make what use of it she might.

I carried the dog still further, however. Taking it down to a small creek that gave entrance to the seashore, I came to a rock that was washed by the deep waters, and here I tied a large stone around Selta’s neck and silently lowered the body into the sea, where the great waves of the Atlantic murmured a solemn requiem.

Then, regaining the top of the cliff, I stood for a time looking seaward, where the curling waves swept in from the west and dashed with terrible strength against the hard rocks of granite. There was no sail to be seen as far as my sight could penetrate through the driving rain mists; but I knew that the storm would be fatal to many a brave fisherman and sailor, and many a strong-built ship.

My sad thoughts and the noise of the breakers so much absorbed me that I felt conscious of nothing so much as my utter loneliness. But as I stood there in my wretchedness, suddenly a hand was laid gently on my shoulder, and I looked round, to see Thora at my side, with a great cloak thrown about her, and her hair streaming in the wind.

“Halcro,” she said, “it is not this way I can see you turned from my father’s door in the rain and the wind, and with that wound in your foot. Pm sorry he spoke to you like that, for I’m sure you’ll be tired and weary.

“I have brought you some oatcake—see. Eat it, while I mend your foot.”

Then she knelt down before me on the wet, mossy rock, took a piece of clean linen from under the cloak that covered her, and wiped clean my wound. With her fingers she gently drew over the torn skin, and taking another piece of white cloth bandaged it neatly round my ankle.

While she was so employed I informed her of my fight with the otter and the loss of my dog, and her gentle sympathy was sweet to my troubled spirit. And then I told her where she might find the otter's skin, and how she should make use of it.

"There, now," she said, putting a pin through the bandage and rising to her feet, "that will serve till you get home."

Page 56

“It’s real kind of you to do this for me, Thora,” I said, touched by the girl’s tenderness, “and I will not forget this. No, not as long as I live;” and I think there was a tremor in my voice—at least I felt what I said.

“But,” I continued, “what will they say to you at Crua Breck, if they hear you have done this thing?”

“Halcro, I have done nothing but what I have been told to do. Before you knocked at the door, my father was saying we should aye ‘do as we’d be done by.’ In that I have obeyed him. But I must run back now, or they will miss me. See you give care to the foot. Fare ye well!”

And with that she hastened back to the farm, leaving me to ponder over her manner of applying that golden rule which her father had, while teaching it, so grievously failed to practise.

I made my way onward to Lyndardy—sadly, it is true, but with a strange new feeling in my heart for this blue-eyed maiden who, in defiance of her family, had helped me in my weariness and distress.

A short distance from the place where Thora left me, I came to the ruined cottage of Inganess. As I approached I heard a click-clicking noise, by which I surmised there was some person within the ruined walls. A dog came out to meet me at the door, wagging its tail in welcome. It was the very counterpart of my own dead Selta, and I knew well whom to expect in the cottage even before I entered.

Seated on the floor under shelter of a part of the roof that had not fallen in, was an old man, with locks of silver hair appearing under his blue bonnet, and hanging with a curl about his neck. The clicking sound I had heard proceeded from a flint and the back of a knife, with which the old man was endeavouring to strike a light to kindle the little pile of faded heather that lay in a corner. When I looked in he raised his eyes and said with surprise:

“Ah! Halcro, lad. Travelling on a day like this? Why, ye’re as wet as myself. But come in, come in here. It’s a poor house; but ye’re real welcome. And where’s your dog?”

I was downcast at this question, for it was this same old man before me—this Colin Lothian, the wandering beggar—who had given Selta to me, and the dog that was with him was Selta’s brother.

“Colin,” I asked, when I had told him of my dog’s death, “why is it you come to this poor place for shelter when every house in the Mainland is open to you? Why do you not go to my uncle’s at Lyndardy?”

“Weel, ye see, lad, I dinna mind where I gang. One place is as good as another, and this is very well in a shower of rain. I was west at Crua Breck when the rain came on sae heavy; and I hae been here these twa hours tryin’ to strike a light, but ye see the tinder’s wet—

“Try you if ye can do it, lad;” and the old man handed me the flint.

Page 57

“Aweel, then,” he continued, “I opened the door at Crua Breck, just as I would open any door in Orkney, be it rich or poor. But wad they let me in, think ye? Na, na. Carver was sittin’ yonder, as he aye does on the rainy days, when there’s nae gettin’ aboot the farm, preachin’ away before a bonnie fire. But the auld hypocrite wouldna let me in. What cares he for the Holy Word? If it werena for his goodwife, he’d never open the Scriptures. Ay, but it’s a lang while he’ll be preachin’ any good into yon blackguard son o’ his. There’s not a house of harder hearts in all the Mainland than Crua Breck. They all take after Carver; ilka body o’ them, except peerie Thora.”

“Yes,” I said feelingly, “Thora’s kinder than all the rest.”

“Kinder! Ay is she. She’s no’ like ane o’ the same family. I mind ae stormy night in the last winter, when Carver had shut the door in my face, Thora cam’ after me and, ‘Colin,’ says she, ’come away here, and I’ll gie ye a bed in the byre;’ and with that she took me in among the kine and gied me some oaten bannocks and a flagon o’ warm milk. And then she made up a bed upon the hay, wi’ a good warm plaid to wrap mysel’ in. ‘See there, now, Colin,’ says she. ’Rest ye here, and I’ll let ye out before my father rises i’ the mornin’.’ Now wasna that kindness for ye, Halcro?”

“Ay, Colin, that was just like wee Thora.”

Whilst Colin was telling me these things I was busy trying to kindle the fire; but try as I would, it could not be done.

“Oh, never mind the fire, Colin!” I said. “Just come along wi’ me to my uncle’s farm at Lyndardy. Ye’ll get good shelter and food there. That’s far better than staying in this ruined place.”

So the old man got up on his feet, and we walked together to the farm.

My sister Jessie, who frequently came up to Lyndardy to stay over the Sabbath, was in the kitchen when we arrived, and while we were drying our clothes before the fire she got some good warm broth ready for us, and some new-made scones.

Over our meal I told Jessie of my adventure with the otter, and the death of my dog. She wanted to dress my ankle again, but Thora had bound it up so skilfully that there was nothing more to be done.

“I wonder that the otter should bite you like that, Halcro,” Jessie said. “Why, I thought the old viking’s stone was to save ye frae the like o’ that!”

I had myself wondered at the same circumstance.

“Ah! but, Jessie,” I said, suddenly comforting myself with an excuse for the apparent failure of the charm, “Mr. Drever didna tell me that the stone would be o’ any use against such a beast as an otter.”

“No, I ken that. But did he not say it would protect ye from all harm? Surely an otter shouldna be left out o’ the reckoning.”

But here Colin Lothian, to whom the virtues of the viking’s talisman had been explained, suggested that I perhaps needed to have some secret communication with the stone in my own mind—that I perhaps needed to think of the charm at the very moment of danger, and to call upon it for aid. He had heard of such things, he said.

Page 58

This explanation appeared to me very reasonable, and with the suggestion in my mind I determined, should I ever have another opportunity, to put it in practice.

Such an opportunity presented itself sooner than I could have expected.

Chapter XVIII. The Wreck Of The "Undine."

Colin Lothian remained at Lyndardy until the following Monday morning. He slept out in the byre, where such wayfarers as he were always welcome to a supper and a bed, and in the evenings he would come in to the kitchen to sit with my uncle and talk over the affairs of the island, or to read us a chapter out of the well-worn Testament that he carried with him on his wanderings. For Colin was a religious man and loved his Bible. He knew most of the Psalms by heart, and often gathered groups of islanders about him to hear him repeat them. Idlers sometimes scoffed at his fondness for the epistle on Charity; but no one who heard him repeat it could fail to be impressed by its teaching or to recognize the poor wanderer's sincerity.

Colin was the recognized newsmonger of the Mainland, and it was his habit to travel from parish to parish retailing the gossip of the countryside. At farm towns which were situated in remote places he was always a welcome guest. He was well acquainted with the condition of the markets and the state of the fishing and the crops. He knew the price of butter and of oatmeal, of cattle and of sheep, and his information was often of great value to the farmers in adjusting the values of farm produce. With the old men he would laugh over the jokes of days that had been; tell them how laird had gone to law with laird, or how poor crofters had been evicted from their holdings for failing to pay their taxes or their rents. The young women were always ready to hear from him who was to be married at Martinmas, or how Nell So-and-so had been jilted; and he often entertained the young people with strange tales of the brownies, the trows, the kelpies, or other supernatural beings. In this way he supplied the place of newspapers and books, which were scarce commodities in those old days; and he further made himself useful by doing odd work about the steadings and cottages—such as building the peats into stacks for the winter, mending a thatch, or even doctoring a cow.

On the Sunday evening at Lyndardy, while the storm still beat upon the land, Colin sat with us round the fireside and smoked with my uncle Mansie. The talk drifted round to the subject of Carver Kinlay, whose new boat was to be brought from Kirkwall that week. My uncle did not know for what purpose that new boat was built.

Kinlay was a man who had no settled occupation outside his farm. Sometimes, it is true, he went out to the herring fishing when the fish were plentiful, and he thought he could make some money by it, and he often made secret passages over to Scotland for no one knew what trade. But it was for none of these purposes that the new boat was

required, for it had been built with a deep keel and a lugger rig, with a view to being a quick sailer.

Page 59

Now if anyone should know of Carver's purpose, it would be Colin Lothian, and my uncle questioned him on the subject.

"Colin," said he, "they tell me that Carver is gettin' a new boat frae Kirkwall. D'ye ken what he means to do wi' it?"

"That's piper's news," said Colin. "I heard that three or four weeks syne; and I hae seen the boat mysel', on the stocks at Allan Dewar's boatyard. Ay, and a bonnie boat she is! As to what Carver means to do wi' it—Weel, I dinna ken if it be true; but I hae heard that he intends to start as a Stromness pilot in opposition to Sandy Ericson."

"A pilot!" exclaimed Mansie. "Carver Kinlay a pilot! Man, Colin, ye astonish me. Why, the man hasna gotten a certificate!"

"Maybe ay and maybe no; but I assure ye, Mansie, that a pilot he means to be."

Mansie dismissed this notion incredulously; for though Kinlay knew the coast very well, yet the idea of his starting with his limited experience as an Orkney pilot was droll to one who, like my uncle, had been all his life at the work, and knew every fathom of the waters.

But the character of Carver Kinlay—"Crafty Carver" he was called by those who knew him well—was a problem which had not yet been solved. I had myself gathered many incoherent hints relating to him, and, bit by bit, I heard fragments of fact as to his first appearance in Pomona; but on this Sunday evening, as I sat with Lothian and Mansie, I added to these hints some certain knowledge which enabled me afterwards to better understand this man.

The noise of the storm raging outside—the wind and rain beating on the windows, and the sound of the waves breaking against the cliffs—brought the two men to talk about the ships that had from time to time been wrecked on our neighbouring coast. Said Mansie:

"'Twas on a night like this—d'ye mind, Colin?—that the Undine went to pieces on the Gaulton Craigs."

"Ay," said Colin, "weel do I mind it, and weel, I reckon, does Carver Kinlay mind it."

The conversation regarding the incident was disjointed. Let me, therefore, tell the story in my own words.

My father had with his gallant crew gone out to sea one stormy night in the pilot boat. A stiff westerly wind was blowing, and the headland of Hoy was hidden in mist and spray. The Curlew was steered out into the open sea in the hope of falling in with any ship that required piloting into the safe haven of Stromness. Beaten about on the heavy sea, the

boat was brought along the outer coast of Pomona until she stood off abreast of the Head of Marwick. Along the coastline of Sandwick, as she sailed back towards Stromness, the waves rose in angry foam against the rugged cliffs. None but men thoroughly accustomed to the terrors of the storm-swept Orkneys could have taken that little craft through such a surging sea, and it was only by the help of the light that was always kept aglow in the windows of Lyndardy farmhouse that they were able to guide the boat in safety.

Page 60

When the Curlew was abreast of Inganess, Willie Slater, the lookout man at the bow, reported a ship in sight; and as my uncle Mansie lighted a rude torch, made of old rope steeped in the oil of sea birds, my father peered into the darkness and saw a large barque heading towards the land. The blazing light of the torch was presently waved as a warning signal to those on the ship.

The meaning of this was understood too late, for before the vessel could turn she was driven swiftly upon the North Gaulton rocks, and there smashed like a bottle of glass.

Then the sail of the Curlew was lowered, and the boat taken as close as possible to the wrecked ship. The cries of the people on board were heard in the tempest, but there was little hope of saving life. Yet the pilot crew were undaunted by any risks. Four of the men were at the oars; Mansie was at the bow with his flaming torch, and my father at the tiller. They got within hail of the ship, and after an infinite amount of trouble succeeded in saving four precious lives. These four persons were a seaman, a gentleman passenger—who was picked up suffering from a wound he had received in the head when the vessel struck—Mrs. Kinlay, and my schoolfellow, Tom Kinlay.

When they were brought into the boat, Mrs. Kinlay entreated my father not to leave the wreck until he had saved her husband and her infant girl. But after much searching of the water the chance of saving any more lives was so small, and the danger to the Curlew so great, that the boat was brought to the beach at Inganess Geo, where its suffering passengers were landed and carried up to the neighbouring farm of Crua Breck.

The Curlew was then taken back to the wrecked barque. One of the ship's boats had been launched by the skipper and some of the crew, who had endeavoured to save all they could; but the little craft was too frail to stand against the heavy sea; it was dashed against the sunken rocks and all were drowned. My father and his men remained by the vessel until daylight. Among the jagged rocks, when the tide went down, they found the body of a very beautiful woman with the shattered body of a child still clasped in her arms. The infant seemed to have been hurriedly taken from its bed. This fair lady was afterwards recognised as the wife of the owner of the ill-fated vessel—the gentleman my father had rescued—who had been returning with her and their infant daughter to Denmark. The lady's name was Thora Quendale, and it was her tomb that I had seen in the old graveyard of Bigging on that evening when we shared the viking's treasures.

Her husband had remained in Orkney only until he had laid her and the child to rest, when, gathering the few remnants of his property that remained to him from the wreck of his ship, he took a passage in a vessel that happened to touch at Kirkwall for repairs, and with the sailor who had been saved with him he set sail for Denmark. My uncle Mansie said that this Mr. Quendale had promised to my father and others that he would be back again in Pomona in a few months, but since that time he had never been heard of.

Page 61

Now it happened that on the fifth day after the wreck of the Undine (for such was the vessel's name) my father was taking his small boat round to Borwick, a little hamlet two miles south of Skaill Bay. On passing the place where the vessel struck, now calm and peaceful after the storm, he shortened sail and rowed inshore. A little distance up the face of the red cliff, above the high-water mark, and hidden by a projecting rock, there was a "scurro," or fissure, which opened into a large cavern. He had discovered this cavern when he was a boy, on some bird-nesting expedition; and now, scarcely knowing why he did so—except, perhaps, for the passing thought that some of the wreckage had been washed into it by the high waves—he climbed up from his boat and entered the cave. To his astonishment he found there a half-starved man, who had been on board the Undine at the time of the disaster. Having found the cave in his endeavours to scale the cliff, this unfortunate man had contrived to live there during the five long days and nights since the wreck by subsisting on shellfish, seaweed, and a few sea-birds' eggs.

What surprised my father more than all, however, was that the man had as a companion a helpless little child. Someone on the ship had placed the infant in an empty packing case, which had drifted into the cave. The pilot conveyed the two waifs ashore and took them up to Crua Breck.

The man thus rescued by my father was Carver Kinlay; the little child was Thora.

All that I could learn from my uncle and old Colin concerning Carver, further than this, was that he was a native of the north of Scotland, and that he and his family were passengers on the Danish ship, which was to have put in at the haven of Wick, in Caithness. Careless where he settled down, however, when cast upon the shores of Pomona, he had taken root here, like a weed in a flower garden. He seemed to have had a store of money in the big chest which he claimed from among the wreckage, and circumstances enabled him to purchase the little farm of Crua Breck, together with a fishing boat. The fishing, and a previous knowledge of the Orkney channels, had given him some experience of local navigation; and it was upon the strength of this experience that, having built his pilot boat, he intended to start in opposition to my father.

The greater part of what Mansie and Colin said, as they sat in the comfortable kitchen of Lyndardy, was entirely new to me. I felt a strange pleasure in hearing now, for the first time, that Thora Kinlay owed her life, in some sort, to my own father. When he carried the little girl up to the farm, with a seaman's jacket covering her from the cold—for the women and children had all been in their beds when the ship struck—she was at once claimed by Mrs. Kinlay. They named her Thora, after Mrs. Quendale, who had shown some kindness to her during the voyage, by reason of a resemblance that existed between the two children—Mrs. Quendale's own child and the child of Mrs. Kinlay—-both of whom were of a like age.

Page 62

The story of the wreck of the Undine gave me many matters to ponder over. But the one practical thing that I learnt was this existence of a cave in the North Gaulton cliffs. I had not known that there was such a cave at that spot, although, indeed, I prided myself upon my knowledge of the whole coastline from Rora to Birsay. I accordingly determined to explore the cliff at some future time.

Chapter XIX. Tom Kinlay's Bargain.

I must not omit to mention that Willie Hercus and Robbie Rosson duly delivered up to Mr. Drever their shares of Jarl Haffling's treasure. The dominie was, I believed, already in communication with the proper authorities concerning the claims that would be imposed according to what he called the law of treasure trove. But there were many delays in coming to an agreement, owing, as I understood, to official indifference and to the difficulty of determining the value of the relics, which Mr. Drever contended were worth more than their mere weight in silver. Meanwhile, the schoolmaster, anxious to keep the collection, as he said, intacto, for preservation in some museum, still held possession of the antiquities, and was nightly burning much oil in his absorbed study of them.

Since Tom Kinlay had left the school Mr. Drever had not seen him. But, betimes, a message was sent by Thora to intimate to Tom that we others had given our parts of the viking's treasure into his charge, and advising that Tom should send in the remainder without delay. But Tom, who now owed no direct duty to the dominie, resolutely refused to give up his share of the treasure.

On a windy Saturday morning—a week after the death of my poor dog—I was loitering about the quays in the port, when I was attracted towards a little crowd that had gathered round an old capstan. The crowd consisted of several sailors and fishermen, with a sprinkling of townsfolk, who were evidently much interested in something that was going on in their midst.

I walked towards them and elbowed my way in beside old Davie Flett, the skipper of a coasting schooner, with whom I was slightly acquainted.

"What's all the stir, Mr. Flett?" I asked.

"Och, it's just an auld Jew doing some business," he replied; and I pressed my way further into the crowd.

In the middle of the group there was a withered little man, bent with age, with a long ragged beard and a nose like the beak of a hawk. He wore a great black coat that was very shiny and reached almost down to his ankles; and in his skinny fingers he held what I soon recognized as the large red stone that Tom Kinlay had found at Skaill. Tom

himself was standing near the old Jew, and bargaining with him for all the treasure that had fallen to his share.

The Jew had made some offer for the gem when I came up, and Kinlay was deliberating whilst listening to the advice of the fishermen.

Page 63

“Take his offer, lad,” advised Jack Munroe.

“Ay, take it, Tommy,” added another. “Ye’ll mebbe never hae anither such chance again.”

“Nay, dinna be a fule,” said Jim London. “The auld swindler kens the thing’s worth mair than he offers. Gar him gie ye anither ten shillings.”

“No, no,” protested the Jew, speaking in broken English. “I not want ze ting. Wot use I make of it?”

He was about to hand it back to Tom.

“Well, well,” he continued, again examining the gem. “If you not satisfy, den I gif you six shilling more; wot you say, eh? Dat make ten pound and six shilling, English. It not worth one penny more, I tell you.”

“Mike it ten guineas,” urged Kinlay.

“What! ten guineas? Himmel, mine child, you make me ruined!” exclaimed the Jew.

“Give the lad the ten guineas and be done with it, Isaac,” said a young seaman who appeared to know him. “You’ll get your own price in Amsterdam.”

“Well, ten guineas I will gif—two hundred and ten shilling!”

And the old Jew slowly counted out the money from a dirty canvas bag that he took from his belt. I saw his little black eyes glitter as he dropped the sparkling gem into the bag and buttoned up his coat, before handing over the money.

Kinlay pocketed the sovereigns, and then looked round the crowd of faces about him with an air of extreme satisfaction. At the same time old Isaac turned to a Dutch sailor who was addressing him in their own language. By the fox-like look in the Jew’s eyes I understood that he, on his part, was not really discontented with the bargain he had closed.

But Tom had evidently not disposed of all his valuables, for, just as Isaac was slipping away, he held him by the sleeve and showed him a handful of the viking’s coins and rings, whereupon the old Hebrew renewed his bartering, with the result that Tom disposed of all his remaining store for the sum of two additional pounds.

The crowd was breaking up, and the Jew again slipping away, when I called out to him, thinking I would tell him that there were some more of these things in Stromness, and believing for the moment that Mr. Drever might have some wish to deal with so

generous a purchaser. Isaac could at least tell him what the treasure was worth, I reflected.

“Will ye buy any more o’ these things?” I asked, when he came to my side.

“Well, I want nossing more, mine young friend,” he replied. “I haf make a very bad bargain already. But what have you? Any more of dose pretty tings?” and he indicated the gem that he had bought from Kinlay.

I thought at once of my magic stone that was suspended at my neck under my guernsey. I produced it, though of course I did not mean to let him have it at any price.

“Is this worth anything?” I asked.

But I had no sooner brought it forth than I felt a tugging at my sleeve. I turned round and saw old Davie Flett frowning at me meaningly.

Page 64

“Don’t have anything to do wi’ the auld thief!” he whispered, dragging me aside. “Come away, lad, an’ let me tell ye something.”

But the Jew was already examining my little black stone, and asking me to take the cord that held it off my neck. He scratched its smooth surface with his long finger nails, and then took out an old knife from his pocket and was proceeding to insert the blade under the gold ring that encircled the stone. I snatched my precious talisman from him, and replaced it under the collar of my knitted shirt. The Jew looked surprised; but without heeding him I turned away with Captain Flett, who walked with me some distance from the dispersing crowd.

When we were alone beside one of the sheds he said:

“It’s all right now, Ericson, my lad. I wanted but to save ye frae makin’ a fule o’ yersel, like Carver Kinlay’s lad.”

“Why,” I said, “Kinlay has made a very good bargain, has he not?”

“Simpleton!” said the skipper. “Ye didna hear what yon Dutch sailor said to the auld Jew, eh?”

“I heard, captain, but of course I didna understand,” I said.

“Weel, my lad, I understood,” said he. “The Dutchman asked him what kind o’ gem it was he had gotten frae the boy.

“‘It’s a ruby,’ said the Jew.

“’Oho!’said the Dutchman. ’It’s a rare big one, though. How muckle might ye be expectin’ to get for it across the water—a couple o’ hundred?’

“Then the auld Jew gave the Dutchman a wink, and said, ’Maybe a thousand dollars, mynheer.’

“So ye see, Ericson, if the auld swindler could count upon gettin’, let us say, two hundred pounds English for the stone over in Amsterdam, ye can hardly say that young Kinlay got a big price for’t, can ye?”

I was astounded at this information. Such unfairness appeared to my boyish mind as criminal in the extreme. But a wider knowledge of the world has since taught me that in commercial transactions things are not always bought and sold at their proper value.

I thanked my skipper friend, while telling him that I had myself had no intention of dealing with the merchant.

Scarcely had I left Mr. Flett two minutes before I heard someone walking hurriedly behind me. I was quickly overtaken by old Isaac and Tom Kinlay.

“Ericson,” said Tom with a friendly tone in his voice, as though we had never quarrelled. “Let the old man hae a sight o’ that thing ye’ve got round yer neck, will ye?”

I put my hands in my trousers pockets, and made no reply.

“I gif you tree shilling for it,” said the Jew.

“Keep your dirty money, sir,” I said, turning on my heel.

Then, as though he did not wish Kinlay to overhear his offer, he followed me, taking me by the sleeve:

“Ah! mine friend,” he said coaxingly, “I see you know wot it is. Very well, den, I gif you a sovereign.”

“A sovereign!” I exclaimed aloud.

Page 65

And Kinlay, who had now come up to us, opened his eyes in surprise.

“Take the money, man,” he urged.

“Nay, nay,” I said. “If you like to give the value of two hundred pounds in exchange for ten guineas, I am certainly not so green. Besides, ye ken weel enough that those things were not rightly yours. Mr. Drever has told you that.”

He did not appear to notice the latter part of what I said.

“Two hundred pounds!” he exclaimed, looking from me to the Jew. “Two hundred pounds! What d’ye mean?”

“I mean,” I said calmly, “that you have been swindled. It’s a ruby stone ye hae sold him, a ruby worth two hundred pounds.”

I will not soon forget the expression that came into Tom’s eyes when he heard this. It was a look first of incredulity, as though he supposed I was simply playing upon him. Then it changed to a look of defeat as he realized how much he had been cheated by the crafty old Jew. He turned round to vent his indignation upon Isaac, swearing and uttering threats of vengeance.

“Ye auld long-nosed deevil!” he exclaimed. “Ye heathen swindler! Gie me back the stone!”

But Isaac had already slipped away from the spot like a startled trout. We saw his long coattails disappear round the corner of an alley that led down to the harbour. Kinlay followed him, still swearing and threatening, and got down to the quay just in time to see the old Jew jump into a boat that had been waiting for him. The boat belonged to a Dutch brig that was putting out to sea, and when old Isaac got aboard, the anchor was already at the cat head and the sails were bellying in the wind.

Frustrated in his revenge upon the Jew, Kinlay now turned upon me his indignation. He accused me of willingly allowing him to sell the ruby below its value. I simply told him that it was no business of mine, and quietly asked him where he had got the gem.

“But I needna ask you that,” I added, “for I well ken where you got it.”

“Where did I get it?” he inquired, his face turning as red as the ruby itself.

“You got it from the old viking’s helmet,” I replied, “for I saw you put the thing in your pocket, though you did deny that you had it that day over at Skaill. But ye’ll see what Mr. Drever will say to your selling what didna rightly belong to you.”

“I carena that for Mr. Drever,” he said, snapping his fingers. “Nor for you neither, ye young sneak.”

At this he turned from me without further words. But I think there was more malice against me in his heart than he allowed to appear on the surface. This incident, and my advantage over him, had at least the effect of increasing the enmity between us.

Chapter XX. The Opposition Boat.

Page 66

The little haven of Stromness was ever a quiet place, but never did it seem so quiet as during the calm which succeeded the storm of the past week, especially as that calm came on a Sunday, that quietest of all days in the North. Even the twittering of the sparrows on the quaint housetops seemed less noisy than usual, and the women who stood in groups in the narrow street, with their clean mutch caps, their crimson hubbie jackets and coarse blue gowns, suppressed their voices almost into whispers as they talked of the growing quarrel between my father and his new rival, Carver Kinlay. The solemn stillness of the June Sabbath was everywhere apparent. The healthy scent of the peat smoke, mingled with a certain fishy odour, permeated the little town, while the cool, fresh smell of the seaweed, and the sweet perfume of the Dutch clover, came from the shores of the bay. The few men who were in port lounged about in sight of the sea, looking lazily outward at the anchored ships.

On the little jetty at the Anchor Close my father sat on an upturned herring creel, smoking his pipe, and watching a flock of sea mews floating gracefully on the green water. Occasionally these birds would rise in the sunny air with long outstretched wings, and give utterance to cries not unlike the mewing of kittens. Some wind-bound vessels lay at anchor in their own reflections, keel to keel, with gay colours streaming from their mastheads. I had never before seen the bay looking so still and beautiful. But from the outer shores of the Ness came the prolonged murmur of the Atlantic waves, falling upon the ear like an everlasting sigh.

I was seated in the stern of the Curlew, as the boat lay against the pier upon which my father sat smoking. Looking over her side down into the clear water, I could see the small fish dart about like flashes of silver light in the emerald depths, where the many-coloured seaweeds swayed softly to and fro with the motion of the tide; while far below, on their sandy bed, the bright shells, the sea urchins, and the green mossy stones gleamed like brilliant gems. And the low swish of the tide against the stone pier made a pleasant, sleepy sound.

Sometimes, as I sat there dreamily, my eyes would wander across the smooth blue water to the distant hills, following the steady, swooping flight of an eagle. Nearer at hand, the flight of a flock of sea larks along the links of the shore would attract my attention, while once I heard the splash of a solan goose diving in the bay, and saw the spray rise in a glittering column high above the water.

Suddenly my dreamy meditations were interrupted. Hurried footsteps sounded in the silent street, and looking up the passage of the Anchor Close I saw a company of men quickly passing. Among them were Carver Kinlay and his son Tom.

I told my father who they were, at which he expressed much wonder, and tried to assign a cause for their hurrying. But soon our questioning was fully answered by the unexpected appearance of my sister Jessie.

Page 67

“Father!” said she, very much out of breath, for she had walked very quickly from Lyndardy, where she had been staying during the whole of that past week.

“Well, lass?” said my father, looking round at the girl’s agitated face. “What have you seen that you look so scared?”

“I’ve seen from the cliffs,” gasped Jessie. “I’ve seen the Lydia makin’ for Stromness. She has surely put back, for her masts are away, and her bulwarks are wrecked.”

“The Lydia! What, Captain Gordon’s ship? Ay, lass, but ye’re telling me a strange thing. You’d better gang and tell Mansie to get the men out. There’ll be a race wi’ the new pilot, I’m thinking.”

And he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and came down into the boat to get her ready.

Jessie, however, had no need to go and tell the crew to get ready, for she had hardly turned away when my uncle Mansie and the men hurried down the jetty and sprang into the Curlew.

The day was so fine and bright that my heart yearned for a sail in the boat, and I was about to ask my father if I might go out with him, when he forestalled me by ordering me to be seated among the ropes in the bow.

The quietude of the Sabbath was now changed to bustle and excitement. The oars and rowlocks were put in place, the sail made ready for hoisting, and soon all was trim and ready to start.

My father’s pilot boat, the Curlew, was strongly built and of great breadth of beam. It was of a pattern and rig peculiar to the Orkneys, much after the fashion of a whaling boat, and called a “sixter,” from having a crew of six men. It was propelled by either sail or oars, as either was most convenient, but the Orcadian boatmen never employed the oars when the sail could be used.

The boat’s crew was a picked one, and seldom could six finer men be seen together. The skipper, my father, was himself a picture of manly strength, handsome and agile. His father and grandfather had been pilots; the latter, indeed, had been the chief pilot of Stromness in the year 1780, when Captain Cook’s ships, the Discovery and the Resolution, lay in the harbour on their return from the South Seas.

My father’s shipmates, as he called them, were also fine stalwart men, each of them competent to take the skipper’s place, but each willing to sacrifice anything for Sandy Ericson. My uncle Mansie was mate, and sat forward in the bow. The stroke oar was usually taken by Tom Hercus, a man of singular daring. Willie Slater was an old whaler, who could stand any hardships with perfect indifference. Then there was Jock Eunson, a good-humoured Orphir man, who, on many a dark night, had kept his mates merry as

they beat about in the outer sea in search of ships; and Ringan Storlsen, of Finstown, who had been at school with my father, and with whom he had had many an adventure.

“Hurry along, my lads; there’s Kinlay started,” said my father, seating himself in the stern sheets.

Page 68

With that the ropes were cast off and the sail hoisted. Then the boat was pushed off from the pier, and as she caught the light breeze she glided slowly into the bay among the sailing shadows of the summer clouds.

When we were out in the deep water I looked along the line of the shore for the opposition boat; but I found she was already further out than ourselves, looking like a pleasure yacht, with her newly painted hull and clean white canvas—a contrast to the dingy brown sail and the scratched and worn hull of the Curlew.

My uncle Mansie, who sat quite near to me, told me that the new boat was called the St. Magnus—after the patron saint of Orkney—and I noticed that he spoke very lightly of her as a sailer. I asked him if he did not think she would beat us in this race; but he assured me there was no fear of it, for that though Kinlay had the start of us, yet he had not the advantage of a well trained and disciplined crew, and his ropes were too new to run free.

There was little chance of a race, however, in the calm bay, and my uncle, not wishing Kinlay to see that we were taking any interest in his movements, drew my attention away from the St. Magnus by asking me some questions about my viking's stone. He said that, now I had made a start in coming out in the boat, I might stand a better chance of proving the virtue of my talisman, more especially if I should be bold enough to come out on some dark, stormy night, when there would be some danger. Then some of the other men, hearing us, asked me to show them the magic stone, and it went round the whole company for inspection.

By the time they had all had a good look at it, and I had hung it round my neck again, we had got full into the breeze of the outer bay. My father, who held the tiller, managed to get to the weather side of the St. Magnus, and when we reached the Ness point, where a number of people had already gathered from the town to watch the expected race, the two boats were bow to bow.

Beyond the point we brought up at the same moment as the St. Magnus, and steered westward on the starboard tack, with a southwesterly breeze swelling our sails. The Curlew now bent over to leeward, our bow plunging into the waves, dashing them aside and sending the foam surging in a long track far astern. With a strong outrunning current in our favour we sped through the channel between Stromness and Graemsay, the St. Magnus being now to windward of us and several lengths behind.

Tom Kinlay was sitting on the weather gunwale near his father, who was steering. It was easy to see that they were all suppressing their excitement in the race; yet their craft was brought bravely along in our track, and there was still a chance of their reaching the ship before us. The result depended upon good steering, and upon the readiness of each crew to lower sail at the right moment.

Page 69

From watching the St. Magnus I turned my attention to the approaching barque, which, by her green-painted hull, I soon enough recognized as the Lydia. She was struggling slowly onward against the rapids of Hoy Sound, with the wind on her starboard quarter, and as we got nearer her I could see the extent of the damage she had sustained in the late storm. She had lost her fore and main topgallant masts, and her port bulwarks were stove in. The quarter boat was missing and her jolly boat was gone.

She came along at the rate of about two knots, under close-reefed topsails, storm trysails, and spanker. We could hear Captain Gordon's voice directing the working of the ship, and once I saw him on the quarterdeck, leaning over the rail to watch us. His head was bandaged as if from some accident. On the forecastle deck the mate and some men stood watching our approach, with ropes ready to throw out to us.

I became inwardly excited when the moment came that was to determine everything; and even my father was a little pale as he steered us steadily towards the lee side of the Lydia. We came within a hundred yards of her when he cried out, "Lower away!" and I heard the same order given on the St. Magnus.

Down came our sail in quick obedience, and at the same time oars were put out to prevent the strong stream and the way we had on us from sweeping us past the vessel.

The Lydia was now in a most dangerous part of the channel, where the rapid tide was met by the equally rapid stream of Burra Sound from the south side of Graemsay island. They formed a wide, swift current of broken water, which swirled and eddied about with a rough irregular motion. As our boat passed the bowsprit of the Lydia, my father turned her head towards the ship, and my uncle Mansie was alert and ready to catch the coil of rope that was at that moment thrown down to us from the barque's forecastle.

I think the rope was awkwardly thrown, or the man throwing it had miscalculated the rate at which we were driving past. Howbeit, the rope fell across our stern, beyond Mansie's reach. Leaving the tiller my father seized it with the intention of passing it forward to my uncle, holding the coil in one hand and the line in the other. As he rose from his seat, however, the rope was by some stupid mistake suddenly made secure on board the ship instead of being paid out, and my father was instantly jerked into the sea.

"Let go the rope!" Tom Hercus shouted to my father.

But the seaman in charge of the line on the ship's deck, taking the order as meant for himself, cast off the rope, the end of which dropped overboard before the error was discovered. Thus the rope my father held was fastened neither to the ship nor to the boat. He was a powerful swimmer, but he soon became entangled in the coil of rope in such a manner that the more he struggled to free himself the worse became the tangle,

so that his very efforts to swim made his position more difficult than if he had remained still.

Page 70

This could all be seen from the Lydia, and ropes and life buoys, which he failed to catch, were thrown to him as he rose for a moment to the surface and finally disappeared.

Now this unhappy incident threw us all into such confusion and consternation aboard the Curlew, dividing our men's attention between attempting to reach the drowning skipper and endeavouring to secure another rope thrown from the ship, that all control of the boat was lost. The Curlew was capsized by the treacherous current, and we were all engulfed without a moment's warning.

An awful exclamation of "Oh, God!" was the last thing I heard as I sank below the waves, and then the water rushed into my open mouth, and I felt my cap torn from my head. Down, down I sank, struggling, yet with my eyes open, while the water became dark around me and I was drawn along by the whirling undercurrent.

I raised my hands above my head and tried to regain the surface and get breath; but it was many moments before my eyes were gladdened at seeing the water grow greener and brighter. Then I could see the sunlight above me glancing and dancing in the surrounding water; then at last I felt that my hands had reached the surface, my head rose up into the open air, where I gasped and got breath. I swam about for a little, thinking only of keeping myself above water, but when I got my full breath again and found that I could keep afloat without great effort, I looked around me and remembered what had happened.

There was the ship, the Lydia, lying athwart the channel, ten fathoms or so away from me, and I could see the St. Magnus beating down towards me. I looked for my father and my uncle Mansie and the other men, but could see none of them anywhere. Probably my own lightness, and the fact that I was not, like them, encumbered with heavy sea boots, had aided me in coming up to the surface before them. But I could not have helped them, even had they stood in need of such help as mine, and I knew that they were all good swimmers, so I turned round on my breast with the current and continued swimming towards the Curlew, which now floated, bottom up, to the seaward side of me.

The St. Magnus very soon came within hail, drifting with the rapid stream. The men were at the oars, though they only used them to steady the boat and hold her back.

Just as they were abreast of me the man at the bow cried out, "There's old Slater! Port your helm!" and the boat's head was turned away from my direction, for they had not seen me.

As she slewed round, however, Tom Kinlay. who sat at the stern, caught sight of me swimming close under the boat's side. So near to him was I, indeed, that by stretching out his arm he might have caught my upraised hand. Our eyes met, and a smile of

triumph played about his lips. The boat was rowed away from me without his uttering a word or once attempting to save me.

I kept steadily on my way, swimming towards the Curlew, nor did I once look round again for the St. Magnus.

Page 71

The upturned boat was floating outward with the stream, and it took me a very long time and a strong swim, that tired my arms more than I can say, before I could be sure that I was shortening the distance that separated me from this one refuge. But at last the boat got into a whirling eddy that turned her round and round, and so kept her back until I was within a fathom of her. Yet even this short distance seemed more than I could now swim, for, with my clothes on and my jacket buttoned over me, my arms were not free enough to let me swim with any ease, and I began to despair and to flounder about in such eagerness to reach the boat, that I sank twice under the waves and got my mouth filled with the briny water.

In my growing fear, however, I thought of the viking's stone that hung under my waistcoat. Surely now was a time to test its power, I thought, and the thought gave me courage. Renewing my efforts, I at length reached the boat and grasped the rudder. But the rudder came away in my hand, having been displaced in the capsizing of the boat. This, however, aided me in keeping afloat till I was enabled to reach the boat again and cling to the keel.

Now was I in comparative safety, for I did not doubt that Carver Kinlay would see me and bear down to rescue me.

When, after many failures, I managed to climb up the side of the boat and get astride of her keel, I began to feel sick with the sea water I had swallowed and weak after my long swim. Then my head grew dizzy, a mist came over my eyes, and I fainted away.

Chapter XXI. The Rescue.

When I returned to consciousness the warm sunlight was slanting down upon me. I opened my eyes and saw the snowy clouds floating in the blue sky. I thought I had but fallen asleep in the stern of the Curlew as she lay against the jetty on that Sabbath afternoon.

I felt the boat rising and falling gently on the tide. All was quiet, except for the swishing of the water against the planks of the boat.

I tried to speak:

"Father," I said, thinking he was there on the jetty smoking.

Then I felt a hand laid gently on my breast and a shadow crossed between me and the sun.

"He is waking!" said a voice that sounded as sweet as the song of the skylark to my ears: "Halcro! Halcro!"

A soft hand raised my head, and then I saw, looking down into my eyes, a beautiful face, framed in a mass of waving hair that the sunlight had turned into brightest gold. It was the face of Thora Kinlay.

How Thora came to be there, leaning over me, I could not tell. My mind was in a strange confusion, and I remembered nothing of what I had gone through. But soon I heard another voice speaking to me. It was the voice of my sister Jessie.

“Halcro! Halcro!” it murmured.

“Where am I?” I asked; for I could not understand how I came to be lying in the bottom of a little sailing boat with my limbs all aching and trembling.

Page 72

And Jessie and Thora were at my side—Jessie steering, and Thora holding the rope of the little lug sail. How did it all come about?

Then Jessie, bidding me lie still, told me in a few words how she and Thora had watched the race between the Curlew and the St. Magnus, standing on the high ground of the Ness point. They had seen the accident, and had immediately put out together in a little boat that was lying on the beach. They had rescued me from the upturned Curlew, where I lay in a faint, and were now making for the Lydia.

“Have they saved father?” I asked.

But the girls did not know. They had not seen anyone picked up by the St. Magnus.

“Where is Carver’s boat now?” I inquired; and feeling my strength return to me somewhat, I raised myself up and sat on the seat at the stern beside my sister, while Thora went forward to the mast to be in readiness to lower the sail.

We were now, as I could see, only a few fathoms distant from the Lydia, which was lying athwart the stream, thus breaking the force of the current, and making it possible for us to draw up alongside. The St. Magnus was already there, having, as I afterwards found, given up the search for the unfortunate crew of the Curlew. Carver Kinlay was aboard on the quarterdeck engaged in an altercation with the skipper, who stood at the gangway.

“Heave us a rope, captain!” cried out Jessie; and Thora caught the line that was thrown down, while I helped her to draw our boat to the ship’s side.

My clothes were still very wet in spite of the warm sun; but, with some difficulty, I got up the barque’s side and joined Captain Gordon at the gangway.

“Have any of our men been saved?” I asked. “My father, is he—?”

But I saw by the skipper’s downcast face that the worst had happened. I turned to Kinlay:

“Did you not pick up any of them?” I inquired.

“It was no use,” said he sullenly. “We could save none of them.”

“You might very well have done so if you’d been more prompt,” said Captain Gordon. “I saw two of the poor men above water when you turned to come back.”

“Why did ye not send out a boat yerself, then?” said Kinlay.

“Because I have none, except the lifeboat there. We lost the others in the storm. But it was little use my thinking of launching a heavy lifeboat when you were afloat there at hand.”

“Well, well, it couldn’t be helped,” said Kinlay. “It was their own fault they were capsized, and there’s no use talking. Put your helm to starboard, skipper, and let’s get you into port.”

“Is this man a pilot, Ericson?” asked Captain Gordon, turning to me.

“No,” I said; “I believe he has not yet taken out his license. He started piloting two days since in opposition to my father.”

Kinlay scowled almost savagely at me for saying this. But I knew very well that he was not a fully qualified pilot, whatever he might become, now that my father was drowned. He lost much of his swaggering manner, however, and was very quiet when Captain Gordon ordered him off the ship.

Page 73

“Since that is so, then,” said the captain, “you may leave this ship, and young Ericson will take us into the harbour. The lad may have no more claim to pilot us than yourself, but I doubt not he is quite as capable.”

Kinlay walked across the quarterdeck at this dismissal, but as he put one leg over the gangway to get down to his boat, he said in a hoarse voice, and with a sly leer in his dark eye:

“I say, skipper, if ye’re examined by the authorities, just say you gave every assistance —that ye hove ropes over—d’ye see? It’s a very lamentable thing. But it was their own faults, their own faults.”

“What d’ye mean?” said the captain. “I did heave ropes over, and I need tell no lies about it. I gave more assistance than you did, ye blackguard.”

“Oh, very well, very well! I thought I’d just put you on your guard, d’ye see, in case you’re examined.”

And so saying, Kinlay disappeared over the rail, and was soon sailing away, taking Thora with him.

My sister Jessie had come aboard while Carver and the captain were altercating. She came up to the captain and in great distress asked him if he was sure no more could be done to find our father and the other men; at which he expressed his belief that it was impossible to do anything further. I must add that this was also my own impression, for I well knew that as the poor fellows had been unable to keep afloat until Kinlay came up to them, nothing could now save them from that terrible current.

But already we could see that there were several boats out looking for the men. They could do more than we, for in the meantime the Lydia was herself running into some danger, drifting outward with the current.

I spent no time in expressions of regret or lamentation over the calamity that had befallen the men of the Curlew; but, feeling that it was in some measure my duty to undertake the work my father had set out to perform, I told Captain Gordon the best course to take to cheat the tide, and gave him such advice as only a person acquainted with Hoy Sound could possibly give. Under these directions the barque was guided through the easiest channels into the smooth water inside the Holms, where the anchor was dropped and the vessel secured.

Captain Gordon, who had been very kind to me during all this time, procured me a can of hot coffee to send away my chill. He then threw a warm pea jacket over my trembling shoulders, and came ashore with us in the small boat that Jessie and Thora had taken

the use of. He also accompanied us to our home to break the sad news to our mother —a mission in which he showed a fine tenderness and sympathy of heart.

Chapter XXII. After The Accident.

Page 74

The sad catastrophe in Hoy Sound cast a gloom over the little town of Stromness, where the unfortunate men had been held in great respect. By the fishers and sailors of the island Sandy Ericson had been regarded as a sort of chief. When any ship touched at the port it was his genial face that was first seen, and when they passed on their long voyages to distant lands it was he who gave the last word of farewell. Among the women he had been esteemed as an oracle, to whom they went for comfort in stormy weather when in doubt as to the fate of lovers or husbands at the fishing; and even the young children had learned to know his heavy stride, and to run into the street when he approached, that they might cling to his great, gentle hand and hear his kind, cheery voice.

The accident had been seen by a large number of women who had gathered on the Lookout Hill, where they were wont to assemble in rough weather when watching for the return of the fishing smacks. When the Curlew was seen to capsize a loud shriek rent the air, for all knew that to be cast into that dreadful tideway meant almost certain death. The impulse of my sister Jessie and Thora to put out in a small boat that lay at the water's edge, on the possible chance of saving some of us, was, therefore, looked upon as a mad freak. But when the two girls were seen to rescue me from the upturned boat, they were praised for their promptitude.

My own rescue, however, was much marvelled at. I had been known as a good swimmer; but that was not extraordinary in a place where swimming and cliff climbing were learnt before the alphabet. What was wondered at was that I had managed to keep afloat and swim so far when all the men had perished. When it was whispered about, therefore, that I was in possession of a magic stone which had the power of protecting me from the dangers of the deep, the credulous people readily grasped at the explanation of supernatural assistance, and thenceforth I was distinguished amongst them as one over whom Providence had cast a miraculous garment to protect me, as Earl Ewan was protected in the olden time.

But if by the people of Stromness generally the calamity was lamented over, how much keener was the grief of those who had been bereft of husbands, fathers, brothers! All the men of the Curlew were married and had families, with the exception of my uncle Mansie. But in Mansie's death my mother had to mourn the loss of a brother in addition to the loss of her husband.

In our house in the Anchor Close, where the crew had so often sat in readiness to put out the boat, all was now hushed, and the busy life of my mother and Jessie was suddenly checked and deprived of all hope, their domestic duties robbed of all meaning. My mother wandered about the house in melancholy, or sat before the fire expressing her woe in long-drawn sighs. Very often she walked down the jetty and looked out across the breezy bay, as though she expected to see the Curlew coming in, and then she would return with tears filling her eyes, and take up her knitting to hide her

grief in work, forgetting for the moment that the stockings she was making were for him who would never, never wear them.

Page 75

As for myself, my life seemed empty of ambition, now that the Curlew was sunk and my father and the men had gone. I had learnt to hope that I might be a pilot some day; but where were my prospects now? That I must go out to some work was evident, but what was to be the nature of that work was left to more mature consideration, or to some happy chance or opportunity. In the meantime I was to remain away from school.

There was no lack of sympathy for us on the part of our neighbours for many days after the accident. Mr. Moir, the minister, was among the first who called, bringing much comfort to my poor widowed mother; the schoolmaster also came, with great sorrow on his face, and many a good word he spoke of my father; while Captain Gordon visited us again and again so long as his ship lay in port.

Chapter XXIII. Gray's Inn.

About midway along the crooked, narrow street of Stromness stood the one house of entertainment of the port—Gray's Inn—where the wind-bound sailors and idle fishermen usually regaled themselves and spun yarns. The host, Oliver Gray, who was himself a retired seaman, had sought to attract his customers by hanging out over his front door a sign which was calculated to win the good opinion of all seafaring folk. It was a representation of a clipper in full sail on a raw green sea. Oliver took great pride in this picture, and it was commonly believed that he had had a hand in the painting of it. When it was praised he was profuse in his acknowledgments; but if a critical captain asked him how it was that, though the ship was sailing before the wind, yet her colours were all flying aft, or inquired whether it was grass or cabbages she sailed upon, Oliver was less eager to claim any artistic ability, and hurried the critic into the house lest he should also discover that the shrouds had been omitted by the painter.

Gray's Inn was not an ordinary public house, and beyond the signboard announcement that "Spiritis and aile is retailed here" there was little to indicate its commercial character. The parlour was a large room with a window at each end—one facing the street, the other being so situated that the seamen sitting at the large centre table could look out at their ships riding at anchor across the bay. There was no counter or bar, and the liquor was brought "ben" by Oliver or his sonsie wife.

One Saturday morning I had to go there to see old David Flett about a boat that Captain Gordon wanted to buy from him. I found him at the inn before me, sitting there with a goodly company of Stromness men and skippers, whose ships were, like the Lydia, undergoing repairs or waiting for fair winds.

When I went in he was talking with a skipper whom he was evidently well acquainted with. This was Captain Wemyss of The Duncans, outward bound for Bombay. Wemyss had been lying in the harbour for over a week, and now that fair weather had come, and the wind was veering round to a favourable quarter, he was contemplating weighing

anchor. His vessel was a full-rigged ship, the largest in the bay; and all the other skippers seemed to pay him a degree of respect equal to the size of his ship. They looked upon him with such deference, indeed, that not one of them would think of heaving anchor until he led the way.

Page 76

In the mornings, when they turned out, they never looked at the sky or the direction of the wind; they instinctively turned to The Duncans, and if the Blue Peter was not at her fore peak they made arrangements for spending still another day among the Orkneys.

What in Wemyss tended to call forth a good deal of respect was that he seldom mixed with the other captains, but condescended to take only a single glass with a select few. I noticed that he preferred the company of Bailie Duke, or of Lloyd's agent, and other magnates of the town.

Flett received me with a friendly welcome when I went into the inn, ordering a cup of coffee for me, and bidding me sit beside him until Captain Gordon should join us. He spoke of me to Captain Wemyss, and at that the whole company present fell to talking of the accident in the Sound. They were in the midst of a discussion as to the cause of the disaster when Captain Gordon entered, accompanied by Bailie Duke.

Gordon was somewhat of a stranger to them all, so Captain Wemyss gave the names of the others, including Lloyd's agent, Captain Miller of the Albatross, and Captain Abernethy of the brig Enterprise, the last of whom, I may tell you, was the officer my father had described to Gordon as knowing so little of navigation that he had, after cruising out of sight of land for some months, mistaken the Mainland of Orkney for one of the West Indian Islands.

Bailie Duke, whose happy face wore a constant smile, and whose bright eyes seemed ever to be asking questions, took his seat in the armchair, and passing his snuffbox round the company, very soon took the lead in the conversation. He was the chief magistrate of the town, but he did not assume any undue dignity on that account. Indeed, his long life among the simple fisher folk of Stromness, and his business connection with ships—for the bailie was a shipping agent—had given him a sympathy with all persons connected with the sea which quite overrode his dignity as a magistrate. He could talk of ships as learnedly as any of the captains, and of every vessel that had been in the harbour for the last twenty years he could tell the name and history whenever he saw her again. As for his knowledge of freights, duty, stability, and the ordinary affairs of shipping, he was the one man in Stromness whose word was taken above all others.

When Bailie Duke was comfortably settled in his easy chair, and there was a lull in the noise of conversation, he turned to Captain Gordon and asked him to tell the company how he had come by the hurt in his head, and what sort of a time he had had in the recent storm.

"Well, ye see," said Gordon, taking a glance round his hearers' faces, "it was a most unlucky affair from the first. I was warned before I left Stromness that my masts were too high, and in addition to the fear of losing them I was troubled by my men declaring that the ship was bewitched. We were overrun with mice, d'ye see. Well, I got a cat, a

wild-like animal, from old Grace Drever here. Young Ericson brought the beast aboard, but what became of it I cannot exactly tell, for no man could find it, though we could often hear its wild squealing at night.

Page 77

“From the moment Pilot Ericson left us outside the Sound we encountered misfortune. We reached Cape Wrath after a struggle against contrary winds, and off the Butt of Lewis we lay to for two days. The men swore that the cat down the hold was possessed of some evil demon, and that we would never make any progress on the voyage unless we turned back and took the animal home. Well, we beat about until we sighted St. Kilda, where wet weather came on, and a gale from the west sprang up. We made no headway, and the island lay like an impassable rock on our beam for three days. The sea came rolling on from the west—great snow-topped mountains of waves—and the spray and the cutting sleet were hard to stand against. One night we shipped a heavy sea, which carried away our port bulwarks and stanchions and sent me into the lee scuppers, where I was stunned by a blow on the head. The same sea smashed the jolly boat.

“I was insensible for a couple of days, and when I crept on deck again I found the other boat had been stove in. The fore and main topgallant masts were gone. I was standing on the quarterdeck, when, just at midnight, I was startled by a most unearthly caterwauling, as though all the furies in the infernal regions had broken loose. I looked in the direction it came from, and, behold! there stood the cat like a frightful apparition. He seemed four times his original size, and his eyes were like two gleaming fires. Even now I am not sure if it was the flesh-and-blood Baudrons or his ghost come to explain the mystery of his disappearance, and vent his displeasure at me for having taken him from his comfortable home. As I looked at the goblin cat my head reeled and I fell on the deck.

“Next morning all was calm and bright; but we were disabled, and it was necessary to put back for repairs. You may think what you like, mates, but as sure as we’re here, it was nothing but the cat that brought on the gale and gave me my ill luck; the worst calamity of all being the loss of the pilot and his crew.”

“Ay,” said Bailie Duke, “but the cat had nothing to do with the loss of the pilots. Nobody can be blamed for that but Carver Kinlay.”

“No,” added Oliver Gray, “a greater rascal than Carver never set foot in Orkney, nor a braver man than Ericson.”

“Well,” said Captain Wemyss, “this Kinlay may do as he likes, but I for one will have no business with him.”

“Nor I neither,” said Captains Johnson and Miller at once.

“He’s no proper pilot,” said Gray, “and has no right to run a boat.”

“I’m afraid, gentlemen,” put in Lloyd’s agent with a tone of authority, “you’re a wee bit too late in bringing forward your objections, for I’m informed that Kinlay has already taken out all necessary papers, and is now a duly certified pilot.”

“What!” exclaimed Abernethy. “I’d sooner employ young Ericson here than Kinlay; I’m sure the lad kens more about the coast.”

Page 78

“I’d trust that lad to take my ship through any channel in Orkney,” added Captain Gordon. “He brought us through on Sunday, and I never saw a pilot—except his father—handle a ship with greater skill.”

Mr. Gordon was speaking thus in my praise, when who should walk into the inn but Carver Kinlay himself.

Carver had on a new suit of clothes of blue cloth, and his high boots, reaching above the knees, were newly polished with oil. At his waist he wore a leather belt from which was suspended a long sheath knife. He walked in with a jaunty air of self importance, but with a slightly unsteady gait, which showed how he had been celebrating his appointment. He approached Captain Wemyss, and addressed him.

“Ye’ll be weighing anchor on Monday morning, captain, I suppose? What time shall I come aboard?”

“I never asked you to come aboard my ship, my man,” said Captain Wemyss. “What is it you want?”

“Why, d’ye not know I’m the pilot?”

Captain Abernethy interrupted him, and drew him round by the shoulder to face the company, saying:

“You’d not be the pilot if you hadna gotten the post by your crafty, sneaking, murderous villainy, Carver Kinlay. What business had you putting out to the Lydia on Sunday?”

“What business is that of yours?” was the response.

“Every one has business in a case like this,” said Abernethy, “and I’ll wager a thousand pounds if you hadn’t gone out the accident wouldn’t have happened. It was nothing else than the fear that you’d get aboard before them that made the men think of boarding the barque in such a hurry, and so far out. I knew the men well, poor fellows, and they were all decent men and good pilots, every one of them.”

While Abernethy was saying this, Kinlay was venting a torrent of oaths and words in disparagement of my father and his men.

“You villain! you rascal!” continued the skipper, “if you say another word against Sandy Ericson I’ll pitch you out at the window!”

At the same time Bailie Duke stepped forward and said:

“Now just hold your filthy tongue, Kinlay. You’ve been trying for years to do what you’ve done now. You’ve gotten your wish; what more do you want?”

The bailie succeeded in quieting him, and Carver slunk off to a corner of the room. The company, after this interruption, dispersed, leaving only Captain Gordon, Kinlay, Captain Miller, and myself.

No further words had been exchanged before a stalwart fisherman entered. I immediately recognized Jack Paterson. Jack was, as I have before said, a powerful man. He came in with a firm resolution in his step, and looked around the room. We watched him closely, for there was something strange in his look.

On seeing Kinlay he walked straight up to him, laid a big hand on his shoulder—the hand that wanted a finger—and, without a word, dragged him to the middle of the room. Kinlay turned quickly round, and putting his hand on his sheath knife drew the weapon. Without hesitation Paterson stepped forward and dealt a tremendous blow with his fist on Carver's nose.

Page 79

“Ye ken what that’s for—I needna tell ye,” said Paterson; and Kinlay reeled over and fell upon the floor, while Jack Paterson walked quietly into the street.

The explanation of this swift chastisement was this. There had that morning been a small indignation meeting of Stromness fishermen. They were all determined that Kinlay should see they had no sympathy with him, and the purpose of the meeting was to determine what form of vengeance they should employ.

Their method was simply that which Jack Paterson had carried out, in boldly confronting Kinlay with closed fists; and when Jack’s fellow fishermen heard what he had done their revenge was satisfied, and they returned to their daily duties with accustomed quietude, only agreeing in this, that thereafter Carver Kinlay was to be recognized as the common enemy of all true Orkney men; that he was not to be molested, but that none was to give him help in any way soever.

Chapter XXIV. Carver Kinlay’s Success.

The Lydia was laid up for about a fortnight. A slight delay in completing her repairs was occasioned by the want of timber—a scarce commodity in Orkney, where there are no trees—but suitable material was procured from a homeward-bound ship. Captain Gordon never, in my hearing, referred directly to my sister Jessie’s caution about the barque’s masts; but I noticed that the new masts were made shorter and stouter than those that had suffered in the storm. There was also some difficulty in procuring new boats for the ship; but Captain Flett at last found a jolly boat, and one morning early I took it out to the Lydia.

When I went below I found Mr. Gordon sitting over his breakfast with Marshall, his first mate. I remained talking with them for some time, when we were interrupted by one of the ship’s boys, who came down with a note to the skipper.

Captain Gordon read it with some show of consternation.

“What can be the meaning of that, Marshall?” he asked, handing the piece of paper across the table to the mate.

“Why, captain, I suppose you’ve been getting into some scrape ashore,” said Marshall.

“Scrape! I’ve been in no scrape,” said Gordon, “unless, indeed, it be the accident last Sunday week.”

And he handed the note to me, asking if I could throw any light upon it.

The note was from Bailie Duke, and it ran as follows:

“Be in readiness. An officer from Kirkwall will be on board of you in a little with a summons.—Yours, &c., H. Duke.”

I had hardly finished reading it when a noise as of someone boarding was heard on deck, and presently Captain Miller of the Albatross came rushing down the cabin stairs. He was evidently newly out of his bunk for his face was unwashed, his hair uncombed, and his large overcoat was roughly thrown over his sleeping clothes.

“What the mischief does this mean?” he exclaimed throwing a note on the table the facsimile of that which was puzzling Captain Gordon.

Page 80

The two skippers were forming surmises, and were at last consoling themselves that it was some playful trick of the bailie's, when Marshall whispered through the skylight that a boat with seven men in it was pulling towards the ship.

"Show them down if they come aboard, then," ordered Gordon.

And Captain Miller rushed into the pantry to hide, dreading something serious; for he had let it out to us that he had been "on the spree" the night before, and was not the quietest of the company of which he had been a member. He locked the pantry door as he heard footsteps on the companion ladder.

Two men entered the cabin. One was a big seafaring man with a weatherbeaten face. The very appearance of his companion betrayed the fact that he was the "officer from Kirkwall."

"Beautiful morning this!" observed the big man, addressing Captain Gordon. Then after a pause he added: "We have just come, captain, to ask the favour of your company with us to Kirkwall. The officer here has a summons for you, I believe, and also one for Captain Miller of the Albatross, who is not at present on his ship."

Here a deep groan came from the direction of the pantry.

"A summons!" echoed Gordon. "What—why—what d'ye mean? What have I been doing?"

"Oh! my dear sir," returned the officer from Kirkwall, "you do not seem to understand the nature of the thing. You have done nothing at all, my dear sir. We only want you to come to Kirkwall as a witness in the case of assault—'Kinlay versus Paterson'—to be tried today at Kirkwall."

"Oh! then, if that's all, I'm here," said Captain Miller, coming in from the pantry and adjusting his coat.

"That is," said the man with the weatherbeaten face, supplementing the officer's explanation—"that is the case of the broken nose, captain. Now, we—that is, Mr. Watt and myself—have nothing to do with it, really and truly; but the matter is just this, we are anxious to clear off Jack Paterson, who is in our boat alongside with us—"

Here the speaker was interrupted by the appearance of Captain Abernethy.

"Come on, Gordon, old boy!" said he; "come along. I'm going to pay all expenses, every penny of them. I'm willing to sport a thousand pounds to clear Jack Paterson. Only to think of that scurvy rascal Kinlay bringing up Jack, and him with a wife and a whole crew of young children. Shall we allow it? No; not if I can help it. Come along!"

Abernethy was generous, certainly. He had lately, as I heard, fallen heir to the sum of five hundred pounds sterling, and his willingness to “sport” his thousands on every important occasion was one of his chief characteristics at this period.

“But how far is this place Kirkwall?” asked Captain Gordon. “How long will it take us to get there?”

“How far! Oh! only a matter of a few hours’ sail,” said Abernethy. “I’ve got my pinnace out, and we’ll have a fine jaunt. Come along!”

Page 81

“No. I’ve to see old Flett this morning to pay him some money. Besides, we’re too many for the pinnace. Can we not go by road?”

And Captain Gordon looked to me for an answer.

“You can get Oliver Gray’s pony and gig,” I replied. “It’s about fourteen miles by road.”

“Will you come with me, then, Halcro?” he asked.

“Certainly; I’ll be very glad. I know the way well.”

The two other skippers, with Mr. Watt and the rest, then made arrangements for their boating party, intending to sail round to Scapa, and thence walk across the little peninsula to Kirkwall.

When Mr. Gordon had brushed himself up a bit, we went ashore together and found out Davie Flett, whose business occupied very little of the captain’s time, and soon we were at the door of Oliver Gray’s inn watching his Shetland pony being harnessed into the gig.

“Now, Halcro, are you going to drive? Up you get,” said Mr. Gordon.

“Surely you dinna expect me to drive, Captain Gordon!” I exclaimed. “Why, I never held a pair of reins in my life!”

“All right, my lad! get over to larboard there, and I’ll see what we can do. You can be pilot and give your orders, and I’ll take the helm.

“Come along, Sheltie; off we go!”

The weather was very fine, the roads in good condition, and the pony fresh, so that we looked for a very pleasant drive to the capital. We drove along the north road by Hamla Voe and past the green cornfields of Cairston, and then over the hill until the great loch of Stenness stretched before us, reflecting on its surface the dappled, woolly clouds.

When we reached the Bridge of Waithe and turned westward, I asked my companion to slacken pace, for I had seen on the white road in advance of us two figures that were familiar to me.

“Who are they, Halcro?” Mr. Gordon inquired; “two of your school friends, eh?”

“Yes,” I replied. “The lassie walking on the grass with the bare feet and carrying a green bag is Hilda Paterson—Jack Paterson’s daughter.”

“Ay! Jack Paterson’s girl, eh? Well, and the other one with the pretty hair, walking along here like a stately young princess, who is she?”

We were already close to the two girls, however, and I hesitated to reply. He drew the reins, and I saw him regarding the elder girl with great interest.

She raised her blue eyes as we stopped—eyes as blue and clear as the sky itself. Her fair hair hung in waves about her shoulders, and as her rosy lips were parted to say, “Good morning, Halcro!” they revealed a row of white and regular teeth.

“Good morning, Thora!” I said in reply to the greeting she had given.

“I hope your foot is mending,” said she very gently.

“Yes,” said I; and Captain Gordon turned to me as though he wondered at my sudden shyness.

Thora looked down at a daisy growing at her feet in the green turf, seeming to seek inspiration from its golden heart. Then she raised her eyes to me again and said softly—oh, so softly:

Page 82

“I’m real glad, Halcro, that ye werena drowned when the Curlew was wrecked.”

I was about to thank her for the part she had taken in my rescue when Captain Gordon interrupted. Said he:

“If that sinner, Carver Kinlay, had had his own way Halcro would have been drowned like the rest.”

Thora’s cheeks grew crimson.

“It is my father you speak of, sir,” she said very bravely; “and I hope what ye say isna true.”

“Your father! Carver Kinlay your father!” exclaimed the skipper incredulously. “Really, I beg your pardon, my girl.”

But already there was a tear in Thora’s eye, and she turned to join Hilda Paterson, who had gone on in advance. And the two girls walked onward to school.

“Well!” ejaculated the captain as he whipped up pony, “well, I should never have believed it!”

“Believed what, Mr. Gordon?” I asked.

“Why, that such a sweet young girl as that was the daughter of that villainous Carver Kinlay.”

“Ay! Thora’s a bonnie lassie,” I observed, with more feeling than I meant the words to convey; “and she’s as good as bonnie.”

“My lad, thank Heaven that your lucky stone and your splendid swimming saved you from that dreadful Sound of Hoy.”

“I would rather they had saved my father, Mr. Gordon.”

“I’ve no doubt you would, Halcro; but I was thinking of something else. I was thinking that when you grow older, and when little Thora—as you name her—is a woman—”

“Tuts! Mr. Gordon,” said I, guessing what he would be at. “The Kinlays and the Ericsons will never be friends.”

Thereafter Captain Gordon became very quiet and thoughtful, and when again he spoke it was about my own sister Jessie. He asked me many a question concerning her; and if I turned from the subject to point out some object in the scenery that I thought would interest him, he was sure to lead me back in some way to talk of Jessie.

We had now passed by the standing stones of Stenness, which my companion showed but little interest in, saying they were nothing compared with the Druid circle of Stonehenge, in England; and our way then lay along a straight uninteresting road past Finstown, and by the southern shores of the Bay of Firth, where the green holms of Damsay and Grimbister lay like floating gardens on the calm water. Soon the great red cathedral of St. Magnus loomed in sight above the antique houses of Kirkwall; and after our drive of fourteen miles we entered the old town and pulled up at the courthouse, where we met Abernethy and Miller and the rest who had been of the boating party.

I took the pony and gig to the Falcon Inn, and left them there until the trial should be over. I was alone the rest of the morning, for such an important trial as that of “Kinlay versus Paterson” must be conducted in private, and only those who appeared as witnesses or in other capacities connected with the case were permitted to be present.

Page 83

But the time was not spent wearily, for I knew the town of Kirkwall very well, and there were many folks anxious to hear from me the full particulars of the fatality in Hoy Sound. Amongst these was old Colin Lothian, whose wanderings had brought him to Kirkwall. The old man sat with me on a stone seat in the shadow of the cathedral, and talked long of the accident and of my own blighted prospects, and at length of the trial that was now going on in the courthouse.

I mentioned Thora, and said we had met her on the road in company with Hilda Paterson. Colin was fond of Thora, and talked of her with affection, notwithstanding his hatred of her father.

“Ay, there again, there again, you see,” said he. “What cares the lass though her father brings up Jack Paterson? It doesna make a bawbee’s difference in Thora’s liking for Jack’s lass. Ah there’s good in Thora. She’s a right good girl, my lad, and I warrant she would do anything for them that are good wi’ her.”

As we sat there Captain Gordon joined us sooner than I expected, and I asked him how they had settled the case.

“Oh!” said he, “the trial hasn’t begun yet; the humbug of a sheriff clerk has sent us away till three o’clock.”

“What like a man is the sheriff’s clerk, sir?” asked Lothian.

“I can’t tell you that, my man, for we never saw him,” replied the skipper. “He has a clerk, who has also a clerk, and this last one is the only one we saw. Why, the Governor of Jamaica has not so many functionaries.”

Until three o’clock Captain Gordon went about the town with me—to the cathedral, where he examined the old Norman arches, the dim old epitaphs, and other relics of antiquity contained within these ancient temple walls. There were many other sights of curious interest to the captain about Kirkwall; for here were the decayed palaces of earls, the halls of old sea kings, and thick-walled mansions of the lordly times—many of them degraded into hostelries and shops, but all of them showing something of the glories of old Orcadia. Thus we passed the time until three o’clock.

In the evening, when I joined the Stromness party, I found Captain Abernethy exclaiming in indignant terms against the result of the trial.

“I knew how it would go,” he said; “but still I wanted just to show them what was what, ye see. Of course, it was as well they went through all the due forms. But only to think of Kinlay getting off so cleanly! I don’t mind paying the fine, Jack—it has got you off going to jail—but, hang it, I don’t like paying Kinlay’s expenses.”

Kinlay had gained the case. Jack Paterson was fined fifteen shillings and costs, or a fortnight in Kirkwall jail. Abernethy had paid the fine on the spot. Carver, therefore, was throughout successful.

Not only had he gained in the assault case, but in the matter of the piloting he was equally fortunate. He was permitted to carry on his business in the St. Magnus, and notices were posted up forthwith on the quays at Stromness to inform the inhabitants that Carver Kinlay of Crua Breck, in the parish of Sandwick, was a duly certified pilot of Pomona.

Page 84

Chapter XXV. A Family Removal.

I was one evening walking over the heathery braes of Lyndardy, in the direction of Stromness, with my sister Jessie. The soft breeze from across the sea played with her brown hair, which was bound by the silken snood usually worn by the Orkney girls. A scarlet bootie shawl covered her shoulders. In her hand she carried a basket filled with kitchen vegetables from the farm.

As we walked our attention was directed to a number of fishing boats putting out to sea, and to the slow and mournful song of the fishermen as they set out, with the creaking of their long oars keeping time to the music of their voices. Then the red mainsails were hoisted to catch the light breeze blowing over from the region of the setting sun, and we stood and watched the boats.

But presently, as I looked further down the hillside where we were, I saw the figure of a man leaning upon a low stone wall. He was looking across to the wild headland of Hoy, where the red beetling cliffs reflected the sunlight.

“Jessie,” I said, “is that Captain Gordon standing down there?”

Jessie turned her eyes in the direction I pointed, and her cheeks were flushed with the red light that fell upon them.

“Oh, Halcro!” she exclaimed, “I’ve forgotten to bring the butter. We must go back to the farm.”

“Never mind, Jessie; I’ll run back for it,” I said, though I would have been glad to see the captain again.

She, however, made no objection, but let me go back to Lyndardy, while she continued her way towards Stromness.

I had been gone something like a half hour, and as I was returning, walking briskly over the heathery braes and skipping across the rippling burns, down the hillside in front of me I saw Jessie standing with Captain Gordon, and his arm was round her waist. I stopped suddenly, wondering if I should proceed further and interrupt them. And now I understood how it was that Jessie had forgotten the butter, and how she had so calmly agreed to my going back to the farm. I seemed also to understand how it was that Captain Gordon had spoken so much about my sister during our drive to Kirkwall. And with these explanations in my mind I took my way homeward by a roundabout path along the cliffs, and so passed unobserved, reaching Stromness just in time to see Jessie and the captain parting at the end of the town.

On the following day the Lydia set sail. It pained us to see the vessel taken out of port by Carver Kinlay; but when she had rounded the Ness, Jessie and I went up to the head of the cliffs and watched the white sails over the sea, until they became a mere speck on the far horizon. Then, as we were coming back, and I remarked the tears in Jessie's eyes, I learned what I had already partly guessed—that Captain Gordon had asked my sister to be his wife.

Page 85

Hard was the struggle that we had at home, after the first weeks of mourning and grief that followed the loss of my father and uncle. We had now no regular source of income, beyond the few shillings every week that my mother and sister earned by the straw-plaiting industry. This was work that was common in Orkney at that time; but the English hat manufacturers, for whom the straw was plaited, were not always liberal in their payments, nor prompt; and it was only by very hard work that these few shillings could be earned.

My father had been thrifty, and had saved some little money; but when we came to calculate the full measure of our resources, we discovered that several alterations would have to be made in our mode of living. Not the least important of these changes was the necessity of an early removal to Lyndardy.

Lyndardy farm had been leased conjointly by my father and my uncle Mansie; and when there was no occasion for them to be out in the boat, the two men were in the habit of working together in the fields, as most of our neighbours worked. It was from Lyndardy that we were supplied with all our oatmeal, our eggs, cheese, butter, and vegetables. Fresh fish we could always procure in abundance from the sea and the lochs, and I was able sometimes to add to the general stock of provisions by the aid of my gun. The feathers and oil from the wild sea fowl I shot were sold or bartered for other commodities; and the wool of the few sheep we kept, and the flax we grew, were helpful in supplying us with clothing and other necessaries.

It was not long after my father had “gone before” that we removed from the old house in the Anchor Close.

Much of our familiar furniture was sold. My boat, too, was disposed of. Many a heart pang it cost us to leave the home at the waterside, but we all took kindly to the new life at the farm and its various duties. Jessie soon became skilled in the work of attending to the cows; and as for myself, I readily learned how to mend a gate, to dig potatoes, to look after the sheep, and even to follow the plough. Thus I busied myself until, in after-time, I was able to take to the sea.

When the warm weather came round, the boys and girls of Andrew Drever’s school were dismissed for their holidays. Sometimes, when I saw some of them passing along the cliffs with their climbing ropes over their arms, I confess I felt some twinge of regret that I was no longer a schoolboy, and that my duties on the farm no longer permitted me to join in the pleasures of a bird-catching expedition. My fowling piece was now hung up in the barn, and few were my opportunities of taking it down. What sport it would have afforded me had I been still a schoolboy!

On a certain fine morning, soon after the holidays commenced, I was very busily employed at the work of helping in our sheep shearing—not that I myself ventured to handle the shears; my part in the business was simply to carry the wool into the loft, and

to assist in bringing out the sheep from the pens as the shearers required them. My mother, who had been born and brought up on Lyndardy farm, was, however, an expert hand at sheep-shearing, and I believe there was no other woman in the whole parish of Stromness who could do the work with such speed and neatness.

Page 86

I was admiring the skill with which she stripped a sheep of its fleece, and standing near her at the same time, with a black-faced ewe between my knees, ready to pass the animal to her when she was ready for it. Letting the shorn ewe escape, she stood up and looked over the moorland in the direction of Stromness.

“Hullo! here’s some stranger coming up the brae,” she said, shading her eyes with her hand. “Who in the world can it be, Halcro? Surely it’s not the dominie?”

But the dominie it was. He came up to where we were at work, and sat upon a heathery knoll near my mother, with whom he engaged in some ordinary gossip.

“But,” said he, after a while, “it was Halcro himself that I came up to see.”

“Me!” I said. “What can ye want to see me about, Mr. Drever?”

“To tell you that I’m to gang to Edinburgh,” he replied.

“To Edinburgh!” I exclaimed, wondering what his mission could be.

“Ay, Halcro, I’m to be there for a few weeks, partly on pleasure and partly on business, concerning our auld friend Jarl Haffling. The museum folk there are anxious to have the viking’s treasure, and I hae gotten permission to deal wi’ them in the matter. I dinna ken what money they will gie me for the things; but, ye see, whatever it be, Halcro, a third part of it will come to Hercus and Rosson and yersel’, to be divided among ye. Do ye agree to that? Will ye trust me to transact the business for ye?”

“Oh, certainly, sir. But surely it’s ower muckle trouble to put you to?” I said.

“Trouble! Dinna think o’ trouble, lad. Why, these auld coins and things hae been mair pleasure to me than I can tell; for, look ye, all the time I hae had the keeping o’ them, I hae been studying them; and—and, Halcro, I hae even written a little book about Jarl Haffling’s grave, and I shouldna be surprised though that book be printed. Think o’ that, lad! A book written by your ain dominie printed! Nay, nay, Halcro, dinna speak o’ trouble.”

“And what is being done about Tom Kinlay, sir?” I asked.

“Weel, as to that, ye see, the lad has broken the law by appropriating his part o’ the treasure, and selling it. I can do nothing mysel’, beyond stating the nature o’ his offence. The law must tak’ the matter into its own hands. Beyond a doubt it will do so; and ye’ll see, Halcro, that it was far better for you and the other two lads to put the viking’s treasure into my hands, instead o’ makin’ fools o’ yersels as Tom Kinlay has done.”

“I am sure, sir, I am perfectly satisfied,” I said. “And now, Mr. Drever, I suppose you will wish me to give up my magic stone? Must it go to Edinburgh with the rest?”

“The talisman? Weel, I hadna thought that. Ye see, it isna worth muckle. No, I think ye needna send it now. But keep it wi’ care, dinna lose it, just in case it is wanted. Of course I hae written about it in the book, and it may be claimed; but keep it for the present, Halcro.”

Page 87

The schoolmaster left me to continue my work, and three days afterwards I heard that he had started for Edinburgh in a trading sloop that plied between Kirkwall and Leith.

He was absent in Scotland for nearly two months, and when he returned I received a message from him asking me to bring Willie Hercus and Robbie Rosson down to the schoolhouse on a particular evening. He welcomed us with much affection, and during tea he related to us many of his experiences in Edinburgh.

But his chief reason for having us with him on that evening was, as he said, to give us an account of his stewardship in regard to the viking's treasure. He had had several interviews with the authorities of the Antiquarian Museum, with whom he had finally left the curiosities, receiving in return a due share of money to be delivered in equal portions to the three of us.

I believe that the Jarl Haffling's treasures may be seen to this day in the Antiquarian Museum of Edinburgh; but I have seen only the catalogue, in which the curiosities are enumerated and described as having been found by some boys playing on the shore of Skaill Bay, Orkney. Be that as it may, the money brought back by Mr. Drever—which was greatly in excess of our expectations, and allowed to each of us a share much larger than Tom Kinlay had received from old Isaac—came as a great help not only to my mother, but also to the widow of Tom Hercus, to say nothing of Mrs. Rosson, whose rent had fallen so far in arrear that she had been threatened with an eviction from her cottage, and was only saved by this timely assistance.

Chapter XXVI. A Subterranean Adventure.

It was little that I saw of my old school companions now that I had become a farm worker and spent my days in the fields. Sometimes, indeed, when I was tending my nibbling flock on the hillside, or driving them over to the distant pasture land by the margin of the loch of Harray, where the grass grew sweetest, I would chance to see Thora Kinlay on her way from Crua Breck to Stromness, and occasionally she would come to Lyndardy to see my sister Jessie. These were the summer days; but when the harvest season came round, and our crop of oats had to be gathered in, and, later still, our turnips stored away for the winter, I was then always busy with my work, and very seldom had opportunity of speaking with Thora, or of even seeing her from a distance.

And yet I had often a wish to be near her, and to show her what kindness or sympathy a lad can show to a girl whom he believes to have but little happiness in life. For the treatment that Thora received at her home was becoming day by day more severe.

Page 88

With Tom she of course had no pursuits in common; he treated her with harshness, and as much as possible she avoided him. Even Mrs. Kinlay seemed to regard her with very scant affection, and as the girl grew in years her position at the farm became that of a servant rather than of a daughter. As for Carver Kinlay himself, he seldom spoke a gentle word to body or beast, and Thora had no exception from his severity. His continued ill treatment of her was, however, the more difficult to endure, since from simple abuse it often extended to actual brutality. She could never understand why her father and mother were so unkind to her, and to hear a few words of sympathy was always comforting.

One day late in the autumn I was tending our sheep on the banks above the cliffs of Gaulton, lying on the soft green turf with my hands under my chin, looking dreamily across the sea towards the blue outline of hills on the Scotch coast. I had just finished reading the last pages of Robinson Crusoe, and the book had fallen from my hand. Like my sheep, I was languid with the heat of the noonday sun, and the sight of the ships and the whirling seagulls was refreshing to me. The sound of the waves down below on the rocks was soothing.

Presently something dropped lightly on the grass before my eyes. It was a sprig of sweetbrier. I turned lazily and saw Thora standing by my side. Without speaking a word she sat down, and together we looked out upon the blue sea.

We remained silent for several moments without greeting each other. But at last I said:

“I was thinking maybe you’d be coming across to see me, Thora, one o’ these bonnie days, now that we never meet at the school. It was good o’ ye to come.”

She turned to me with a smile, but I saw that her eyes were moistened with tears.

“What has gone wrong, Thora?” I continued. “Has Carver been ill using you again?”

“Yes, he’s aye using me ill,” she said, sobbing and wiping her eyes. “I was in the garden just now, nipping some dead leaves from the briar bush, when he came in at the gate. He never likes to see me among my flowers, and when he found me there he got into a passion, and walked over the beds, and kicked the plants about with his sea boots. Then he ordered me away into the house, and said that if I wanted work to do, I might go and clean out the stable. I told him that was a man’s work, not a lassie’s; and at that he took up a stick, and struck me with it across the back.”

And here she sobbed again.

I did not speak, but I felt my blood run hot in indignation against Carver Kinlay. I would have liked to thrash him.

“If I were a lad like you, Halcro,” she continued, “it’s not long I would bide at Crua Breck. I would run away to sea. But what can a helpless lassie do? Nobody has a good word to say for my father since the Curlew was lost, and—I canna help it—I hae just as great an ill will at him as anybody else has.”

Page 89

“They say that it was all through Carver that my father was drowned,” I said.

“Tell me, Halcro, what was the quarrel between your father and mine? What way did it come about?”

“Well, I canna tell ye the ins and outs o’ it all, but my father had some secret about Carver, and Carver was aye afraid o’ him. You see, Thora, folks say that when a man saves another from the sea, there’s sure to be a quarrel between them. And my father saved Carver Kinlay—not, perhaps, from the sea, but he saved his life.”

“How was that, Halcro?”

“It was when you were a bairn, Thora. A ship was wrecked here on the Gaulton rocks, and all your family were aboard. Your mother and Tom were picked up by the Curlew, but Carver and you werena found for some days after the wreck. My father found you both in a cave, down in the cliff, and if it hadna been for him, I suppose you wouldna be here now, Thora, to say that Carver had beaten you.”

“That’s a strange thing you’re telling me, Halcro. I never heard of it before. And what ship was it that was wrecked?”

“The Undine.”

“The Undine! I’ve seen that name on a box at Crua Breck that father keeps his money in. But tell me all about it. Did Captain Ericson tell you about the wreck?”

“No. I only heard of it a week before he was drowned. It was Colin Lothian and my uncle Mansie that told it me. Auld Colin kens all about it, and more than he told to me.”

“Colin is a good old man, Halcro. When next I see him I will ask him to tell me what it was that he kept from you. Colin would keep nothing from me, I believe.”

“Maybe not. But listen, and I will give you the story as I heard it.”

Thora lay down on the grass, with her hands under her chin, and I proceeded to tell her of the wreck of the Undine.

“Thank you, Halcro!” she said when I finished. “That is all very new to me. I remember nothing of being in that cave. How cold I must have been! But Carver was good to me then. I can almost forgive him for trampling over my flowers.”

Then, after a pause, she asked: “Have you ever been in that cave, Halcro? Where is it?”

“I’ve not been in it,” I said; “but I ken whereabout it is. Come and I will show you.”

And then I took her out to an abutting point of the headland, and indicated the position of the cavern behind a great rock that hid its entrance, a few feet above the high-tide mark.

“Halcro, d’you think we could get down there and see the cave?” she asked. “Where are your climbing ropes?”

“We can manage it, I think, if you’ll try it with me, Thora,” I said.

“Ay will I try it. Do you think I’m afraid?” said she.

Page 90

Now, this adventure that Thora proposed was no small one, for the North Gaulton cliffs are amongst the wildest and most rugged in all Pomona, and they are very steep and dangerous to the climber. Yet Thora was a cool-headed girl, strong of foot and wrist, and very adventurous. I remember on one occasion, when several of us were bird nesting together on the Black Craigs, she happened to get stranded on a corner of rock, and could not either return or get round the projecting point. I was watching her, and saw that she had the wrong foot foremost. Her position was extremely dangerous, for one false move would have sent her headlong to a frightful death. But, holding on with one hand, she coolly took a piece of oatcake from her pocket, and munched it. Then with a dexterous movement she changed her position, got safely round the point, and went onward.

“Why, Thora, were you not feared for yoursel?” I asked, when I got near her again.

“If I’d been feared, Halcro, I wouldna be here now,” she quietly replied.

“I daresay that; but what made ye think of eatin’ the bannock when ye were in such danger?”

And, said she, “Weel, I just thought I was needing it.”

But with all Thora’s daring I was too sensible of the dangers of the Gaulton Craigs to allow her to make the descent of an unfamiliar precipice without climbing ropes, and when we had determined to explore the cave, I ran home for my lines and an old piece of tar rope to use as a torch in case we should require a light.

Thora was anxious about my sheep possibly straying in my absence, but I had a certain confidence in my flock, and assured her that as I had never known them to stray, there was little danger of them doing so now, especially as I had no dog to drive them over the banks. We accordingly left the sheep grazing or sleeping contentedly on the open braes, and proceeded on our adventure.

One end of the rope was firmly secured round a jut of rock, so that the other extremity, when it was thrown over the brink, would fall as near as possible to the mouth of the cavern. I went down some distance to see that all was right and easy, and then we made the descent together.

Neither of us made much use of the rope, but it was there for Thora to take hold of if she should find that she could not get secure hold on the jags of rock for her feet and hands; and I kept close to her to aid her if need were. A stranger in Orkney might have marvelled to see us, a lad and lass, climbing with such ease about the face of a precipice of nearly two hundred feet in height above the turbulent sea; but the thing was simple enough to our practised hands and feet, and the regular layers and shelves of the old red sandstone afforded for the most part secure resting places.

As we got further down, the disturbed sea birds fluttered and screamed around our heads, the boldest even offering to peck at our hands, but fearing to do so for all the clatter they made about it.

Page 91

Once a great gray brent goose, with black head and staring eyes, approached Thora with a loud, harsh cry, and flapped its wide, outstretched wings against her. Thora took hold of the rope tightly with both hands, and placing her feet on a narrow ledge of rock, looked round and uttered a shrill, “Tr-r-r-r,” frightening the bird away.

When we got safely down to within a couple of fathoms of the surface of the clear water, we left the rope and made our way along a strip of flaggy gneiss, until we reached an immense boulder which had been detached from the main cliff. This great rock lay before the cavern in a way that, as we found, not only hid the entrance from view, but also—except, I suppose, in very stormy weather—prevented the sea from flowing in. I crept behind this barrier, holding Thora’s hand, and we were soon at the mouth of the cave.

A slanting ray of sunshine found its way within, illumining the great vaulted roof and the dripping stalactites, that looked like giant icicles hanging above us. We were able to walk or scramble over the rocks and shingle for a considerable distance.

When we passed into a part of the grotto where the darkness deepened, however, Thora began to show signs of timidity. She spoke of having heard about many an Orcadian who, in attempting to reach the innermost recesses of such caverns, had been taken possession of by the evil spirits that were commonly believed to inhabit these places; and the strangely-echoing sounds we heard were exaggerated in her imagination, and became to her as the weird voices of kelpies and water nymphs.

I endeavoured to allay her fears as I proceeded to strike a light, and reminded her of the magic stone that I had hanging at my neck; but still she was reluctant to go further.

“Take you the stone yourself then, Thora, if you’re afraid,” I said, as I took the cord from my neck. “It will keep you from danger.” And I looped the cord over her head.

Now Thora had an implicit faith in the virtues of that little stone, and when she felt it resting on her throat her fears were at once conquered.

It took some trouble to light our torch, but with the help of some wool from my cap as tinder I set to work with flint and steel, and at last we got the tar rope in a blaze. Thora took the torch in hand and picked her way over the rocky floor, exploring every nook and cranny of the cave. So rapidly did she skip from stone to stone and climb over the intervening boulders, that I frequently found it difficult to keep up with her.

We tried to find some traces of the wreck of the Undine, or of anyone having lived there, but we found nothing beyond a great heap of oyster shells that had been thrown into one corner. But Carver Kinlay might very well have existed comfortably in this immense place, for, besides the dried fish that he was said to have found among the wreckage, there was a fine bed of oysters within easy reach of the entrance to

Page 92

the cave, and these shellfish are good enough eating, I believe. How he managed to keep Thora alive for so long without other food was, however, a thing I could with difficulty understand, unless she fed upon the sea-birds' eggs. Thora, herself, remembered nothing of having been in the cave before, but she was very anxious to reach its furthest limits, and, trusting to me to follow her, she went fearlessly onward.

Sometimes she would stoop to lift a stone, and would throw it in front of her to discover if there was a clear passage, for the light burned but dimly. Once when she did so the stone fell upon something that gave a peculiar hollow sound, as though some wooden box or barrel had been struck.

I took little notice of this, for I was at the moment groping my way into a side chamber of the cave. I was feeling my way back towards the torch, when Thora called me to her as though she had made some new discovery. But as I hurried in the direction whence her voice sounded, I was startled by a loud and piercing scream which filled the cavern and re-echoed through the empty corridors. For a moment I fancied it was the shrieking of some monster inhabitant of the cave and was about to beat a retreat when I heard my name called again.

"Halcro! Halcro! Help! help!"

And then the whole place was in utter darkness, and I heard nothing but the dying echoes, and a strange purling of running water.

I made my way as speedily as I could to where I had last seen the lighted torch, and as I got further and further into the cave, the sound of running water grew more distinct, until I heard it just at my feet. It was not the singing ripple of a shallow rivulet, but the sonorous sound of a deep stream that, so far as I could make out, ran athwart the cavern. I went down on my knees and put my hand in the water to feel which direction it took, for I did not now doubt that my companion had fallen in, and was even now struggling somewhere in the dark water that was rushing past me.

My first impulse was to throw myself into the stream and swim about until I found her, but this I considered would be vain, and I tried to first find where she was by getting her if possible to answer me. I called her several times by name, at the same time following, as well as I could in the darkness, the direction taken by the current. Oh, how I wished we had brought two torches instead of only the one that was now lost!

As I crawled about from rock to rock, guiding myself by the indistinct sounds I heard, I blamed myself for not having listened to Thora's words of expressed fear at the opening of the cave. That she had the viking's stone in her possession was a matter of small comfort to me when I seriously reflected upon the extreme danger of the situation, and I

feared that, in spite of the supernatural aid, she might even now be drowned, and that I would never again see her fair face in life.

Page 93

But I was determined not to leave the cave until I had found her, and, accordingly, I continued the search with growing consternation.

No response came to my constant cries of “Thora! Thora!” and I wandered hither and thither in the difficult darkness for what appeared to me fully an hour’s time. I became hopeless, and even thought of trying to find my own way out of the cavern, that I might summon help from Crua Breck. But still I was urged by some inward feeling to go onward yet a little further.

Passing at length round an abutting angle of ragged wall, I entered what appeared to be the extreme chamber of the cavern; and here my eyes were for a moment dazzled by the appearance of a bright though thin beam of golden sunlight, which shone from the west through a narrow fissure in the rock, and glittered upon the unruffled surface of a large and deep pool of water. With renewed hope I again called Thora; but not far from where I was standing the water curled in a cascade over its rocky bed, so to continue its subterranean course into the sea, and the noise it made in falling rendered my voice inaudible. The sight of that dark water gliding smoothly to the edge of rock, and there tumbling over into greater depths, seemed to tell me only too plainly what Thora’s fate had been.

I now began to despair of being able to escape into the outer air before the night came on; the changing hues of the stream of light that entered the cave already indicated the setting of the sun. But by the welcome help of such light as remained I carefully surveyed the chamber in which I stood.

Just as I was giving a last look round, I observed a slight movement on the opposite edge of the stream. One hurried glance was enough, for there, not a dozen yards from me, was Thora, clinging with clasped hands to a large piece of rock, her long, fair hair touched by the fading crimson light and dangling in the stream, that rapidly passed her as though it would sweep her with it to some unknown destiny. She seemed totally unconscious of all that was going on around her, and I saw that her exhausted strength could not long sustain her in her perilous position. Even as I was thinking how best to reach her, I saw her hands suddenly relax their hold upon the rock, and her helpless form floated slowly with the current towards the dark abyss beyond.

Without hesitation I plunged into the stream. A few strong strokes brought me to her side, and with one hand I firmly grasped her by the arm. Another second and we both would have been carried over the cataract, but the sense of our imminent danger gave me courage, and with a great effort of strength I swam with my burden to the side of the stream from which I had plunged, and eagerly clung to the rock until my strength was renewed.

It was with considerable difficulty that I at last managed to raise myself and the girl from the water, and place her unconscious form upon a flat slab of rock. And now I

endeavoured with such simple skill as I could command to restore her exhausted animation. This was a task I was little fitted for; but just as the last faint ray of light died away and left the cavern in darkness, I had the satisfaction of hearing her draw a deep breath and then utter my name.

Page 94

I found it no easy thing to carry her in my arms to the mouth of the cave, and many halts did I make by the way, trying to discover the light that should tell me that our peril was over. Before we had gone very far, however, she was conscious enough to help me in some sort, and by our united efforts we at length got so far on our right way as to come in sight of the light of day, and thereafter our journey was easy. The evening breeze that met us revived my companion considerably, and she was able to stand up and thank me in her girlish way for delivering her from her dangerous plight.

When she was sufficiently recovered to speak, she told me how it was she had fallen into the water.

She had found a large tarpaulin spread out as though it covered some hidden boxes, and, calling to me, she had tried to raise the tarpaulin to look beneath it. But in standing up to do so she unfortunately missed her foothold on the slippery rock, and falling backward was plunged into the stream; and this was all that she knew, except that being swept along by the water and struggling to keep afloat she happened to touch a rock at the side, and had there held on until, as she had expected, I was able to help her.

Having thus far got out of the cave, there remained yet the difficulty of climbing up the cliff in the twilight. If I could get Thora as far as the rope, I felt that the rest would be comparatively easy. But she was very weak and cold, and I feared for the result.

Fortunately, the shelf of rock along which we had to pass was sufficiently wide for us to walk along by clinging to the cliff. This was done with great care, and when the rope was reached I bound it several times round her waist and secured it firmly under her arms. Being assured that she was then quite safe in her position, I took hold of the higher part of the climbing line and with its assistance scaled the crag.

When I reached the top I gave Thora the signal, and by hauling the rope up with all my strength I helped her to ascend. It was a long time ere I felt sure that she was safe, but at last I heard her call out that she was all right, and I stretched my hand down to her. She took hold of it, and I assisted her until she stepped once more upon the soft turf, and then, still holding her hand, I led her home, deeply thankful that our adventure had ended without fatality.

Chapter XXVII. A Family Misfortune.

I must now tell you what happened on that afternoon while I was away from my sheep, neglecting my work, and seeking useless adventure in the North Gaulton cave. But I must go back to record a conversation that took place at Lyndardy on that same morning, so that you may understand the gravity of the misfortune which was the result of my neglect.

Page 95

We were sitting over our early breakfast, my mother, Jessie, and I, discussing the family resources for the coming winter—a subject that had given us much anxiety since the death of my father and uncle. Our concern was intensified by the fact that our harvest had not turned out so fruitful as had been anticipated; for the oats were light in the grain and the potatoes diseased; and the expenses incurred for repairs and improvements on the farm, had well-nigh exhausted the ready money that had been left by my father or procured by the sale of the small boat and various articles of furniture from the old home. To make matters worse—and this it was that suggested the discussion—Jessie had been down in Stromness on the previous evening, and there ascertained that the price paid for straw-plaiting, which was never very high, was to be greatly reduced.

“I’m sure we’re ill enough off already without them cutting us down at such a rate,” said my mother, as she took a sip of tea from her saucer. “If it had not been for what the dominie brought from Edinburgh for Hal’s silver, we’d have been most hard pressed this while back. But what we’re to do when the winter comes round, I dinna ken. It’s certain we’ll not have meal enough to serve us; and there’s the rent to pay, and clothes to get, and nothing coming in at all.”

“Well, mother,” said Jessie, “dinna take on so ill about it. We’re not more hard pressed than our neighbours. Look at Janet Ross with all her bairns, and her rent owing for three terms; and auld Betty Matthew, at the Croft, who hasna a penny forbye what she gets at the kelp burning. We have our two bonnie cows, and a score of good sheep, and all our hens.”

“We have all that,” replied my mother. “But I’m thinking the sheep must be sold at Martinmas, or we’ll not have much of a living for winter.”

“Then, if you sell the sheep, Halcro will need to go to the fishing,” said Jessie.

“He’ll need to get work somewhere. The lad canna aye be idle; and there’s nothing but the fishing for him, I doubt, if he doesna gang to the piloting with Carver Kinlay.”

“No, not that,” I said. “I’d rather burn kelp than have anything to do with him.”

So it was agreed that our sheep were to be sold, and that I must find work of some sort whereby to help the family.

Now, in the afternoon, when they found I did not come back to tea, they surmised that I had already gone to look for employment at Kirkwall, and they waited impatiently for my return. After tea my mother went to the byre to attend to the cows, and Jessie stood for a long time at the door looking out for me. Seeing no sign of me, nor of the sheep, she walked in the direction of the North Hill, there to get a wider prospect. She looked towards every likely quarter, but the last place she thought of looking at was Kinlay’s

clover field. There were some sheep grazing there, but Jessie never imagined that they were the sheep of Lyndardy; for what should take them into that forbidden pasture?

Page 96

And yet their number was remarkable. Yes, there were our twenty sheep, with our big cheviot in their midst, coolly enjoying themselves in the fine clover grass that Carver was jealously reserving for the benefit of his own ewes. Without waiting to explain to herself the meaning of what she saw, or the reason of my being away from the sheep, Jessie hastened towards the clover field. As she approached, however, something occurred that made her run with all speed.

Suddenly there was a commotion among the sheep and a noisy barking, for in their midst was Tom Kinlay with his great retriever dog. He chased the sheep into a corner of the enclosure, and proceeded to belabour them with a heavy stick. The cheviot, however, bolder than Tom had supposed, turned at bay, made a heavy rush at him, and butting him aside bounded over the low wall, followed by all the flock.

Tom was soon on his feet, and with his dog he gave chase. One of the small Shetland ewes was overtaken, and disabled by a knock on the head. The other animals, led by the cheviot, were running madly towards the cliffs when Jessie, arriving on the scene, attempted to intercept them. But the dog was fleet of foot, and, encouraged by Tom's cries of "After them, good dog, after them!" continued the pursuit with high enjoyment.

The cheviot, with the stupidity of its kind, saw not the danger to which it was hastening. Panic stricken, it rushed towards a part of the cliffs known as the Lyre Geo, and no efforts of Jessie could divert its onward career.

When Kinlay became conscious of what he had done he called back his dog. But as he watched the sheep bounding and leaping on in their mad course his apprehensions gave place to merriment; and when the cheviot, with a high spring into the air, went headlong over the precipice, followed by the smaller sheep, he burst forth into a fit of laughter loud and uncontrolled.

"You great brute, Tom Kinlay!" exclaimed Jessie indignantly; "if Halcro had been here you would not have done this cruel thing."

"Well," said Tom, "what for did the sheep go into our field, eating up all the clover? Halcro should have been minding them. It serves you right that the sheep have gone over the bank."

This, and more that I know not of, was said between them. But Jessie wasted no time in dispute. Her concern for the poor sheep was too great for idle discussion.

"Come away," she demanded, "and help to get the poor beasts from the water."

"Get the sheep from the water yourself," returned Tom stubbornly; and whistling to his dog he went homeward as though nothing unusual had happened.

On looking over the brink of the cliff Jessie found that it would be useless to attempt without assistance to recover any of the sheep. Two of them she saw floating out to sea, several of them lay apparently dead far down on the rocks. One had fallen on a projecting part of the cliff, and others, instead of jumping over the edge, had run down a narrow pathway, and, though not injured, stood in danger from the fact that they could neither proceed nor turn back without falling.

Page 97

Near as she was to Crua Breck, however, Jessie would not go thither to seek the help she needed. Hurrying towards the croft of Mouseland she saw two men at work in one of the fields, and they readily laid down their spades and, after procuring a long rope, went back with her to the Lyre Geo. Before sunset they were able to recover the bodies of the animals that had fallen among the rocks, as well as to rescue the sheep that were still alive.

This had all taken place before Thora and I had come up from the Gaulton Cave; and as we turned from the head of the cliff to go home a cart was passing along the moor conveying the dead and injured sheep to Lyndardy—the sheep which only a few hours before we had all so hopefully counted upon selling at Martinmas.

Sadly did we contemplate the poor remnant of the flock, and guilty did I feel for having left the sheep unattended. At first my mother blamed me sorely for what I had done; but when we talked the matter over it seemed not so much my own fault in leaving the sheep (for that had been done many a time before), but Kinlay's neglect in leaving open the gate of the clover field, and Tom's inhuman conduct in driving the sheep over the cliff.

I do not know how it fared with Thora when she reached Crua Breck, but I was not long in doubt as to the result of her immersion in the underground stream. The next morning I heard by accident that she was ill in bed. For many long weeks she lay weary and helpless, and it took all the skill of Dr. Linklater of Stromness to bring her round to health again. During this time I heard nothing of her, and much did I fear that her illness was very serious. One thing that consoled me, however, was the thought that she had the viking's talisman in her keeping, for in the excitement of seeing the cart passing with the dead sheep, I had entirely forgotten to ask her for the return of the stone, and she went into the house with it still suspended from her neck. I was confident that she would keep it in safety, and while she had it in her possession I felt that her recovery to health was assured.

Chapter XXVIII. Captain Flett Of The "Falcon."

The unfortunate occurrence which deprived us of our little flock of sheep brought an increase of sorrow and hardship to our family, whose resources had already been so greatly impoverished; and when the gloomy winter days came on, with their biting frosts and keen cold winds, the prospects at Lyndardy grew as dull as the leaden clouds that hung in the sky. Our mother's woeful sighs were painful to my ears, while I felt how helpless I was to soften her sorrows. Sometimes, when I saw the tears in her eyes, I would silently wish for her sake that I was older and could do more towards filling my father's place.

But work of the kind I was fitted for was scarce in Orkney. Had I been able to choose for myself I should have been, like my father, a pilot. But the chain of circumstances which had made this the vocation of my family for three generations was now broken. Carver Kinlay and his crew were having things all their own way, and in the meantime I was doing that most trying of all work—waiting and hoping for what seemed to become every day less probable.

Page 98

But I did not pass my hours in idleness. Whenever an outward-bound ship came into the harbour I sought her captain, and asked for a berth aboard. Sometimes I would even walk as far as Kirkwall to see if in that port I could get what was so difficult to procure in Stromness.

One cold, wintry day, when the wind was blowing strong and cutting from the north, I found myself in Kirkwall. Walking along the wharf, looking down upon the decks of the vessels that lay against the old stone quay—brigs, barques, and schooners, some of them bound foreign, but most of them from Scotland—I came to a little coasting schooner that I had often seen in the harbour of Stromness. She was named the Falcon. I was looking down at the green copper plating near her cutwater, when I heard a gruff but cheery voice calling out:

“Hullo! there, young Ericson! Are ye not coming aboard, lad?”

“Hello, Davie!” I responded, jumping down upon the deck. “Here’s a cold day for ye, eh?”

He was a little, thick-set man, with a rippled, weatherbeaten face. He wore a dirty, red, knitted cap, from which escaped a few curls of iron-gray hair. A short pea jacket was closely buttoned over his chest, and a pair of immense sea boots reached high above his knees.

This was David Flett, the same jovial old mariner who, it will be remembered, warned me against the Jew on Stromness quay. He removed a short black pipe from his lips as I joined him near the companionway.

“Have ye walked from Stromness the day?” he asked. “Ay, lad, but ye’ll be tired, I doubt. Come away below to the fire and warm yersel’.”

And he led the way down the ladder and into a close little cabin, where a rousing wood fire was burning under a good pot of potatoes.

Captain Flett had spent most of his early days at the Greenland whale fishing, but he had now settled down upon his own quarterdeck to make a comfortable living for himself by helping others; providing for the Orkney islanders, what they much needed, a market of exchange for their native commodities.

The Falcon was called a cargo packet; but David Flett was a man of singular enterprise, and styled himself a general merchant. He had, indeed, become quite an important trader in his own way by speculating in quantities of seemingly worthless goods, and reserving them until time gave him a chance of disposing of them at a profit.

If a farmer in Ronaldsay told him he was badly in want of a plough or a pony the skipper would speedily find a farmer in another island who had a plough or a pony to sell, and

by thus bringing buyer and seller together he made himself a friend to both. Nothing was out of Flett's way. He had a genius for commerce. He would buy an old anchor or a piece of sailcloth from someone in want of ready money, and keep them in the hold of his schooner till he could find a customer in some skipper whose anchor had been slipped or whose sails were in need of repair. I believe he made it his business to find out exactly what every person in Orkney was most in need of, and straightway to set about getting it.

Page 99

A Hoy crofter once said to his master (whether in jest or earnest I know not):

“Eh, sir, but Flett’s a wonderfu’ man. I thought I had met wi’ a sore misfortune, twa months syne, when I lost both my cow and my wife over the cliffs; but I went to Davie, and he has gotten me a far better cow and a far bonnier wife.”

David Flett’s habits were well known to me, and on seeing the good man’s genial face I at once thought of a way in which he could be of service to me. It is always well to have a friend in court. Why should he not be asked to get me a berth on one of the outgoing ships?

“Tak’ a seat, now,” said he, as he placed a stool for me in a warm corner of the cabin. “Tak’ a seat and tell us a’ that’s passing in Stromness this while back, and then we’ll get something to eat.”

While he was asking questions and listening to my replies, I quietly observed the miscellaneous contents of the cabin. A curious place it was—half cabin and half shop. From the ceiling hung many hams and pieces of bacon, smoked geese, pots and pans, bundles of tallow candles, and strings of onions. On two shelves nailed athwart the compartment were rows of canisters containing coffee, tea, rice, and other luxuries and necessaries, besides bottles of drugs, bars of soap, squares of salt, and other articles of commerce, to be retailed to customers in the remote islands.

Presently a seaman, who was addressed as Jerry, came below and took the potatoes from the fire, while the skipper drew a small table to the middle of the floor and set it ready for dinner. The potatoes were placed in a large dish in the centre of the table where we could all reach them, and a joint of corned beef was added, with plenty of oatcakes, cheese, and salt butter.

When all was ready for the meal the mate appeared, from I know not where, and took his seat opposite the skipper, and I drew my stool between them, while the man Jerry sat nearer the fire on an upturned cask.

The mate, whose name was Peter Brown, was a red-faced little man with a nose that had a decided list to the starboard, very untidy in his dress, and given a bit to swearing, but a real good sort of fellow, as I afterwards found, and a capital seaman. He had served in English ships in the Baltic trade, but getting knocked about in a storm rounding Cape Wrath, breaking his arm and his nose, he had been put ashore at Kirkwall, where he had met with Captain Flett and joined the Falcon, thirteen years before this time.

“And now, my lad,” said Flett, blowing a hot potato that he held in his horny hand, “what brings ye all the way to Kirkwall on a cold day like this? Ye didna tell us that.”

“Well, captain,” I said, looking down at my platter and wondering how I could eat its plentiful contents, hungry though I was, “I just sauntered along to see if I could get some work. My mother’s sorely needin’ help now, ye ken, since father was drowned, and I maun be doing something.”

Page 100

“Ay, ye’re right there, lad; ye’re right there. But what kind o’ work were ye seekin’?”

“I carena what it be, if it’s just work,” I replied. “But I was thinkin’ I’d go in one o’ the Kirkwall ships if there was one wantin’ a lad.”

“Weel, that’s just most amazing!” exclaimed Flett, dipping his hand into the dish and bringing forth another steaming potato. “For our lad, Jack, has taken a strange misliking to the Falcon, and run away to a bigger ship.

“Jerry,” he asked, turning to the seaman, “did ye hear onything o’ young Jack this mornin’?”

“Ay,” said Jerry. “He sailed yestreen in the Foaming Wave, the lazy rascal.”

“We’ll need a lad in his place then,” said Peter. “Could Ericson come aboard when we’re round in Stromness?”

“Ye see, Ericson,” said the skipper, looking kindly at me and casting another slice of meat on my platter, “Ye see the Falcon’s but a wee slip o’ a craft, considerin’. But maybe ye’d get along wi’ us weel enough till a better offers. So, if ye like, Jerry here’ll make up a bunk to ye, and I’ll see that your mother, puir soul, doesna want for onything. Sandy Ericson was a good man, as everybody kens, and his widow maun be cared for.”

Now this unexpected offer of employment was a thing that I had reason to be very grateful for, as I did not neglect to show. While wishing, with true Orcadian love of the sea, to sail for foreign countries in one of the large vessels I had so often seen in the haven of Stromness, I yet believed that there was no place in all the world like the Orkney Islands—no cliffs so high, no sea so blue, no homes so dear—and this new possibility of sailing with Davie Flett in the Falcon among our own islands was more agreeable to me, since it would not necessitate any very long absence from my home, three weeks or a month being the usual extent of the voyage.

Before I left the schooner that afternoon, therefore, the matter was fully arranged. The Falcon was to be round in Stromness Bay in a few days’ time, and I was then to join her.

Passing through Finstown on my way home, I was overtaken by Oliver Gray’s man in the inn gig. He gave me a lift as far as Stenness, and thence I hurried to Lyndardy to tell my mother the joyful news.

For the next few days, whilst my mother and Jessie were occupied with the business of providing some warm clothing for me, for use on the cold nights at sea, and in other ways preparing for my leaving, I sought to add to our stock of winter provisions by a free use of my gun. The eider ducks, or dunter geese, as we call them in Orkney, are always plentiful in the winter time, and valuable not only for their flesh, but also for their

rich downy feathers, and I managed to procure a good number of these. Over at the fresh-water loch of Harray, too, several teals and sheldrakes were taken. And then, when my sport was over, I hung up my gun in its place in the warm byre, believing that I was now a man.

Page 101

So passed the time pleasantly and profitably until, much to my satisfaction, the good ship Falcon arrived in the bay and dropped anchor off the jetty.

Chapter XXIX. In Which The “Falcon” Sets Sail.

It was on a gray, wintry Saturday morning that we set sail on my first Orcadian voyage. I had, you may be sure, been up at an early hour, helping to load the little vessel with its miscellaneous cargo, to be carried to the many indolent island ports at which our skipper proposed calling. We were ready by about eight o’clock, when I was sent ashore along with Jerry to get two or three letters from the postmaster that had been waiting two weeks for the Falcon, to be taken to some of the outlying islands; for the schooner, in addition to her regular work, also carried the Queen’s mails. Then, aboard again, we weighed anchor, the harbour was cleared, and we dropped below the Lookout Hill into the Sound.

It was a bitter cold morning, but my excitement on being outward bound on my first trip was enough to keep me warm, and I paced the deck proudly as we passed slowly into the broken water. Over the brown slopes of Graemsay the late-rising sun struggled sleepily to penetrate a dreamy haze; but soon his warmth had strength to melt the white hoar frost from our rigging, and with a brisk breeze and an outflowing tide we slipped through the Sound, dipping and rising as we met the swelling waves of the outer sea. Then the great headland of Hoy loomed into sight, its yellow and red cliffs gleaming across the water as if sunshine always bathed them.

From the deck, as we sailed blithely along, I watched the billows rolling landward and dashing upon the hard rocks, resounding with thunderous noise among the hollow chasms. I was unwilling to go below before we had passed beyond the sight of Stromness, but when we were abreast of the Black Craigs I thought I would go down and have a drop of hot coffee. I had no sooner got into the cabin, however, when, what with the pitching of the schooner and the smell of the cheese and bacon and other things, I began to feel a sickening, so I went on deck again and busied myself as best I could, though the skipper had told me he would not expect me to do any work until I got my sea legs.

I soon fell into my simple duties, which were the more easy to me since my acquaintance with ships and sailors in Stromness had given me some slight knowledge of the routine work of a small craft. Whenever the schooner was brought round on a new tack I was ready to lend a hand with the ropes. I helped to keep trim the deck, and even had the proud task of taking my trick at the tiller. When I was well enough to venture below I had the duty of preparing the meals, with the help of Jerry, who was man-of-all-work. But this was not until we had been out some days.

On the first day I did little but hang about on deck, or sit on the weather gunwale with Captain Flett. The old man was very kind to me, and even put his pipe away lest the smell of the smoke should make me feel sick.

Page 102

One time, when we were so sitting together, I noticed an eagle rise from a ravine in St. John's Head, and we watched the bird sailing backward and forward on steady outstretched wing and finally disappear amid the shadows of the Red Glen. This suggested a long talk about the eagles that inhabited the solitudes of Hoy Island, and the skipper told many a thrilling story of his own adventures in search of eagles' nests in the time when rich rewards were offered for every eagle killed.

At midday the Falcon was abreast of the Old Man of Hoy—a curious isolated pinnacle of rock some five hundred feet in height standing out in the sea—and before the time of sunset we rounded Rora Head and entered a beautiful sheltered bay with a fine stretch of sloping beach, beyond which, on the brown moor, about a dozen tiny houses could be seen snugly nestling together beside a flowing stream that had its source away up amongst the hills.

This was Rackwick, one of the chief hamlets of Hoy; and when the schooner was brought well inshore the anchor was dropped. The captain then ordered Jerry to blow the horn to announce our arrival to the inhabitants far and near. Jerry thereupon took the fog horn and blew it till the noise resounded and echoed for miles around. Then we all went below to a meal of good Orkney herrings and hot tea.

The meal was just finished, and the men were lighting their pipes, when a boat from the shore was brought alongside—a heavy, clumsy boat with great square oars pulled by two burly crofters.

When I went on deck with the skipper I found that our arrival at Rackwick had been expected for some time.

"Man, Davie," interrogated one of the crofters in a broad Orkney dialect, "where has thoo been wandering sae lang? They was expecting thee mair than a twa week syne. Was thoo thinking o' starving us all?"

"Starving you, Tam," returned Flett. "Nay, nay, lad, we'll see ye dinna starve. Come aboard, lad, and let's know what you're needing. We have everything you can want, from a needle to an anchor. So just name it and you'll get it."

"We're needing none o' your anchors," said the crofter in a matter-of-fact tone as he climbed up the schooner's side, "but I just mind now, Mary Seater lost her last needle a week syne, and we have but twa needles in all Rackwick, so thoo'd better gie us a penny's worth."

Captain Flett told me to get the slate and pencil from below, and as the crofter gave his orders for the articles required I wrote these down under the initial item, "Needles, 1d."

When all the necessaries were brought together, they formed a goodly pile of merchandise in the boat. Here were bags of potatoes and of meal, a few loaves of bread, some tin cans and crockery, pieces of cloth, and coils of rope and small parcels of groceries. I went ashore in the boat to help the two men to unload her, and when this was done there was the work of bringing back to the Falcon what things were to be exported or given in exchange for goods received.

Page 103

When the last load was brought on board some ingenuity was required to strike a just balance in the accounts, for in this primitive community actual money, though well appreciated, was of less consequence than money's worth, and the system of barter which Captain Flett necessarily adopted was very difficult of adjustment. However, my schooling was of some service to him in striking a balance, and at nightfall the business was agreeably settled.

The next day was the Sabbath, and in the morning Captain Flett appeared on deck dressed in his finest clothes of blue cloth, and wearing a very respectable soft felt hat over his neatly-brushed hair. The mate, Jerry, and I were also apparelled in our Sunday best. After breakfast we went ashore in the dinghy, and the four of us made our way in a body up to the Manse.

The room in which service was held was barely large enough to admit so great an addition to its weekly congregation, but we were permitted to take front seats near the chair occupied by the minister, who thus was able not only to exchange occasional civilities with the captain, but also to help himself to a frequent pinch from the old man's snuffbox.

I remember I thought the service extremely wearisome, and I soon grew tired of listening to the doctrinal discourse that was given for our benefit. I found diversion in looking through a little window behind the minister, and in observing the curious contortions which were given to a cow browsing on the heath outside whenever the animal passed a certain round knot in the glass.

Captain Flett remained ashore with the minister for the rest of the day; and in the afternoon, when Peter was asleep in his bunk, Jerry and I left the schooner and went for a walk across the hills. The weather was not very inviting, for the wind blew in cold, cutting gusts from the northwest, and there was little of interest to be seen on the bleak, treeless waste. The coastline of Scotland was hidden in mist, and even the crown of the Ward hi?^ll was covered by the low-lying clouds. There would be little, indeed, to tell of this walk were it not for an adventure that we encountered.

We had got round into the Red Glen, and were resting on a great gray boulder. Everything was so quiet in the shelter of the hills that even the birds seemed to recognize that it was Sunday. Not a living thing was to be seen or a sound to be heard, except the soughing of the wind and the trickling of a burn down the hillside. Presently a loud screech rent the air, and a large eagle swooped swiftly above us, carrying in its talons a rabbit or other small animal. Flying in gradually narrowing circles, the bird at last alighted among some rocks on the opposite side of the valley.

We ran as speedily as we could to where the eagle had dropped. To our disappointment, however, the bird took wing and hovered high in the air, but without its victim.

Page 104

Continuing our way in search of the rabbit we saw a very curious sight. In the midst of a number of loose stones someone had set a trap, but had evidently neglected it. This neglect would have been hard on any animals that might have been taken, as their probable fate would be death by starvation. But what was probable did not happen in this case. When we reached the trap we found in it a fine golden eagle, alive and in splendid condition. Around him lay the remains—the well-picked bones—of some twenty rabbits and as many grouse which his mate had brought, and so saved him from a lingering death.

The captive eagle, with its great beak dripping with the rabbit's blood, flashed its bright round eyes and ruffled its feathers as Jerry picked up a large stone and prepared to dash it at the bird's head. Quick as might be, I arrested his uplifted arm.

"O, Jerry!" I pleaded; "dinna kill him, man. We have not so many eagles as that. Give the bird his liberty."

Jerry dropped the stone, and looked at me with a kindly smile.

"Well, Ericson," he said, "you're maybe right. A dead eagle isna much good after all. We'll let the bird fly."

Whilst Jerry attracted the attention of the eagle forward I went behind, and, taking my knife from my pocket, I was proceeding to open the jaws of the trap, when Jerry exclaimed, "Look out! look out aft!" and before I understood his warning, I was thrown bodily forward by a tremendous blow on my back.

The first eagle had watched our proceedings while on the wing, and had flown to her mate's assistance, alighting on my back, at the same time burying her talons in my woollen muffler. In my fall, however, I liberated the captive eagle, which hopped about lamely for a while, and then giving a kind of guttural chuckle, flapped his wide wings, and rose gracefully into the air.

Jerry rushed forward to rescue me from the pecking beak of my assailant. Fortunately the female bird, in her eagerness to follow her mate, did not show fight when Jerry belaboured her with his stick, but disentangled her claws from my muffler; at the same time, giving me some severe scratches. Then she took to flight in pursuit of her companion, and soon the pair of birds were seen sailing side by side far up among the leaden clouds.

I was not seriously injured, and, so far from regretting that we had not been victorious in the encounter, we were pleased at being the means of restoring the captive bird to its noble mate.

Chapter XXX. An Orcadian Voyage.

Shortly after midnight, when I lay comfortably in my bunk, I was awakened by hearing the anchor scraping and thumping against the schooner's bow; then there was a hauling of ropes on deck and a creaking of timbers as the sails were run up, and I fell to sleep again before we had got out beyond the shelter of the coast.

Page 105

When I got up in the morning and went on deck, the island of Hoy lay far to windward like a bank of mist upon the sea. We were far out on the broad Pentland Firth, plunging about on the rough water, with our mainsail double-reefed, and the flying jib pulling away like to split itself in the wind. I enjoyed it all for a time; but when I went below to help Jerry to get ready some breakfast for the skipper, the smell of the coffee and the frying bacon overcame me, and I was forced to go back to my bunk, where I remained for the rest of the day helplessly seasick.

The next morning, feeling better, I went up to get a breath of fresh air, and found that we were hemmed in by a thick white mist that crept round us, and rendered it difficult for Jerry, who was on the lookout at the bow, to determine our course. We were making for South Ronaldsay, and had been beating about all night, making very little headway; and when the mist lifted before noon, it was discovered that we had been driven down by the current, and had come nigh to running into the black rocks of Stroma Island.

Here, where two strong streams met with terrific force, the turbulent water whirled about with wild irregular motion, and we were swept now one way, now another, until it seemed useless to fight against the current that controlled us. We were, in fact, in the midst of that dangerous vortex locally known as the Swelkie. Those who know the secrets of the ocean currents of the northern seas have their own scientific explanations to give; but our native boatmen and sailors, who were not so well acquainted with the eccentricities of the Gulf stream as with the popular legends of Orkney, accounted for the Swelkie in this way:

A certain King Frodi had a magical quern, or hand mill, called Grotti; the largest quern ever known in Denmark. Now Grotti, which ground either gold or peace for King Frodi as he willed, was stolen by a sea king named Mysing, who set the mill to grind white salt for his ships. But it happened that Mysing had only learned the spell to set the mill going, and knew not how to stop it. His ships, therefore, became so full of salt that they sank, and Grotti with them, before they could reach the islands of Orkney; hence the Swelkie. This took place to the northwest of Stroma Island, and ever since the sea there has not rested, for as the water falls through the eye of the quern, it roars and rushes about, and the quern goes on grinding and grinding salt, and giving its saltness to the whole ocean.

The mist having lifted, Captain Flett had a reef or two let out, and himself took the helm until he got us into calmer water, when we luffed to the windward and headed for South Ronaldsay, with a stiff breeze springing up that gave us a clear seaway to get past the Lother Reef, when we sailed steadily through a lesser rush of tide across a quiet, landlocked sea, into the little haven of Burwick, where in the gathering darkness the chain went rattling down, and we came to a restful anchorage.

Page 106

But our stay at Burwick was not for long, as we had lost much time in the outer sea, and the skipper wanted to get round to St. Margaret's Hope. No sooner had we put a boatload of goods ashore than we set sail again. And now that we were in smoother water, I was not allowed to shirk my watch, but had to spend the better part of the night on deck.

A little after midnight we were sailing under easy sail through the dark Sound of Hoxa. I was at the helm, the mate walking the deck in front of me. The night was extremely cold, and some light flakes of snow were falling. I had difficulty in making out the points of land as we passed, but Jerry was at the bow, and I depended upon him and Peter for my steering. Just as we were abreast of Stanger Head, on the little island of Flotta, I thought I saw a small vessel creeping along, well inshore. I drew the mate's attention to it, and he was denying me, when a bright flash of light was seen, followed by a loud report, as of a small piece of ordnance. Peering through the darkness, we could distinguish the sails of a large cutter, which was now bearing down upon us.

"It's the Clasper," said Jerry, coming aft.

"Confound him!" said the mate. "Does she take us for a smuggler?"

From these words I at once understood the meaning of the shot that had been fired; the revenue cutter had evidently mistaken the Falcon for one of the famous smuggling craft of Scapa Flow.

We were at once hauled round, and a boat from the Clasper came alongside. A sprightly young lieutenant climbed over our starboard bulwarks, followed by a sailor who carried a large lantern. This the officer took from him, and coming aft to where we all three stood, he held the light aloft peering into our faces.

By this time our skipper came up from the cabin, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"What's all the row, Peter?" said he.

"Ah! Flett, it's you, eh?" said the lieutenant politely. "I'm sorry to trouble you on such a cold night; I did not recognize your schooner in the dark. But we have strict orders, you know. There's a lot of it going on, and we must search you. A mere matter of form, of course. You won't object?"

"Nay, I don't object, Mr. Fox. Search away," said David, turning to go below.

A hurried search was made accordingly, but nothing suggesting contraband traffic being discovered, the revenue men went away perfectly satisfied, the lieutenant wishing us a goodnight, and requesting us to keep the affair a secret when we arrived in Stromness.

Early on the next day we touched at St. Margaret's Hope—one of the chief fishing stations of Orkney—and our course thereafter lay along the eastern shores of the Mainland.

Long and dreary was the passage northward from Ronaldsay to Stronsay. The cold, frosty winds and weary, dark nights, made the long watches on deck difficult to endure; but when my turn was over, and I could get below to the fire, I generally forgot about the hardships, and began to think that life at sea was really not unpleasant.

Page 107

Captain Flett tried to make my position comfortable and my work agreeable, and sometimes when I was on deck with him at night, he would remain by me smoking, and make the time pass lightly by telling me of his early experiences in the Dundee whaling ships; or more often he would instruct me in seamanship, and teach me regarding the tides and channels of Orkney.

Thus during this voyage among the islands was the weariness of many a night watch relieved. There was something to be told of almost every place at which the Falcon touched. Often the talk would turn upon the subject of wrecks, and of the wreckers who inhabited the storm-swept islands, and were not above welcoming a shipwreck for the sake of the valuable spoil they might procure.

Anchored off a little port in Sanday, David told me of a minister who, while professing to deplore the frequency of shipwrecks on the coast, ended a prayer by saying:

“Nevertheless, if it please Thee to cause helpless ships to be cast on the shore, oh, dinna forget the poor island of Sanday.”

We pursued our tortuous course as far north as a place called Pierowall, in the island of Westray; when we found that there was need to continue the voyage still further to Fair Isle, a little island that lies about midway between Orkney and Shetland, for the people in that place, we heard, had got short of winter provisions, and our skipper would not hear of returning until he had supplied the deficiency.

The weather became boisterous as we entered the open sea again, and I had my first experience of really rough sailing. For two days the schooner tossed upon the great white-crested waves which dashed against her bows, broke in snowy foam upon the deck, and glistened on oilskin and sou’wester. The wind whistled with piteous noise among the ropes, and frequent showers of hail and sleet added to our discomfort.

On the third day after leaving the Orkneys we sighted Fair Isle, looming faintly through a mist of snow, far to starboard. With difficulty we tacked to windward, for the northeast wind had driven us considerably out of our course. Darkness came on at about three o’clock in the afternoon in these latitudes, and we wanted to make the harbour in daylight. But though the wind fell, the snow and mist came on so thickly that we quite lost sight of the island, and in our difficulty a terrible thing happened.

We were all hands on deck, and sailing close-hauled with a good stretch of canvas set. I was at the helm, and the skipper standing near me. Jerry and the mate were nailing some boards on the companion hatch to keep out the snow from the cabin. Suddenly the schooner gave a great lurch and fell off the wind. The mainsail flapped wildly for a moment, and as we luffed again we went over with a list that swung the boom back with such force that the ropes that held it were slipped, and the spar struck the skipper a blow upon the shoulder that sent him headlong overboard into the sea.

Page 108

Jerry and the mate saw the accident, and while I still held the tiller hard a-port, they at once got out the boat. Jerry and Peter each took an oar and rowed quickly astern to where Captain Flett was swimming.

It will be easily understood that, left to myself, I could not manage the schooner with much skill; for, in the first place, I could not without help bring the sails over on the other tack, and in the second I could not well leave the helm. Indeed, I had the greatest difficulty in hauling the vessel round, and before I succeeded in doing anything beyond simply putting the helm a-port, the driving snow had surrounded me in its mist, and I lost sight of the boat.

I could see it nowhere. I called aloud, but the wind whistling in the ropes overpowered my voice. I left the tiller and got the fog horn. But, alas! I had never practised blowing that instrument, and try as I would, I could get no more than a feeble grunt out of it.

Thicker and thicker grew the mist, and the snow fell in numerous and heavy flakes. Darkness came on, and still never a boat could I see, never a sound could I hear but the ceaseless swish of the snow and the soughing of the wind. The schooner pitched and rolled helplessly on the waves, and I was in terror lest the sails should split in their mad flapping.

I tried to secure the heavy boom that had been the cause of this mischief, and after a long struggle with it I succeeded. Then I went below and lighted the lamps, and having fixed them in their places so that they might be seen from the boat I made another attempt to bring the vessel round on the starboard tack and keep her to the windward.

All through that long dark night I beat about on the rough sea with the snow driving cold and sharp upon me, and the waves breaking on the deck. I was tired and sleepy after a hard day's work, yet I could not think of this, nor of my hunger and my cold hands and feet. My only object now was to recover my messmates, and as the night wore on without my seeing any sign of them, I grew utterly hopeless, for they were without food and far from land, and God alone knew what had become of them.

From my despair at the probable fate of the boat, however, I gradually realized the fact that my own condition was not without peril. Here was I, a slip of a lad, alone and helpless, out in the open sea, in a schooner that three men could only with difficulty manage. I had but small skill in seamanship. I knew almost nothing of my whereabouts, and, added to these disadvantages, I had the physical discomforts to endure of fatigue, hunger, and cold.

At about nine o'clock I went below to get something to eat. The fire was out, so I could not make any coffee; but there was a bottle of spirits in the locker, and fancying this might do me good I, for the first time in my life, drank some. I at once felt much warmer,

and I took half a glassful with some water and drank it with the oatcake and cold bacon that I ate.

Page 109

Going on deck again, I felt much more comfortable; but the spirits that had warmed my vitals soon had an effect upon me that I had not counted upon. My eyesight became hazy, and I felt terribly sleepy—so sleepy that I could not remain at the helm for fear of falling into a slumber at my post. So I tied up the tiller, and, for the rest of the night, walked the deck, only altering the schooner's course when I thought that she was being driven too far from the spot where the boat had put off.

All the night through I peered over the dark sea, and at intervals raised my voice, in the faint hope of coming across the boat. But for all the lookout that I kept, never a boat could I see; and for all my shouting, never a response to my cries could I hear. Whatever had become of the skipper—whether he had been picked up or was drowned—the mate and Jerry were gone, and I, the youngest of the crew, was left alone on the Falcon to bring her back to port, if haply I was not taken by her across the dreary waste of ocean to some terrible and unknown destiny.

Chapter XXXI. An Arctic Waif.

When the dim light of dawn fell upon the sea I looked over the gray waters through the telescope. The mist had faded away, and the snow had ceased to fall. A fresh breeze from the low east brought a faint glimmer of sunshine with it. But though I searched the horizon, and the wide intervening space of sea, yet could I discover nothing of the boat, and Fair Isle was nowhere to be seen.

Looking for that island—which I knew to be the nearest land—I remembered the islanders and thought how little chance there now remained of the Falcon rendering them assistance in their need of provisions. I saw no possibility of reaching Fair Isle; for, as I had seen it on the previous day, it appeared but a small rock; and being out of all my reckoning, and, as I supposed, a considerable distance to leeward, I did not think it wise to waste much time in the vain effort to reach the island, the exact position of which I was ignorant of. I might have beat about for two or three days, perhaps, without sighting it, and yet I knew not what other land to make for.

The wind, which was now blowing east-southeast, was unfavourable in an attempt to make for the Orkneys. The only alternative that I could see, therefore, was to head the schooner round on the port tack and bear northward to the Shetlands.

I went below to look at the chart to determine my position and the course I should take; and, to prepare myself for difficulties I foresaw, I lighted a fire and made myself some coffee and cooked some bacon for breakfast. When I had eaten a good meal and warmed myself, a drowsiness came over me again, and I threw myself on the skipper's bed to rest for a little while.

I must have slept very soundly; for when I awoke the fire was out, and I saw by the chronometer that it was nearly eleven o'clock. But my sleep had done me great good, and I hurried on deck and looked round.

Page 110

The schooner was labouring aimlessly for the want of the helm to guide her and keep her on her course; but soon I brought her to again and she went scudding along bravely. I made no doubt that at the rate she was sailing I should sight Sumburgh Head early the next morning.

What troubled me most was that she appeared to be making a good deal of leeway. This was my one danger, for if I should be taken so much to leeward as to miss the southern point of the Shetland Mainland, then I should lose my chance of making Lerwick. Thus I might possibly be driven northward beyond the islands, and so find myself in a worse plight than if I had tried to regain the Orkneys.

The sight of a few fishing smacks on the far east inspired me with renewed hope. They were making north, but they were too far away for me to signal them. As a precaution, however, I hoisted a signal of distress in case any passing ship should see the Falcon whilst I was below or asleep at any time. But this was of no avail as it happened, for all the rest of that day I saw not another sail.

The next night was spent in weariness on deck, with a cold rain falling. I managed to keep awake without much difficulty, for I did not take any more spirits, but had a can of hot coffee beside me at the tiller, and went below several times to keep the fire alight and the kettle on the boil. At about midnight I saw a ship's light to windward, but it soon dropped below the horizon. It showed me that I was still on the sea track between Orkney and Shetland, and I kept a sharp lookout towards morning for the Sumburgh light.

Day broke with a haze over the water and a cloudy sky. The wind shifted to the northeast, bringing snow. At midday the wind was due north, and several inches of snow lay on the schooner's deck. I boiled some potatoes for my dinner, and thought that I had something to be thankful for in having a good store of provisions on board. I was beginning to think that I should need them, for I had not yet sighted the land.

Again the night came, and still I had seen no more sails. I had seen no land. The rays of the Sumburgh light never reached the poor Falcon. I felt that I was drifting to westward, being carried away in the grip of one of those mysterious ocean currents that are the terror of the northern latitudes.

On the fourth day of my lonely voyage I was oppressed by a deep sense of the danger of my situation. I realized that I had missed the Shetlands; that I could now do no more than abandon myself to the will of the wind, and trust to falling in with some vessel that might be making for the Faroe Islands or for Iceland. If I had had a companion to take watch about with me I might have got along fairly well; but with my hard work of trimming the sails, and battling with the fitful winds, I could not do without sleep, and during my hours of sleep the schooner always fell off her course, and I could make no reckoning.

Page 111

Day followed day, and my situation underwent no visible change, excepting only that the temperature became ever colder and colder, that the snow fell more constantly, and that the mist hemmed me in more closely. Sometimes at midday the mist would lift and I saw around me the great wide stretch of desolate sea, with an ice floe floating here and there. On one such occasion I fancied I saw land on the windward bow, a white mountainous peak rose high in air, and, not knowing where I might be, I took it to be one of the joekulls of Iceland. But, alas! it proved to be but an immense iceberg.

In my solitude I naturally thought much of my home, now so far away, and of my dear mother and sister, and their prayers for my safety. For their sakes I dreaded to think that I might never return to them again.

I thought, too, of Thora, and wondered many times if she was better, or if her illness had taken her away.

I had before found comfort in the thought that she was protected by the viking's stone. But, probably, I now needed its mystic help even more than she.

One afternoon—I think it must have been about the twentieth day of my loneliness—I had been asleep for some three hours, and in a kind of waking dream I saw a strange vague vision. A number of persons, whose faces I could not rightly discern, were in a large room. Amongst them was Thora, looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her in my life, and she stood pointing with an accusing finger at her brother Tom, at whose feet there crouched a lean dog, snarling at him.

I was awakened from my half sleep by the noise of a crackling and scraping of ice upon the schooner's sides. I had seen many floating pieces of ice during the past few days, but this, from the noise it made, seemed to be an unusually large piece. I feared it might even be an iceberg, and I hastened up on deck.

I shall never forget the sight that greeted me.

The whole sky was aglow with the light of the aurora borealis—or the Merry Dancers, as we call the phenomenon in Orkney. A beautiful crimson curtain, fringed with flickering streamers, spanned the northern sky. From east to west there passed a succession of trembling waves of light, many coloured, from faint rose to palest yellow and delicate green. A heavy cloud of inky blackness hung high above, and from its upper margin rays of fiery light flashed far across the sky, casting their reflections upon the sea.

Two ghostly icebergs, floating about a mile apart, reared their snowy peaks on high, and in the channel between them—most welcome sight of all—there sailed a ship.

The vessel's sails were hanging stiff about the spars and her timbers were coated with ice and snow. I steered the schooner towards her, and we slowly approached. When I

was near enough I hailed her and waited, listening for an answer to my call. No answer came.

A feeling of awe crept over me. There was something strangely desolate about her. No hand seemed to be guiding her helm. Not a man was to be seen on her snow-covered decks. She sailed aimlessly along, as though all on board had ceased to care when or how she reached her destination.

Page 112

I brought the schooner close in to the stranger's side until we touched, and then I got the large boat hook out and fixed it in her chains. None of the ship's crew appeared to have remarked my approach. What could they be doing? Perhaps, I thought, they were all below decks.

I climbed upon the Falcon's gunwale and looked through an open porthole into the vessel's after cabin. I saw there a man seated at a table, with his back towards me, apparently writing.

"Hello in there! D'ye keep no watch aboard?" I cried.

He appeared not to hear me, but held the pen in his hand as though in deep meditation.

I clambered up the vessel's side and got over the quarter rail, taking with me the end of a stout rope with which to secure the two ships together. The snow was deep on the stranger's decks, and bore no trace of footsteps. All was quiet. .

I crossed over to the companion ladder, and found my way down to the door of the cabin. I knocked with my knuckles, but no voice answered, and I went within. The man still sat at the table, without turning at my entrance. The atmosphere was cold and musty; there was no fire in the stove, although yet another man sat crouched before it. I went behind the man at the table and touched him on the shoulder.

"D'ye not hear me, sir?" I said. "Are ye deaf? or what has gone wrong?"

He did not move.

I looked down into his face.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed, drawing back in horror at the grim sight.

What did it mean? I made bold to look again, though I felt myself trembling. A green damp mould covered his cheek and forehead, and hung in a ghastly fringe over his open eyes. The man was a frozen corpse!

Terrified at the sight, I fled up the stairs with my heart wildly beating. Regaining the deck I looked about me, but there was no sign of life anywhere on the ship. Afraid to make any further search, I clambered down into the Falcon and rushed below. I cast myself before the fire, trembling and unable to realize anything for the mortal fear that was upon me. I tried to forget the sight of that face of death, with its horribly grim and mouldy features, but it haunted me with terrible clearness.

I roused up my fire and made some strong tea, and, drinking it, I wondered why I had not thought of pushing off the schooner from this death ship. It was now growing dark, and the thought of spending a whole night alone in the near presence of dead men,

whose ghosts, for all I knew, might visit me, filled my mind with strange and awful fancies. Even the sound of the wind whispering in the ropes struck me with nervous fear. But the drink of tea and what little I ate helped to revive my spirits, and gradually my sense of awe was overcome by a curiosity that came upon me—a curiosity to go aboard the vessel again and discover something more of her singular condition.

It was now wearing on towards night and I trimmed my lamps. Lighting a small lantern, I carried it with me on deck. I made the two vessels still more secure by means of a hawser rope, and then went aboard the barque. As I began to climb up her side I was conscious that she seemed to be deeper in the water than she had been when I came alongside of her, but the discovery did not at the moment trouble me.

Page 113

I carried my lantern across her quarterdeck, and with timid steps again descended into the after cabin. The lantern shed a ghostly light upon the figure of the man at the table. I walked round to the opposite side from that at which he sat and turned the light upon his face. His long beard was overgrown with the same green mould that hung over his glassy blue eyes, and yet there was a look of life about his features.

I chanced to look at the ink pot in front of him. A little black dust was all that it contained. Then I had a wish to see what he had been writing in his log book. I drew the volume towards me and turned it that I might read. The words were in English; they seemed to have been written by a cold and trembling hand. The last lines on the open page were in themselves a revelation. They were as follows:

“It is now seventeen days since we were shut up in the ice. The fire went out yesterday, and our captain has since tried to light it again. His wife died this morning. There is no more hope.”

I pondered over these words for some time, trying to realize their sad meaning.

“There is no more hope!”

How long since had that sentence been written? How long had the ice imprisoned this vessel in its cold, hard grip?

I turned back a few pages in search of some recorded date, and found this entry:

“New Year’s Day, 1831:—The ice still closing in on us. Opened last bag of biscuits. Murray died this morning.”

So long ago! the year 1831! and now it was the year 1844! The ship, then, had been lost for thirteen years!

I turned the light upon the man crouching over the stove. His features, like those of his companion, were covered with green mould, and his beard was fringed with the same grim mildew.

Taking my lantern I went through into the stateroom, and there I found the body of a woman laid upon a bed. Her features were still fresh and lifelike, but her black hair was powdered with the damp green growth. Before her a young man was seated on the floor, holding a flint in one hand and a steel in the other. A few sticks of hard wood were piled up in front of him. I could but surmise that these were the captain and his wife.

From the stateroom I turned into the pantry. Not a sign of provisions of any sort could I discover, either here or in any other part of the ship. The galley fireplace was empty of fuel, a few pieces of charred wood were the only remains of a fire.

Before leaving the ship I went forward into the fore cabin. A dog was stretched out as though asleep at the foot of the ladder, and several sailors lay in their hammocks. They also were reposing in the sleep of death. They all appeared to have died very peacefully; but whether from the want of food alone or, as I have since thought possible, from want of air, being shut up in the heart of an iceberg, I had no means of knowing.

Page 114

I did not further continue my search of the vessel that night, but went on board the Falcon, feeling sick and nervous. I could eat nothing; but having taken a drink of hot coffee, I sat before a good fire, thinking over what I had just seen, and planning what I should do.

If any one of those poor men could, in his dire need, have had a drink of my coffee, or a spoonful of the good porridge I had made but could not myself eat, heavens! how he would have relished it! Here was I, with a schooner well loaded with provisions. Some strange fate had brought me to this ship. But all that I could have supplied was useless to the sufferers now. They had perished of starvation and cold, and my food and fire were of no avail, for I had come thirteen years too late!

Chapter XXXII. The Last Of The "Pilgrim."

I could sleep but little during that long and wearying night. Terrible thoughts haunted me—thoughts of my own peril and loneliness, thoughts of the dead men that I had seen. Before daybreak I was on deck, and in the dim light I noticed that the ice which had been so scattered over the sea for the past few days had almost disappeared.

At daylight, looking overboard at the hull of the dread ship alongside, I observed two things. The first was that we were drifting perceptibly southward; this was satisfactory. The second was that the larger vessel had sunk at least a couple of inches deeper in the water; this was alarming.

Now that it was daylight I was able to read the ship's name at her stern, though I had first to knock away a quantity of ice and snow from above the letters. I found that she was the Pilgrim of Bristol. I had before perceived that she was not a whaler, nor did she appear to have been fitted out for an Arctic voyage. I marvelled much what had brought her to these seas, and whither she had been bound, and what her cargo was.

More than all did I wonder what I was to do with her. Here was I, placed by strange circumstances in command of two vessels, a schooner and a barque, and without the power or skill to take either of them into port—not knowing, indeed, where a port could be found. Had Davie Flett, Peter, and Jerry still been with me on the Falcon, we might have taken the Pilgrim to Stromness; we might also have given to her crew, or what remained of them, the decent burial for which they had waited so long. But, as things stood, I should have been thankful if I could have simply foreseen the possibility of getting out of my position of difficulty, regardless of either vessel. The sight of those dead bodies on the Pilgrim had made me utterly downcast. Their terrible fate had suggested to me the uncertainty of my own.

When I had taken some breakfast, I again went aboard the Pilgrim. I discovered that her cargo consisted for the most part of sulphur. Now, sulphur I knew to be a product of Iceland, and I judged from this that the ship had touched at that northern island.

Page 115

I went into the chart room. A couple of charts were spread out on a couch. One of them was a chart of the north of Scotland, including the Orkney and Shetland Islands; the second was a continuation of the first, and gave the whole coast of Iceland and the sea beyond as high as the seventy-seventh degree of north latitude. The ship's course was clearly traced upon the charts in lines of red ink, and, following it, I could see that the Pilgrim (sailing, I suppose, from Bristol or some other English port) had rounded Cape Wrath and gone in at Kirkwall, in the Orkneys; thence the course was continued in a regular zigzag northward to a port on the north of Iceland, and then due east, as though she had been making for Scandinavia. But here the line became broken and irregular, and swept round suddenly to the far northwest, as though the vessel had been carried away by some adverse current or contrary wind away into the Arctic seas.

Here, then, I had a rough sort of explanation of the Pilgrim's voyage.

I was leaving the captain's room, taking the charts with me, when, on giving a last look round, I noticed a sleeping berth curtained off by a plaid shawl. I drew the curtain aside, and saw something sparkling. It was a beautiful diamond ring that encircled one of the fingers of a man's thin white hand. The hand was clasped over some small object that I did not see. Turning down a heavy fur rug that covered the man's dead body I noticed that his clothing, his appearance generally, were not those of a seaman. He had a long, silky, brown beard, and a very handsome face, which, however, was marred by an ugly scar on the brow. I judged him to be about thirty-five years old. Lying on his breast was a thick notebook, which, on opening the pages, I found to be filled with writing in a foreign language.

Turning from the bed place I was again attracted by the man's sparkling ring. I gently opened the hand and drew the ring from the thin finger, and as I did so a small gold locket dropped from the hand. It contained the painted portrait of a very beautiful girl with fair hair and fine blue eyes. I looked in strange admiration at the face. It had probably been the last object the dead man had seen. With a feeling of reverence I put the locket back into his hand. But with feelings that were less reverent I placed the diamond ring on my own finger, and took possession of the notebook. These, with the charts and the log book of the man in the after cabin, I carried on board the Falcon.

That afternoon I chanced to look overboard at the Pilgrim's waterline. She had sunk at least three more inches. I felt that, whatever happened to myself and the schooner, the Pilgrim at least would never again reach port, and I determined to save from the vessel what articles might be of use to me in case I should be able to return to land. I therefore went on board again and took possession of the ship's papers, some firearms and cabin furniture, a number of English books, and a small chest that I found in the captain's room.

Page 116

The wind had fallen almost to a dead calm very soon after I had come alongside the Pilgrim, and I had thus been able to keep the two vessels together without any difficulty. But that afternoon as I sat before my fire reading a book on navigation—that part of it relating to the art of taking an observation on the sun, moon, and stars—the schooner listed over to larboard, as though the wind had caught her sails. I rushed up on deck and found that a strong breeze was blowing from the northwest, and was filling the sails of both vessels. The Pilgrim, indeed, was sailing with considerable speed, dragging the schooner along with her.

I ran forward and cast off the rope that held us together. Not too soon, for the barque was leaning over on her port side and visibly settling down.

As speedily as I could I trimmed the schooner's sails and got her free. She took the wind bravely, and I left the Pilgrim to leeward. I watched her struggling on the gradually rising waves as she tossed about aimlessly for the space of about half an hour. Then I saw her bows dip deep into the water and her stern rise high, while, with a heavy plunge and a surging sound that came to me like a melancholy groan, she disappeared, carrying her lifeless crew with her to that tomb for which they had waited so long.

Chapter XXXIII. The Light In The Gaulton Cave.

The favourable breeze from the northwest continued with little variation for several days after the foundering of the Pilgrim, and I kept the schooner on the one tack, sailing before the wind, with the tiller often tied up for many hours together without my needing to touch it. I contrived, after many failures, to take an observation on the second day, for the sky was then clear, and I had all the necessary appliances excepting only the skill to use the quadrant with a seaman's confidence. I made out that I was to the northwest of the Faroe Islands, and I made no doubt that I should sight one of that group in the course of that same day or the day after.

But such was not to be my good luck. For eight full days and nights I kept on the same course, with a dull, leaden sky above and a mist creeping over the sea, and never a bit of land could I discover, nor any light, whether of beacon or of ship.

On the twelfth day after the sinking of the Pilgrim, however, I saw, to my great joy, a strip of land on the southeastern horizon. I had not the slightest notion whether it belonged to the Faroe or to the Shetland islands, but I fancied it might be the latter. It was a small island with a high rocky coast, and a vast number of sea fowl flying about and above it.

I was some six miles from the island when I noticed a brown-sailed fishing smack bearing out towards me. As the boat came near enough I hailed it. Two men were aboard, and they answered me in good Orkney dialect. They dropped alongside of the Falcon, and I threw them a rope's end.

Page 117

My first question was to ask them the name of this island. What joy it was to me to hear once more a human voice, to see a fresh and rosy face!

“It’s the Fair Isle,” said one of them. “We thought you was lost. Where have you been, my lad, all this while past since Davie Flett fell owerboard?”

“What!” I asked, “did Davie come ashore?”

“Ay, did he,” said the fisherman; “he was picked up by his own boat, and they brought him ashore here the next morning. We sent three luggers out to seek you yourself, when we heard that you were aboard the Falcon alone, but they could find you nowhere.”

The men brought their boat astern and came aboard. I asked them further about Captain Flett, and learned that he, with the mate and Jerry, had only the evening before gone back to Orkney in a Kirkwall fishing sloop.

The two Fair Islanders then helped me to take the Falcon into their small landlocked haven, where, having supplied the good people with an abundance of provisions, I engaged the services of three fishermen to help me with the schooner back to Stromness, and on the morning following we set sail.

It was well that I got this timely assistance, and that I was not suffered to remain any longer alone on the Falcon, for on leaving Fair Isle we encountered boisterous weather. For two days we were tossed about on the great, white-crested waves of the open sea, and frequent showers of hail and sleet added to our discomfort. The storm abated somewhat as the rocky shores of Pomona hove in sight, and soon the familiar bay of Skaill and the cliffs of my native parish seaboard showed me that the voyage was approaching a welcome end.

It was evening when the schooner passed abreast of the rocks of Yeskenaby, and now I watched eagerly for the light in the windows of Lyndardy farm. As I looked landward, however, I observed something through the growing darkness that excited considerable wonder in my mind. Low down in the North Gaulton cliffs I noticed a peculiar hazy light. Presently it grew brighter and developed into a flickering flame and then disappeared. The light was not seen by any of my crew; but from its position I judged that it proceeded from a torch which someone was using in that cave in the cliff wherein Thora and I had met with our adventure some weeks before.

Chapter XXXIV. Colin Lothian Makes An Accusation.

When I went ashore at Stromness I found that Captain Flett, who had landed in Orkney three or four days before me, had not yet come over from Kirkwall; so next morning I

paid off my three Fair Islanders, who went over by land to Kirkwall, intending to return to their home by the sloop that had brought my skipper and shipmates.

I saw the schooner safely moored in the bay, with her cabin door locked and her hatchway closed, and then went up home to Lyndardy. My mother and Jessie had already heard that the Falcon had come into the harbour; they gave me a very warm welcome from this my first voyage, and listened with interest and surprise to the things I had to tell them.

Page 118

On my way through the town the following morning I chanced to meet my old schoolmaster, who walked along with me as far as the quay. He had two things that he wished to tell me: the one being that his written account of Jarl Haffling's remains had been read before the Society of Antiquaries in Edinburgh, and was to be printed in the Society's Transactions; the other matter being that proceedings were, he believed, very soon to be taken against Tom Kinlay for having appropriated a part of the viking's treasure.

When we had spoken of these matters, there was much for me to tell the dominie; but as it was too cold for us to stand on the quay, I took him with me aboard the schooner, where I had some advice to ask him regarding my course in reporting the loss of the Pilgrim to the underwriters. Seated in the cabin I told him my adventure, and showed him all the books and papers I had taken from the barque before she went down. He gave me what simple instruction I required, and offered to help me in preparing my report for Lloyd's agent. With this purpose in view I permitted Mr. Drever to take the log book ashore with him, as well as the little chest that I had taken from the captain's room on board the Pilgrim.

I was pushing off from the pier, having put the dominie ashore, when I heard myself called, and there, at the head of the piers stood my skipper, Davie Flett, newly arrived from Kirkwall. How thankful I was to see his familiar stumpy figure again I need not say.

He was coming down towards me when Carver Kinlay accosted him, and kept him in conversation. But I approached the two men, taking Flett by the hand.

He gave little notice to me beyond a very ordinary greeting; but I saw by his eyes that he was glad enough to see me, only that he probably had some business to talk over with the pilot. I stood by them, wishing they would be done.

"And how's business in the islands, Davie?" said Kinlay in an offhand tone.

"Fairly weel! fairly weel!" said the captain. "Nothing to complain o', ye ken."

"Ay, I see!" said Carver; "no sae weel but ye might do better, eh? I'm thinkin', Davie, ye need to open up a new line o' business among the crofters."

"Ah! and what business is that, pilot?" asked Flett.

"Oh, I dinna just ken that, but ye canna aye sail on the same tack. Now, supposin', for instance, ye were to start something in the liquor line. Ye have grand facilities for that, have ye not?"

"I'll not deny that I have the facilities," observed Flett, with a curious twinkle in his eye. "But ye see, pilot, there's no demand for liquor in the islands. What for would I tak' spirits to the crofters when the poor folk canna more than pay for their bannocks?"

“Why, man alive, ye can surely make a demand? Just carry a good supply of spirits in yer schooner, and I warrant ye’ll do a grand trade.”

“Ye’re maybe no far wrang there,” said Davie thoughtfully. “But then, there’s another difficulty, pilot; where will the spirits come from?”

Page 119

“Why, man,” said Kinlay, lowering his voice, “that’s just the simplest part o’ the whole business. Think ye that no whisky comes into Stromness forbye what gangs to Oliver Gray’s? Why, man, if it came to that, I could undertake to supply ye mysel’ on the most easy terms.”

“Ay, like enough,” returned Flett, with a look in his face that Carver did not observe. “Like enough—excise paid, of course?”

“Oh! we needna say anything about the excise, Davie,” said the pilot, looking uneasy. “What does’t matter about the excise?”

Davie Flett quietly stroked his bristly chin, saying:

“Weel, Carver Kinlay, it’s the first time I have heard of a pilot having a hand in that business. But, no doubt, a pilot has grand facilities. However that may be, I’m not sure that the Orkney crofters would welcome such a new line of business. Anyway, I have more respect for the crofters and for their poor families than to think of starting such a damnable traffic; nor am I in the least disposed to turn a schooner of mine into a floating grog shop. Good morning, pilot!”

Kinlay winced visibly under this taunting speech of the trading captain. Evidently he had mistaken his man in supposing that Flett would descend to his own level, and aid in promoting the nefarious traffic he suggested. Davie Flett’s intimate knowledge of the Orcadians, and the nature of his commerce with them, would certainly have made it easy for him to do a considerable retail trade. But, as I well knew, the skipper of the Falcon had systematically avoided including spirits in his stock of marketable commodities. Though himself no enemy to an occasional dram on a cold night, he knew too well the evil effects that would probably follow the introduction of strong drink among the innocent islanders, who, for the most part, had the greatest difficulty in gaining a simple livelihood. Even apart from his moral scruples, Davie Flett had excellent reasons for rejecting Kinlay’s singular proposal.

One thing that I gathered from this conversation was the suspicion that Carver, who had often posed as a very innocent man, was, either directly or indirectly, in league with the smugglers of Scapa Flow. That could be the only way in which he could obtain spirits or other illicit goods at a lower rate than through the ordinary channels of commerce; and the pilot’s evasion of the question regarding excise almost confirmed my suspicions.

Kinlay walked slowly away, and when he had disappeared, Davie Flett turned round to me with open arms as though he would embrace me.

“Halcro, my lad,” said he, “I am real glad to see you. Thank the Lord ye’re safe!”

“I might say the same to you, captain,” said I. “How were ye rescued, and where are Peter and Jerry?”

“Peter and Jerry are at Oliver Gray’s,” he answered. “Come, let us join them. As for mysel’, why, there’s nothing much to tell. I was picked up by the boat ten minutes after I dropped owerboard. We searched about for you all night. But ye mind what a mist was ower the sea. It was no wonder we lost sight of the schooner. But ye’re safe, and that’s a blessing.”

Page 120

The skipper then began to ask me a multitude of questions concerning the behaviour of the schooner. But we were now passing through the narrow street and I was interrupted; for we overtook old Colin Lothian, the wandering beggar, who was trudging along over the frost-covered stones with his dog at his heels.

“Weel, Colin, auld crony,” exclaimed the skipper as we came alongside the old man, “you’re aye travelling. Think you we’re to have some more snow?”

“Nay, captain, I dinna think it; the wind’s ower high for that,” the wanderer replied, looking up at the dull sky above Gray’s signboard.

“Then if it isna snow it’ll be a night o’ hard frost,” said the skipper. “Will ye come in and take something to warm ye, Colin?”

And Colin silently complied.

Entering the inn we found a goodly number of men gathered round the cosy stove with steaming glasses before them. Most of them were men of Pomona; but I noticed also a young man who sat somewhat apart from the rest, and in him, despite the absence of naval uniform, I had little difficulty in recognizing Lieutenant Fox of the Clasper, who had boarded the Falcon some weeks before in the Sound of Hoxa.

Then, too, there were Peter and Jerry, both of whom welcomed me with many words of kindness, and made room for me beside them.

Captain Flett ordered Oliver to bring in a glass of hot rum for himself, and two mugs of coffee for Lothian and me; and we had not been seated long before Peter Brown inquired of me the particulars of my solitary voyage in the Falcon. At first very few of the men paid much attention to my narrative, but when I came to the discovery of the ship that had been imprisoned in the ice, and told about the man I saw through the porthole, they all drew their chairs nearer to me and listened with rapt attention. When I spoke about the dead captain’s wife, and said that her features were still lifelike, there was a murmur of incredulity; none of the men would believe that I was not romancing. But the young lieutenant here interposed.

“Let the lad go on with his yarn,” he said. “Believe me it’s quite possible that the woman’s face should show no signs of death. I have known frost and ice preserve a dead body for many months.”

With that they were quieted. But again, when I spoke of the log book and said that the ship had been enclosed in the ice for thirteen years, even the lieutenant seemed to disbelieve me.

“Thirteen years!” he exclaimed. “Come now, come, draw it mild, my lad, that won’t do at all, you’ve mistaken the writing somehow. Show us the log book and then we’ll believe it.”

“I’m sure I did not mistake, sir,” I protested, “for the writing was as plain as plain could be,

“’New Year’s Day, 1831. The ice still closing in on us. Opened last bag of biscuits. Murray died this morning.’

“These were the very words, and I’ll show you them if—”

Page 121

Here I felt a trembling hand clasped on my knee, and Peter asked excitedly, “What name did you say? Was it Murray?”

“Murray! yes, that was the man who died on New Year’s Day.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Peter. “Tell me, what was the name of the ship? Did you not find that out?”

“Why, yes, Peter, I saw her name. She was called the Pilgrim—of Bristol.”

Peter became excited, and a strange pallor came over his face.

“Why, what’s come ower you, Peter?” asked Captain Flett. “D’ye know the craft?”

“Know her!” said Peter; “I should think I did. She was my own ship. I sailed in the Pilgrim as second mate for three years, and I started with her on that same last voyage.”

It was now my turn to show surprise.

“Your ship, Peter!” I said.

“Yes,” he continued. “We sailed out of Bristol in the month of February, 1830, bound for Copenhagen, calling at Iceland. But off the Lewis—or was it Cape Wrath?—I had some o’ my bones broken, and they put me ashore at Kirkwall.”

“Yes, she called at Kirkwall,” I said. “I saw that on the chart.”

“That was just before I joined the Falcon, captain,” continued Peter, turning to Flett. “I mind them all, those dead folk, even to the dog that Ericson has told us about—a retriever named Bounce. Our skipper was a Dane named Thomassen, and his wife sailed with us that voyage. She was as fine a woman as ever I see in Denmark. Murray was the first mate, and the man Ericson saw through the porthole can have been none other than Jenkins, the supercargo; he belonged to Bristol. The only thing that puzzles me is the man that Ericson saw lying in the captain’s room.”

“Maybe he went aboard in Iceland, Peter—a passenger,” suggested Flett. “Ye canna tell.”

“Ay, that’ll just be it,” mused Peter, “a passenger, no doubt. Ay, I well believe that will just be what he was.”

Lieutenant Fox at this point moved away from the circle to get a light for his pipe at the stove. He stood behind us listening to a conversation between Colin Lothian and Jack

Paterson; and as Peter Brown lapsed into silent meditation I diverted my own attention to what Colin and Jack were saying.

“Ay, Colin, but that’s news,” said Paterson. “And so Harry Ewan has fallen into their hands at last, eh!”

“Ay, just that,” said Lothian. “I was over at Clestron yestreen, and they were telling me that just as Harry was slipping round into the Bay of Houton, thinking, no doubt, that everything was clear for the landin’ o’ his cargo, the revenue boat came out from behind the Holm, like a hawk on a ferret. Ye may be sure, Jack, that Harry and his crew didna give in without a fight for it; but the navy lads had the upper hand at last, and, what was more to their purpose, they found in Ewan’s lugger five gallant casks o’ whisky, not to speak o’ half a dozen rolls o’ tobacco, and I dinna ken how muckle salt and candles.”

Page 122

Lothian had raised his voice, and several of the men had moved closer to him to hear the particulars of this raid upon one of the known smugglers of Scapa Flow. So much, indeed, was the general attention occupied that none of the men seemed to regard the entrance of yet another person into the inn parlour. This was none other than Tom Kinlay, who, with his great boots and pea jacket on and his sou'wester hat, looked as big a man as any of them.

For a moment he hesitated, on seeing the young naval officer, but, emboldened by Mr. Fox's disguised appearance, he took up a position where he could hear all that was being said.

"I canna think what had put the revenue men on the track o' the smugglers," a fisherman was saying. "Surely if any man carried the game on secretly it was Harry Ewan."

"What's to hinder them finding out?" said Jack Paterson. "Why, I ken'd it lang syne, though it isna ony business o' mine to ken."

"Ah!" put in Lothian, with the air of one who was well acquainted with the subject, "it's not the most cautious that are least suspected o' breakin' the law. Now, I ken a man that not one here would suspect, an' he has been carryin' on the business underhand this many a day. But tak' my word for it, the fox has his eye on him for all that, and it isna long before he'll be dropped on the same as Harry Ewan."

Lieutenant Fox stepped a little nearer to the speakers.

"Oho!" exclaimed Jack Paterson; "and who may that be now, Colin?"

"Weel," replied the wanderer, "it isna for me just to say, though I wouldna lift a hand to save ony smuggling rogue. But I ken o' a fine hole in the face o' the clifts o' Gaulton, that would suit a smuggler grandly for stowing away a few casks o' whisky in. Sandy Ericson was another that ken'd it. But Sandy was an honest man."

"What!" said Paterson; "d'ye mean the cave that Sandy found Carver Kinlay in, after the wreck o' the Undine?"

"Ay," said Colin.

"Then Kinlay kens o' the cave?" continued Jack.

"Doubtless," said Colin.

David Flett raised his eyebrows at this, and I thought of his conversation with the pilot.

"It's no' possible that Carver has ony hand in the smuggling, is it, Colin?" he observed.

“Weel, captain, I wonldna like to assert publicly that Carver is a smuggler himself,” said Colin; “but I shouldna be surprised though it turn out as I suspect.”

“It’s a lie ye tell!” furiously exclaimed Tom Kinlay, suddenly revealing himself, and shaking his fist in Lothian’s face. “It’s a lie ye tell, ye drivelling auld idiot! And if ye canna prove what ye say, maybe ye’ll deny it?”

Colin Lothian stood up and said coolly:

“Now just hold yer tongue, Kinlay. I ken mair then I hae said. And as to denyin’ it, that I willna do. Nay, threaten as ye will, I carena. What I say is perfectly true. Carver Kinlay’s a smuggler!”

Page 123

Tom Kinlay bit the stem of his clay pipe so hard that it broke in his mouth, so great was his rage. Then, as though words of denial were of no use, he took to the more cowardly argument of violence, and, hissing the words, “Ye auld liar, take that,” raised his hand, and struck a blow at Colin Lothian’s face.

But Jack Paterson knocked up the lad’s arm, and caught Tom round the waist, dragging him forcibly away.

“What! ye young scamp, would ye strike an auld man?” he said.

And he raised Tom Kinlay in his strong arms high in air, and almost threw him out at the open door.

“That was smartly done, my man,” said Lieutenant Fox. “I wish we had a few such fellows as you aboard the Clasper.”

And thus revealing himself, the officer finished his drink and leisurely left us.

“Who’s that chap just gone out?” asked Paterson.

“It’s Lieutenant Fox of the Clasper,” I said.

“If that be so, then,” said Colin, “it seems to me he has gone away wiser than he came.”

“Ay,” said Paterson; “it’s no use wonderin’ how the revenue lads get to ken about the smugglers, if that be the way they set about it.”

Shortly afterwards we went aboard the Falcon, and the rest of the day was spent in cleaning up after the voyage, and in balancing our accounts. In this latter occupation I think my assistance was not without value to Davie Flett, whose system of bookkeeping was original and peculiar, involving a large use of hieroglyphics, which were not always clear even to the skipper himself.

That evening when I tramped over the moor to Lyndardy the snow fell heavily—a driving, drifting snow that penetrated into every cranny it had access to, and collected in deep wreaths on meadow and moor. The cold wind blew hard from the north, carrying the fine snow past me in great clouds that curled and swept along the hard ground, forming in some places high barriers that were almost impassable, in other places leaving the ground perfectly bare.

Chapter XXXV. A Search And A Discovery.

All through that night the snow fell unceasingly, and the drifts grew deeper and deeper in the hollows.

At bedtime, after our chapter from the Bible had been read, my mother barred the door, and said:

“Let us be thankful, bairns, that we are all at home this night. I couldna sleep in my bed if I thought there was kith or kin o’ mine outside on such a night o’ blind drift. It’s just terrible.”

And I think we all slept the more comfortably, feeling that we knew of no one who was suffering in the storm.

Some hours before daylight, while I lay dreaming in my cosy box bed, I was awakened by hearing a rapping noise. I listened, fancying it was but the noise of some rat behind the wainscot that had come for shelter into the warm house; but the loud knocking came again. I hurriedly drew on some clothes and opened the outer door. A wild gust of wind and snow swished in upon me, and in the deep snow outside there stood a woman holding a lighted lantern.

Page 124

“Please d’ye ken anything about Thora Kinlay?” said she; and I recognized Ann, the servant woman of Crua Breck.

“Anything about Thora?” I asked, surprised at the inquiry. “Why, Ann, what’s gone wrong wi’ her?”

“We’re feared she’s lost,” said the woman. “She went outby in the forenoon, and she hasna come back yet.”

“Did she not say where she was going to?” I asked.

“No; and we’ve heard nothing o’ her. We canna think what can hae come ower her.”

“But where are Carver and Tom, and the boat’s crew?” I asked. “Have they not been out seeking for the lass?”

“No; they’re all away in the St. Magnus; and the mistress is ill in her bed. The shepherd and me has been seekin’ Thora all the night, and I’ve come to Lyndardy, thinkin’ ye might hae seen her yestreen.”

“No; I havena seen Thora these nine or ten weeks past,” I said. “But if she be out in this storm she must be looked for; so bide here a wee, Ann, and I’ll come out and help ye.”

I thereupon hastened within for my sea boots and oilskins. I had next to procure a lantern from the byre; and this was somewhat difficult, for the snow had drifted in a high bank against the door, and I had to remove it before I could effect an entrance. Lighting the lantern, and taking down my long staff, I noticed that my climbing lines had been taken from the peg where they usually hung. My gun, too, was amissing. No one but myself had any use for either the ropes or the gun, and I thought it curious that they were removed; but at the moment I did not concern myself about so apparently trivial a circumstance.

I soon rejoined the woman, and with her I made diligent search for Thora. Backward and forward we tramped for many weary miles in the wind and snow. We went by every road and footpath that we knew, yet not even a footmark but our own could we find.

I questioned Ann and the shepherd, who had joined us, as to where they had searched before I came out. The shepherd had been to a cottage where lived an old woman named Mary Firth, but Mary was not at home, and there was no one in the cottage—no trace of Thora.

“Has either o’ ye been across at Jack Paterson’s croft?” I then asked.

“No,” said the shepherd.

“Weel, then, that’s the only place she can have been to, that I can think of. So you two had better get back to Crua Breck and wait till daylight. I’ll gang to Jack Paterson’s, and if they ken nothing of Thora there, we can only wait till the morning.”

The two returned to the farm, therefore, and I tramped through the storm to the croft of Clouston, past the ghostly standing stones of the Druids, and along the dreary, snow-covered road.

The cottage was in darkness, with a great drift of snow against the door. I knocked with my stick several times, and presently I heard Jack Paterson’s gruff voice demanding who was there.

Page 125

“It’s me, Halcro Ericson. Open the door, Jack.”

“Save us all!” he exclaimed, raising the bolt. “What brings ye out on a night like this, lad? Come inside.”

“No; I’m seeking for Thora Kinlay; d’ye ken anything about her; she’s lost!”

“Lost! No; I ken nothing o’ her. But wait and I’ll see the bairns.”

He returned to the door in a few minutes.

“Hilda says that Thora was here yestreen,” he said. “But she went away to Crua Breck when the snow came on so bad.”

I was dismayed at his answer, for it seemed to prove to me that Thora was really lost in the snow.

Paterson offered to continue the search with me, but I advised him to dress and go to Stromness, and make inquiries in the town, while I left him and returned to Lyndardy, always searching for footprints on the snow.

At dawn I resumed the search with my sister Jessie. We first went to Crua Breck to make sure that Thora had not yet returned. We heard that Mrs. Kinlay was very ill now, and that Ann could not leave her.

We returned by the top of the cliffs, where the snow was shallow, but nothing rewarded our search until we got as far as North Gaulton, where we observed what appeared to be footprints crossing our path. They were indistinct, for the wind had disturbed the snow; but they were indeed footprints, and we followed them. They led us to the brink of the cliff, to the very spot where Thora and I had, many weeks before, gone over to descend to the cave.

“Somebody has gone over here, Hal,” said Jessie. “Look down on that jag of rock, there is the mark of a rope!”

And at once I remembered about the disappearance of my climbing lines. I looked to where Jessie pointed, and sure enough there were the marks of a rope, where it had disturbed the snow and grazed against the frosted stone. There was no rope hanging there, but I well knew that it could have been removed from below by means of a few dexterous jerks and twitches.

I reasoned with myself upon what I saw, and I considered that the person who had gone down the cliff could be none other than Thora, for I believed that none but she knew of that way down to the cave. Only she and Tom Kinlay knew that I kept my climbing

ropes in the byre; but Tom had, as Ann told me, gone out in the St. Magnus. Only Thora could have taken them, then.

What her possible reason for going down to the cave might be, I did not pause to reflect, further than surmising the probability of her having had some quarrel with her father, and of her having run away from Crua Breck as she had once threatened to do. But why do this on such a night of storm?

Page 126

The first thing to be done was to ascertain beyond doubt if Thora was now in the cave. Had it been expedient, I would at once have gone over the cliff, notwithstanding its frozen condition. Unfortunately, however, I had no other good rope than the one that had been taken away. An old one I had which was neither long enough nor strong enough for the purpose; but even this might be of service, I thought. We went back to the farm, and Jessie helped me to lengthen the rope by joining to it several shorter pieces. Then, judging that Thora, if she were in the cavern, would be suffering from want of food, we got a small basket and stored it with tempting eatables—some newly-made scones, two hard-boiled eggs, and a closed flagon filled with hot tea. Thus prepared we went together through the snow to the cliff.

Whilst I was tying the rope to the handle of our basket, Jessie gathered some stones and threw them down the precipice to attract Thora's attention to the mouth of the cave. I stood out on the brink of the cliff above the cavern and allowed the line to slip through my fingers as though I were "heaving the lead," until the basket touched upon the rock at the entrance to the cave.

For several minutes we waited for some sign that the food was accepted. Twice the line was drawn up a little, and the weight of the basket was still felt. I called for more stones to throw down, at the same time kicking a loose piece of rock well out, so that it fell with a loud splash into the deep water. Jessie went about picking up stones from among the snow, when suddenly an exclamation escaped her.

"Eh, Hal!" said she; "why here's your magic stone!"

"Impossible!" I exclaimed, unable to believe her.

"I tell you it is, indeed!" she protested; and she brought the stone to me, holding it in the palm of her hand.

I at once recognized the viking's talisman. And now I felt sure that Thora was in the cave, and that she had probably dropped the stone by some accident before going over the brink of the cliff, for it was at the very edge that Jessie found it.

When I tried the rope again, I felt that the basket was being held. Then the line was drawn further down, and again set loose, and I drew it up. The basket had been emptied.

In the afternoon, as the snow had abated, I went out, though without stating my intention, and returned to the top of the cliff, determined upon making the descent to the cave and hearing from Thora her reason for this strange freak of hers, before venturing to inform them at Crua Breck that I had discovered the girl's hiding place. The danger of a descent was very great, for the face of the rocks was in parts coated with frozen snow, and I knew that besides the difficulty of climbing with cold hands there was the

possibility of slipping upon the icy surface of the ledges. But now I had my viking stone to protect me, and with less hesitation than the occasion warranted I proceeded to climb down the precipice, and was fortunate enough to reach the bottom without accident.

Page 127

Lighting a small lantern I had brought, I walked into the cavern, thinking it strange that I saw no trace of Thora at the entrance, for I had made noise enough to attract her. Yet I noticed the flagon that had held the warm tea we had sent down in the morning lying empty on a flat stone. I continued my way further into the cavern, watching the play of light upon the huge stalactites that hung from the roof. At last I came to the stream in which Thora had so nearly lost her life. It was swollen, and rushed past with great force. At one point a kind of bridge had been formed by a couple of wooden planks that had been thrown across. Over this bridge I crossed, turning my lantern to right and left, anxiously looking for Thora, whom I also called by name. Beyond the little bridge I was sensible of a strong spirituous smell, and this became still stronger as I advanced, until, when I held my light towards a side chamber of the cave I discerned a large number of small kegs.

At once I thought of what Colin Lothian had said the day before in Gray's Inn about smuggled whisky. Here, then, I had discovered the secret store of some unlawful trader. But my surprise at this soon abated in my anxiety to find Thora. I was continuing my way yet further when my foot touched something strange. I turned my light upon it, and there, lying before me, was the sleeping form, not of Thora, but of Tom Kinlay.

Chapter XXXVI. Trapped In The Cave.

I stood for some moments transfixed with surprise at seeing Tom Kinlay in this situation. He was lying with his head and shoulders upon a square box and snoring loudly. Behind him were piled up many kegs, which I doubted not were filled with contraband spirits. As I reasoned on all this I surmised that Tom was there probably by the directions of his father, whom, after what I had heard and seen, I could not but associate with the smugglers.

I now, for the first time, saw also some shade of reason for the enmity that had existed between Carver and my father. At the time of the wreck of the Undine, years before, when he was stranded in the cavern, Carver had no doubt seen the convenience of the place for smuggling purposes. The cave was commodious, and the fact that its situation was little known among the natives gave it the additional advantage of secrecy.

I could not tell whether Kinlay had carried on his illicit traffic whilst my father was alive, but I guessed that this was so; and believing that my father was the only man who knew his secret, I saw reason sufficient for enmity. My father's death had removed the one great obstacle in the way of Carver's carrying on the smuggling unsuspected. It had also enabled him to become a pilot—a position which gave unusual opportunity to a man so unscrupulous. As pilot he was able to board any vessel that entered the Orcadian waters, and in the case of ships which came over from the Continent or from the north of Scotland with contraband goods, a transfer of cargo could be boldly

effected without exciting suspicion. And here in the cave I saw before me a part of the smuggler's store.

Page 128

Having explored the cavern by the light of my lantern, I was forced to believe that Thora was not there. I returned once more to the kegs of spirits before departing.

Tom was still sound asleep. Approaching him, I turned the light upon him and knelt down, shielding the light from his closed eyes.

Suddenly I was alarmed by hearing the noise of voices at the outer part of the cave—-the voices of many men. I blew out the light of my lantern, rose to my feet, and slipped into the shadow to watch, for I did not doubt that these were the smugglers.

I had not stood there very long before I observed a flickering of lights, and the sound of men's feet and voices came nearer and nearer. Then I saw the lights of two lanterns, and distinguished the figures of five men. Their sea jackets were powdered with snow.

"Now, lads," said a hoarse voice that I recognized as Carver Kinlay's, "look smart. Get as many as ye can into the boat, then roll the others into the water."

His eyes rested upon the sleeping form of his son.

"Hullo!" he cried, "why, here is the young devil after all!"

Then, crossing the plank bridge, he gave Tom a heavy kick in the ribs, and placed his lantern on the top of one of the casks.

Tom awoke with a start, and I saw him tremble as in fear. His face was ghastly white.

"Where have ye been all night?" growled his father, without waiting for an answer; "hurry along here and help to get these kegs into the boat."

Young Kinlay rose and staggered after the men. Evidently he had broached one of the whisky kegs.

I drew closer within the shadow of the rock and watched the proceedings. The smugglers carried away one by one as many of the spirit kegs as I believed might lie in the bottom of the St. Magnus. This was done in a great hurry as though much depended upon getting the things cleared away, and Carver was for ever urging his men to "hurry up!"

Then they all set to work, and rolled what remained of the casks into the stream, until, after about an hour's time, there was left no trace of the smuggler's store, excepting only the square box that Tom had slept upon.

Carver Kinlay knelt down beside this chest and unlocked it. He turned over many bundles of papers, and I saw him take out what appeared to be a roll of bank notes and

thrust them into his breast pocket. He paused suddenly in his work at the hurried return of his men, and grasped at the box like a miser suddenly surprised.

“The hounds are on us!” exclaimed one excitedly. “They have taken the boat!” And almost immediately there was a tramp of feet coming up the cavern, and a blaze of light from several torches shining on drawn cutlasses.

Kinlay turned with the fury of a wild animal that finds itself trapped, and stood at bay before a company of blue jackets, who were headed by the young officer I had twice before met, Lieutenant Fox of the revenue cutter Clasper.

Page 129

“In the Queen’s name, I arrest you, Carver Kinlay!” said the officer in a firm, loud voice.

“Not so easily,” said Kinlay, who was evidently determined not to surrender himself without resistance; and planting one foot firmly on the little bridge which spanned the stream, he drew a large revolver and pointed it full at the lieutenant’s head.

Standing very near to him, in a dark crevice at his right hand, I saw the movement. I saw Carver’s eyes flash in the torchlight, and just as the click of the trigger sounded I sprang quickly forward and knocked the man’s hand upward. The shot rattled among the stalactites of the roof, and the report filled the cavern with deafening noise.

Kinlay was utterly taken aback by what happened, and as the weapon fell from his hand and dropped into the deep water, he turned instinctively to see who had attacked him. Two of the cutter’s men thereupon crossed the planks and encountered him on the large flat rock whence the casks had been taken, while I made my way past them.

I was walking coolly over the little bridge, with my extinguished lantern in my hand, when the lieutenant stepped forward and took me by the collar.

“Aha, youngster!” he exclaimed, “I’ve seen you before. You’ve done me a good turn, but I must take you nevertheless.”

And he retained his hold of my jacket, giving directions to his men the while.

I made a gentle protest, showing no resistance, and stood by the officer, looking excitedly at the scuffle that ensued between the smugglers and the revenue men. Tom Kinlay had already been seized and dragged off to the cutter’s boat. One of the smugglers had retreated to the inner recesses of the cave, taking refuge in the darkness, and the three others were having a severe fight with the sailors, using large knives in their defence.

Two of them were speedily overpowered, one of them receiving a serious wound in his side, the other a great cut across his cheek. They were both taken to the boat, and there kept under strict guard. The third man managed to get over to Kinlay.

Carver, on losing his pistol, had taken out his sheath knife, and armed with this he fought with furious determination, standing with his back against a wall of rock. One of his antagonists, in trying to lay hold of his hand, was badly cut, and the other disabled by a blow in the face. But when Carver was joined by his comrade there was a rush of the cutter’s men across the bridge, and the smugglers were finally conquered.

They had yet to be brought over to the outer side of the stream, however, and this was a work of no small difficulty. A couple of the sailors walked over the narrow planks, one before and one behind their prisoner, who made an unsuccessful attempt to break loose.

Then Carver was brought to the bridge in a similar manner; and he also attempted to escape by making a spring forward when he reached the middle of the planks. His captors, however, were ready for him. The man behind him had held his two hands, and when by main force he got his right hand free, the sailor held with such a tight grip to the other that Carver was pulled round and he overbalanced himself.

Page 130

A stiff struggle for mastery then took place. Kinlay was the stronger man, and with his free hand he dealt the sailor a hard blow on the chest. The sailor staggered and fell across the narrow planks, but still holding Kinlay's left hand he pulled the pilot smuggler down with him. The sailor let his hand go free. Then Kinlay tripped, and, uttering a wild yell, fell headlong into the rushing stream.

The lieutenant, seeing what had happened, loosened his grasp of my collar and hurried over to his men to try to save Carver from the dreadful current. One of the wooden planks was thrown into the water for him to take hold of, but Carver must have failed in his attempt to reach it. One of the cutter's men ran to the mouth of the cave and brought back with him a long rope—my own climbing rope—which he had seen lying on the rocks: this also was too late, for Carver was already carried off by the swift stream, no doubt to be taken over into that gulf where Thora had so nearly lost her life.

There now remained only one other of the smugglers to be captured, and he was ultimately discovered crouching like a terrified dog in a dark corner. Before the revenue men left, however, they made a careful search of the cavern; but they brought nothing down to the boat excepting the wooden box that Kinlay had been searching in when he was surprised by the arrival of the blue jackets.

When this excitement was over, and the lieutenant had ordered his men to return to their boat, I was wondering what their movements would be in regard to myself. Would they leave me to climb the cliff and go home, or would they take me round to Stromness?

I was not left long in doubt. Two of the sailors, still with drawn cutlasses, took me into the bow of the longboat and placed me there beside Tom Kinlay and the other prisoners, and bound me to them with my own rope. Then the lieutenant took his seat in the stern sheets, his men plied their oars, and we were taken out to the cutter, which lay anchored a few fathoms out from the rocks.

We were all taken aboard of her. Her white canvas was hoisted and her anchor weighed, and soon we were speeding blithely along in the direction of Stromness, with the St. Magnus towed astern.

Chapter XXXVII. In Which I Am Put Under Arrest.

When we were well under weigh, and I had done admiring the cutter's trim fittings and the smartness of her men, I turned to consider the condition of my unfortunate companions. Two of them were badly wounded, and they were ordered to be taken below to have their wounds dressed, whilst the others were now being placed in irons. They were bound hand and foot to a gun carriage.

Tom Kinlay, who was beside me under the starboard bulwarks, watched the men with consternation in his face. He was evidently very much afraid. I saw him put his hand to his breast as though he felt there for something. I thought he was searching for some weapon; but whatever it was he did not find it. He opened his coat and still searched.

Page 131

“Hang it!” he exclaimed, “I must have lost it;” and then he looked at me accusingly.

Somehow I thought just then of my viking’s stone that I had recovered so strangely, and as I took it from my pocket and assured myself that it was all safe, I began to wonder how it had come to be left there at the top of the cliff. How had Thora allowed it to go out of her keeping? And Thora, where now was she?

Suddenly I felt a warm breath on my face. I turned and saw Tom Kinlay glaring at me.

“Ah! it is you,” he exclaimed; “you’ve stolen it from me!”

And he made a grab at the stone, which fell from my hand upon the deck, for the string had been taken from it, and I had consequently not been able to hang it round my neck. We both scrambled upon the deck, each eager to secure the talisman. But I managed to push Kinlay away, and picking up the stone I put it safely in my breast pocket just as two of the cutter’s men came towards us.

“Now, then, youngster,” said one of them, taking Tom by the shoulder, “it’s your turn now, my lad;” and he proceeded to adjust a pair of handcuffs upon Tom’s wrists.

At the same time the other sailor came to me and was in the act of binding me in a similar manner when Lieutenant Fox came forward from the after deck.

“Hold hard, Gillions!” he said. “This youngster needn’t be treated like the others, I think. Leave him to me;” and addressing me he asked, “What is your name, my lad?”

“Halcro Ericson, sir,” I replied.

“Well, Ericson, tell me, how came you to be mixed up in this affair? I thought I saw you on board that coasting schooner, the Falcon, the other night. Have you turned smuggler since then?”

“No, sir; I was in the cave for something else. I was down seeking for Thora.”

“For Thora? What’s that—some sort of birds?”

“Birds! No; for the lass that was lost in the snow yestreen.”

“Queer place to look for a lass, that, I must say! But how did you get there if you did not go round with Kinlay?”

“I climbed down the cliff, sir.”

“Come, come, none of your nonsense!” said the officer. “Don’t tell me you climbed down that cliff. I know it’s impossible.”

“It’s not impossible,” I rejoined, “for I have climbed it many a time before.”

“Well, it’s to be hoped the girl was worth risking your neck for. However, as you did not find her after all, you deserve to get off, to look for her in a more likely place.”

Then turning to the seaman he said:

“Off with the irons, Gillions, and put the youngster ashore when the anchor’s down.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” said Gillions.

Accordingly I was set free; and seeing my rope lying on the deck I coiled it up ready to take ashore with me, taking it aft to the gangway.

We were by this time abreast of the Ness and entering Stromness Bay. Notwithstanding the continued falling of snow, several boats put out from the jetties of the harbour when the Clasper was seen sailing in with her prize; and as the chains, rattled over her bow and she came to an anchorage close inshore, she was surrounded by inquiring fisher folk.

Page 132

In one of the first boats that came alongside sat Bailie Duke wrapped in a great gray plaid. He hailed one of the petty officers of the cutter, and Mr. Fox came forward and asked him aboard.

“What’s all this about?” said Mr. Duke, addressing the lieutenant as he stepped on the deck. “I see ye’ve made a prisoner of our pilot.”

“I’ve made prisoner of a smuggler, sir, pilot or not pilot,” said Mr. Fox.

“But on whose authority have you taken the St. Magnus? Do you not know that she is our pilot boat?” asked the bailie.

“On the highest authority, Mr. Duke—the Queen’s,” replied the lieutenant. “If Kinlay was your pilot, then all the greater was his offence. His men must suffer the penalty for their crime, and I suppose the port must just appoint another pilot, that’s all.”

“His men must suffer, you say?” said Mr. Duke, not understanding. “Then you do not accuse Carver Kinlay himself of smuggling?”

“I should certainly have done that, Mr. Duke; but Carver Kinlay, unfortunately, is dead.”

“Carver Kinlay dead!” exclaimed the bailie.

“Yes; he lost his life just now in the Gaulton Cave, where we discovered him and his crew in the act of carrying off contraband spirits.

“I suppose,” the officer continued, “we can send the prisoners ashore to your jail, sir?”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Duke; “we’ve plenty of room there: send them ashore. But they will be tried at Kirkwall, not here, you know.”

“I know,” returned the officer; “but you see the roads are blocked with this snow. There’s no getting to Kirkwall except by sea, and I have another little affair of this sort on hand tonight.”

Bailie Duke was naturally inquisitive, and at the mention of this other “little affair” he pricked up his ears.

The lieutenant drew him to the other side of the deck, and they both remained there in earnest conversation. Mr. Duke had his back towards me. He had not observed me as yet. But the cutter’s boat was being got out to take me ashore, and as I was anxious to hear from him whether Thora had been found, I walked across and waited until he should turn round. As I stood there I heard my own name mentioned.

“Oh, it’s just as clear as daylight!” said the magistrate, in reply to a question from Mr. Fox. “I have traced it all out. There is little doubt that it was young Halcro Ericson that did it.”

“Halcro Ericson! What! the boy Halcro Ericson?” exclaimed the lieutenant with undisguised surprise. “Why, then, that accounts for our finding him hiding in the cave! I would never have thought it.”

“What!” said the bailie. “You don’t mean you have got the lad?”

“Yes, I do, sir; that is if you have no other natives with the same outlandish name. He’s on board, I assure you. Ay, and here he is.”

The officer turned round towards me where I stood with my lantern in one hand, and the coil of rope over my shoulder.

Page 133

Bailie Duke looked at me with a frown on his brow, and his eyes were steadily fixed upon my face, which could only have reflected the innocence of my heart.

“I cannot believe it,” he said in an undertone; “and yet the thing’s so clear.”

Then he laid a hand sternly on my shoulder, and said, “Ericson, my lad, I’m really sorry; but, you see, there’s no use evadin’ the hand o’ the law, and I must make you my prisoner.”

“Your prisoner, Mr. Duke! But you cannot think that I have anything to do with the smuggling?”

“Smuggling!” said he. “I said nothing about smuggling. With that I have no business. No, it’s not the smuggling, it’s the murder!”

“Murder! What murder?” I gasped.

“The murder of Colin Lothian, the wandering beggar,” he said.

Colin Lothian murdered! I was stunned and perplexed by these terrible words. But, without further explanation, Mr. Duke gave orders to some men in the boat he had come out by to make a prisoner of me. Two men came aboard and bound my arms about me with my own rope, and conducted me into the boat, while the bailie got down into the stern, where he sat ruminating as we were rowed towards the landing pier.

I was marched between two guards up the narrow street of Stromness, and the cold snow fell down upon me. At the doors of the houses women and children, whose faces were all so familiar, looked at me, some with pity, some with shrinking fear. I heard strange utterances of accusation.

“Who would have thought it, that he could hae done such a thing?” said one.

“See how the lad hangs his head!” said another.

“Ay, but it’s a young murderer he is,” said a third.

And this word “murderer” sounded in my ears from every side, and much I wondered what it all could mean.

When we arrived at the door of the prison house a crowd of the townspeople awaited us. I looked round the faces fearlessly, and in their midst I recognized the wrinkled face of my skipper, Davie Flett.

“Cheer up, my hearty!” said he, as I passed by him. “We’ll not heave anchor till ye come out; and you’ll not be long, I’ll warrant.”

But I confess it was difficult for me to feel cheerful at that moment. Indeed, when the prison doors closed upon me, when I found myself alone in my dark cell, I became dazed and stupid, and began to think that perhaps after all I was the murderer that I had been called. Yet what could it all mean? Colin Lothian murdered! My old friend Colin Lothian!

Chapter XXXVIII. Accused Of Murder.

I need not prolong my narrative by telling you in what way I spent that first night in the cold solitude of my prison cell, or by recording the thoughts that occupied my mind through those long and weary hours. My jailer, one Jimmy Macfarlane, an honest, kind-hearted man, who had known my father, gave me a basin of hot porridge before he locked me up for the night, and left with me, as though by accident, a good, thick horse cloth to keep me warm. Conscious of my innocence, and trusting in the justice of my accusers, I slept well and soundly, nor did I awake until late on the following morning, when the Sabbath light stole through the crossbars of the little window, and the opening of the door aroused me.

Page 134

I heard Macfarlane speaking with some one.

“Ye’ll find him in here, captain; but dinna stay ower long wi’ him; for, ye ken, I’m breakin’ the rule in letting ye see the lad.”

“All right, Jimmy!” said a voice that I at once recognized as that of Captain Flett.

“Well, Ericson, my lad,” he said, entering the cell and offering me his hand. “They’ve not put the hangman’s rope round your neck yet, I see.”

Then he added in a more serious tone, “Come, I canna stay with you long. Let us talk the affair over, and see what’s to be done.”

“First of all then,” I said, “I want to know what it’s all about. Why have they put me in here?”

“What! have they not told you the particulars?”

“No; I know nothing but that old Colin Lothian has been murdered.”

“And ye dinna ken who it was that murdered him? Tell me the truth now.”

“I know nothing at all about it,” I said.

“Well, then, I’ll just tell you all that I know myself, Ericson.”

And sitting down beside me on an old box that was in the cell, the skipper proceeded with his account of the affair, of which the following is the substance.

On the afternoon following that of the beginning of the snowstorm, Captain Flett waited for me on the schooner, for he wanted to set sail again. Every now and then he went up the companion ladder to look out for me towards the snow-covered town. While thus engaged he heard the boatswain’s whistle sounded on board the revenue cutter, then lying in the outer bay, and he was admiring the alertness of the blue jackets as they got the cutter ready for sailing, when a small boat that he had not noticed came alongside of the Falcon, and Bailie Duke accosted him.

“Captain Flett,” said the bailie excitedly, “I want the lad Ericson; where is he?”

“’Deed I can’t tell you that, your honour,” replied Flett. “I have been waiting for him here mysel’ all the day.”

“Just as I expected,” said the bailie, with evident annoyance; “the young rascal has escaped. When did you last see him, captain?”

“I saw him yestreen, sir. But was it anything of importance you’re wanting the lad for?”

“Anything of importance! Ay, is it of importance! For, know you this, Captain Flett, the lad’s nothing but a murderer, a murderer in cold blood!”

“Impossible!” ejaculated the skipper. “When heard you of the lad harming body or beast? But who is it that’s murdered, bailie?”

“Colin Lothian, the gaberlunzie,” replied the magistrate.

“Man, you astonish me,” exclaimed Flett. “Poor auld Lothian! And when did the thing happen?”

Page 135

Bailie Duke then told how during that morning a party of men had been sent up from the town to the moor to search for the lost Thora Kinlay. They did not find the girl. But Jack Paterson and another fisherman, while crossing a very lonely part of the moor, had discovered a poor dog, whose pitiful whining had drawn them to the spot. The animal was at once recognized as the dog that had always been seen at the heels of the wandering beggar, and it stood shivering in the cold snow that had gathered there in a deep wreath. The dog refused to move from the spot, and the men cleared away some of the snow, when they came upon the stiff and lifeless body of Colin Lothian.

At first they thought the man was merely asleep, for his woollen plaid was spread over him like a blanket. But on raising the garment they saw marks of blood that had trickled upon the snow and sunk down into the underlying heather. Paterson at once despatched his companion to Stromness for Dr. Linklater, whilst he himself went up to a small cottage which stood about two hundred yards away. Nobody was in the cottage, but there were signs of some one having been there very recently, for the peats were yet smouldering on the hearthstone, and on a little table lay a towel stained with blood.

Dr. Linklater arrived sooner than Paterson expected him, and after a careful examination of the body he stated that Lothian had been dead several hours, and that his death was the result of foul play. The man had, in fact, been murdered.

“I’m real sorry to hear this, sir,” said Flett to the bailie. “It was only yestreen I was speakin’ wi’ poor Colin at the inn. He’ll be sorely missed in the countryside. But tell me, Mr. Duke, what for d’ye say that young Ericson has anything to do wi’ it?”

“Because,” the magistrate replied, “simply because the gun that the man was shot with was found near the spot where he died. That gun, captain, is identified as Halcro Ericson’s.”

“But surely ye canna convict the lad on such slight evidence, sir. He’s innocent, I’ll swear!”

“I trust he may prove so, captain. But you must allow that the evidence is against him. Colin has been shot dead, and with Ericson’s gun. Ericson is not to be found; no one knows where he is. That is clearly against him; and as a magistrate I am bound to arrest him on suspicion. In fact, I have already issued a warrant for his arrest, and if you know anything of his whereabouts, just say so, Davie; for the lad’s not at his home, and his mother knows nothing. They say he is out seeking for young Thora Kinlay; but it seems clear to me that he has fled from the consequences of his foul crime.”

“Well,” said Flett, “I have told you all I know, that the lad left the schooner here before the snow came on so heavy. I have been expecting him aboard all the day. I know no more, Mr. Duke, and that’s the truth.”

At this point of my skipper's account we were interrupted by Macfarlane, who put his head in at the door and said:

Page 136

“Come away, Davie. I canna let ye stay longer, man.”

“Ay, ay, just another minute, Jimmy,” said Flett.

Then turning to me again, he continued: “Weel, I’m just away up to Dominie Drever’s. The dominie was aboard the Falcon just before the Clasper came in yestreen, and I saw him again after ye were brought here. He was up at Lyndardy this mornin’ seeing your mother for information about all your movements these two days past. And now I’m to go up to the schoolhouse and tell him—what shall I tell him, Halcro?”

“Just tell him this, Davie: that the last time I saw poor Colin Lothian was when we were in Gray’s Inn. That I went straight home from the Falcon, and never left the house till the servant woman at Crua Breck knocked me up to seek for Thora. That I was out looking for her part of the night and all the morning, and then that I climbed down the Gaulton Cliff, thinking I would find her in the cave. There, instead of finding Thora, I was taken along with the smugglers and brought in the Clasper to Stromness, where Bailie Duke himself arrested me.

“There, that is the sum of it all. Tell it to Mr. Drever, and he will believe it and understand.”

“Very good,” said the skipper, and then he left me.

He had not gone out many minutes before Jimmy Macfarlane came into the apartment and made a fire in the grate, and brought me water to wash myself, and a good breakfast of coffee and fried bacon. When I was made comfortable he left me alone again, and only disturbed me during the rest of the day to bring in my meals or more fuel for the fire.

Chapter XXXIX. An Unprofessional Inquiry.

Whatever the common opinion among the people of Stromness may have been with regard to the death of Colin Lothian, there was one who, all along, never allowed himself to doubt my innocence. Dominie Drever had his private views on the matter, and he was not over eager to communicate them to other persons. He even kept them from myself in a great measure, and only gathered such information regarding my movements as Captain Flett and my people at Lyndardy were able to supply. There were some other aspects of the case, quite apart from myself, that he was anxious to make clear, and with this purpose in view he had gone quietly about the town gathering evidence and summoning an array of important witnesses.

Not until late on this Sunday afternoon did he come to see me; and then our interview lasted but for a few moments. Macfarlane showed him in just as I was finishing my tea and settling myself cosily before the fire.

“Ah, Halcro, my lad!” he exclaimed in his breezy way, “I see they are making you comfortable here. I hope you find it no great hardship to be cooped up here, eh? It’s hardly so bad as your experience on the Falcon, I should think?”

“No, sir, and I hope it will not last so long either,” I said, taking the hand he offered me.

Page 137

“Little fear o’ that,” said he. “Mr. Duke will send you home i’ the morning; but it’s as well you should stay here until the evidence is complete. Bailie Thomson will not agree to your being set at liberty before the inquiry.”

“And when is the inquiry to be?” I asked.

“At ten o’clock tomorrow morning,” said Mr. Drever. “You see, Halcro, they’re not to put you on your trial in any formal way. That could only take place at Kirkwall, or before the procurator fiscal. But the roads are all blocked wi’ snow, and there’s no getting to Kirkwall just now. Even the St. Magnus smugglers, and another gang that Mr. Fox arrested yestreen up at Sandwick, have to be imprisoned here until the roads are opened up. But it will be easy to prove your innocence. Thora will make that perfectly clear, as ye will see.”

“Thora!” I exclaimed. “Then Thora has been found?”

“Found! certainly. She never was lost. However, ye’ll hear all about that matter again. Just leave it all to me, Halcro, and dinna be downcast about biding here another night. But I must away now. Good e’en to ye!”

“Good e’en, sir!”

The good man was leaving me abruptly, when at the door he turned back.

“Oh, Halcro!” said he, as though suddenly remembering something, “they tell me that your viking’s stone has been amissing. Have ye heard anything of it yet?”

“Why, yes, Mr. Drever,” I replied. “I found it at the head of the Gaulton Cliff on Saturday.”

“Just so,” said he smiling, “I had heard that. Now that stone may be wanted in evidence. Would you mind letting me have it?”

“Here it is, sir,” I said, handing it to him.

And taking it with him, he left me to my thoughts.

The morning of the inquiry came round, and at about ten o’clock Jimmy Macfarlane opened the door of my place of confinement and beckoned me to follow him. He conducted me through a long passage into a large room adjoining the prison house.

It was a comfortable apartment, with a bright peat fire burning on the hearth, before which Colin Lothian’s dog lay sound asleep. Close to the fire and athwart the room was a long table, where, as I entered, I saw Bailie Duke seated at his ease in a large armchair. At his right sat Bailie Thomson—a man with a forbidding face, whom I had

often of late seen in the company of Carver Kinlay. At Mr. Duke's left hand was the schoolmaster, prim and businesslike as I had often seen him look in the school when anything of importance was pending, such as a class examination. Near him sat Lieutenant Fox, looking very handsome in his naval uniform, and very much at his ease. The only other person in the room was Dr. Linklater, who smiled a greeting to me as I stood at the door.

"Take a seat there, Ericson, my lad," said Mr. Duke, indicating a chair opposite to him in the middle of the floor.

And then he turned to the dominie, speaking with him in an undertone.

Page 138

These five men, who were all in different degrees known to me, presented no very formal aspect, and I felt no dread of what was to follow. As I sat there awaiting the opening of the proceedings I looked straight before me at the long table. Here, lying in front of the two bailies, were my fowling piece and a coil of rope. Before Mr. Drever lay Jarl Haffling's talisman; also, to my surprise, I observed the wooden box that I had seen in the cave, and the little chest that I had taken from the chart room of the Pilgrim; on the lid of the latter was the log book of that ill-fated ship.

What these relics of the Pilgrim could possibly have to do with the murder of Colin Lothian I was at a loss to know. But their importance in the issue of the case will presently be seen.

"Halcro Ericson!" said Bailie Duke.

I rose to my feet and faced him. He tapped his snuffbox and took a large pinch, and leisurely passed the box to the dominie. Presently, after much use of his bandanna handkerchief, he continued:

"Halcro Ericson, you were arrested on Saturday last on suspicion of being the murderer of Colin Lothian—a poor, worthy man, known and respected in the Mainland for many, many years. At the time of your arrest on board the Clasper, the evidence against you was circumstantially complete, and appeared to be conclusive. Further evidence of an important nature, however, has since been gathered by Mr. Drever here, and it has brought new light upon the matter. You are not, I am happy to say, to be formally charged with the murder of Lothian; but, in the absence of the proper official—the procurator fiscal—it is necessary that I, as the senior bailie of Stromness, should make some inquiry into this case, you see. You will presently be examined with other witnesses, and you will have an opportunity of, I hope, clearing yourself of whatever suspicion is still attached to you. Sit down again, Halcro."

Concluding this speech, Mr. Duke rang a little hand bell that was on the table, and Macfarlane appeared at one of the doors.

"Just send in Jack Paterson and Steenie Barrie," he said; and presently the two fishermen were ushered in. Paterson, entering first, touched his forelock to the magistrate, and similarly saluted Lieutenant Fox.

"Jack, my man," said Mr. Duke, "just let us know what way ye found auld Colin's body."

Paterson stepped up to the table, twirling his sou'wester round and round by the brim between his two big hands.

“Weel, ye see, Mr. Duke,” began Jack falteringly, “I was lying in my bed on Friday night when young Halcro Ericson knocked at the door and telt me that Thora Kinlay was out in the storm and couldna be found. So I cam’ along to Stromness—”

“Ay, but dinna mind that part o’ the story, Jack,” interrupted Mr. Duke; “just begin where Steenie and you heard the dog.”

“Yes, Mr. Duke,” said Paterson, dropping his sou’wester in his nervousness. And then he repeated what Captain Flett had already told me.

Page 139

“Did you both go into the cottage?” asked the bailie.

“No,” said Jack, “Steenie ran away down to the town to tell the doctor. I went into Mary’s mysel’. But Mary was away at Kirkwall, ye ken. I saw that some person had been there, however; for the peats were still hot, and there was some roasted potatoes on the table, forbye a cloth that had blood on it.”

“And you waited about there until Dr. Linklater came?”

“Yes, Mr. Duke.”

“Now do you recognize this as the gun you found?” Mr. Duke asked, touching my fowling piece.

“Ay, that’s just it,” replied Jack.

Bailie Thomson then asked: “Have you ever seen the gun before, Paterson?”

“No,” said Jack.

“What! have you never seen Ericson with it?”

“Never,” said Paterson, “though they tell me it is Halcro’s gun.”

“Are you sure that Ericson had not the gun with him when he knocked you up on Friday night?” persisted Mr. Thomson.

“Yes, quite sure,” said Jack.

“And where did Ericson go to after he left you?” questioned Mr. Thomson.

“I dinna ken, Mr. Thomson. He said he was to gang back to Lyndardy. But ye’d better ask himsel’, had ye not?”

And Paterson looked round to where I sat.

Mr. Thomson seemed to have no further questions to ask, and Bailie Duke said:

“Very well, Jack, that will do now. You may both go.”

And Jack Paterson went away, followed by Barrie.

“Now, doctor, would you just let us hear what you have to say, please?” said Mr. Duke, turning to Dr. Linklater.

The doctor kept his seat, and said:

“Mr. Drever came to me early on Friday morning and told me that Colin Lothian had been shot dead over by Mary Firth’s cottage, and I went out. I met the man Barrio on the way, and he turned back with me, conducting me to the spot. I found Lothian quite dead. He had been dead quite two hours, I should say. There was a gunshot wound in his back under the left shoulder. I got Paterson and Barrie to take off a door in Mary Firth’s room, and we carried the body upon it down to my house. I made an examination of the body, and extracted several swan shot from the left lung.”

Dr. Linklater then passed a piece of paper containing the shot to Bailie Duke, saying: “I suppose you need me no longer, bailie?”

“No, doctor, that’s all,” said Mr. Duke. “Just tell Macfarlane to send David Flett in, will you?”

Flett came in and took his place before the magistrates, and gave information as to the time of my leaving the Falcon on Friday night.

Mr. Thomson, questioning him, asked:

“Do you know of any motive that the lad Ericson might have in committing this crime? Was there any enmity between him and Lothian?”

“Certainly not. How could ye think so, Mr. Thomson?” said my skipper. “Why, Colin and Halcro were most friendly. It seems to me ridiculous that anyone should ever suspect such a thing o’ the lad!”

Page 140

Mr. Duke here rang his bell and told Macfarlane to bring in Tom Kinlay.

It was a considerable time before Tom appeared, with the jailer at his side, for he had to be brought out of the cell in which the smugglers were imprisoned. As Flett went out, he came forward slowly, looking pale and haggard. I noticed him start nervously as Mr. Duke, putting forth his hand to take up his snuffbox, happened to touch the gun.

There was some dispute between Bailie Duke and Bailie Thomson as to which of them should first question Kinlay. But it was arranged that Mr. Thomson should do so. He commenced by saying to Tom:

“You were taken in the North Gaulton Cave on Saturday, were you not?”

But at this point Mr. Drever made an unexpected interruption. Hitherto he had, during the proceedings, been quietly but busily writing down the evidence, for use in the formal indictment which, as I afterwards learned, Mr. Duke was to submit to the procurator fiscal, whose deputy he was.

“Mr. Duke,” said the dominie, “do you not think, in view of the importance of Kinlay’s evidence, that it is advisable to administer the oath?”

“Ah! you’re right, dominie; yes, certainly,” said Mr. Duke.

“No, no,” objected Bailie Thomson. “Why should this witness be treated differently from the others?”

“Mr. Drever is right, Thomson,” said Mr. Duke. “We must have the oath.”

“I see no reason for it,” said Bailie Thomson. “This is not a formal or judicial inquiry; it is a simple precognition of witnesses.”

“I think, Mr. Thomson,” mildly interposed the schoolmaster, “that you will see a little later on the necessity of it. Besides, you must remember that Kinlay is already a prisoner on two separate charges.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Duke, “both for smuggling and for having contravened the law of treasure trove.”

Then addressing Tom Kinlay he said:

“Thomas Kinlay, you will now hold up your right hand and repeat these words distinctly after me.”

Kinlay raised his hand above his head and repeated the solemn and impressive words of our Scotch adjuration:

“I swear by Almighty God, as I shall answer to God at the great day of judgment, that I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God!”

When this was done Mr. Duke leaned back in his chair and said:

“Now, Mr. Thomson, if you please.”

“You were taken in the cave of Gaulton on Saturday, were you not?” repeated Mr. Thomson, addressing Tom.

Tom sullenly answered “Yes.”

“Now, tell us,” the bailie continued, “when you entered that cave with your father and the crew of the St. Magnus, whom did you find there?”

Tom had first seen me when I was taken down to the cutter’s boat, and no doubt he had believed that it was I who had guided the revenue men to the cavern. He, therefore, grasped at the interpretation implied by the bailie’s question, and, whether intentionally or not, suppressed the fact that he was himself in the cave before the smugglers arrived, he merely said:

Page 141

“We didna find anybody in the cave.”

“That is strange,” said Mr. Thomson. “Then you saw nothing of Ericson in the cave?”

“Nothing, sir, until I saw him in the Clasper’s pinnace.”

“Of course we are to understand,” observed Bailie Duke, “that Ericson might hide in the cave without being discovered by the smugglers. Lieutenant Fox had better be questioned about his manner of arresting the lad;” and he looked towards the officer.

Mr. Fox bent forward in his chair and said: “I first saw Ericson in the cave when, as I believe, he saved my life by knocking a pistol from Carver Kinlay’s hand. I believe the lad was in there before the crew of the St. Magnus.”

“Then that is proof sufficient that Ericson was hiding,” said Mr. Thomson with an air of triumph.

“Halcro! come forward, will you?” said Mr. Duke, “and stand beside Kinlay.”

I did as he requested, and then I was required to take the oath as Kinlay had taken it. Mr. Thomson looked satisfied.

“Tell us, Ericson,” said Bailie Duke, taking a pinch of snuff, and then bending forward with his elbows on the table, “tell us this: When you bravely, and at the risk of breaking your neck, climbed down the North Gaulton Cliff to render assistance, as you supposed, to Thora Kinlay, did you find anyone in the cave?”

“Yes, Mr. Duke,” I answered with directness, “I found Tom Kinlay. He was alone and asleep.”

“You descended the cliff without the aid of ropes, I believe?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you know any other lad in Pomona who could have done such a thing? Kinlay, there, for instance?”

“He might have done it, sir, but not in winter.”

“How, then, do you account for Kinlay getting into the cave?”

“I suppose, sir, that he had my ropes;” and I pointed to the coil of rope on the table.

“Now, further, do you recognize this gun?”

“Yes; it is mine.”

“When did you last use it?”

“Two days before I went away in the Falcon, more than two months since.”

There was a pause here and a passing of the snuffbox. Bailie Duke then turned to Kinlay, holding the viking’s stone in his fingers.

“Have you ever had this curious stone in your possession, Kinlay?” he asked.

“Yes; I got it from my sister,” replied Tom.

“Ericson,” asked Mr. Duke, “how came the stone in your possession on Saturday?”

“Jessie and I found it at the head of the Cliff,” I said. “It was that which made me believe that Thora was in the cave. She got the stone from me before I went away, and I thought she had maybe dropped it as she was getting over the cliff.”

“But what on earth could the lass want in the cave?” asked Mr. Thomson.

“She was unhappy at home,” I explained, “and had threatened to run away. I supposed she had taken refuge in the cave.”

Page 142

“Kinlay,” said Mr. Duke, touching the coil of rope, “did you at any time make use of these lines to climb down the Gaulton cliffs?”

Tom was silent.

“If you do not care to tell us that, then, perhaps, you will say if you happened to make use of this gun on the night on which Colin Lothian met his death?”

Tom became perceptibly confused.

“Mr. Duke,” exclaimed Bailie Thomson, “what in the world are you driving at?”

“I’m driving at the truth, Mr. Thomson,” said Bailie Duke calmly, “and I think I see it. In the first place, you will observe, sir, that no motive whatever has been found which would induce Halcro Ericson to raise his hand against poor Colin Lothian. Now, on the contrary—and I can prove this by witnesses if you wish—it is certain that Kinlay had a quarrel with Lothian on the very day of the murder. Lieutenant Fox, who was witness of that quarrel, will be able to tell the reason of it. The reason was simply this—nothing else but this, Mr. Thomson—that it was Colin who let it out about the smuggling. It was what Lothian said in Oliver Gray’s inn that morning which led the officer to believe that Carver Kinlay kept a store of illicit whisky in the Gaulton Cave. Is that so, Mr. Fox?”

“It is quite true,” said the officer.

“Now, it is useless to examine more witnesses in proof of what I say. All that may be considered in detail when the case comes before the procurator fiscal. But Mr. Drever has found one witness whose evidence is of the greatest importance, and I will have that witness called.

“Macfarlane, bring in Thora Kinlay.

“Ericson, my lad, sit down here with Mr. Drever.”

Stepping towards the schoolmaster I faced the door through which Macfarlane had disappeared, giving a pat of recognition to Colin Lothian’s dog as I passed it. And now that door was reopened, and my dear school friend Thora came in.

It was the first time I had seen her since her illness. She seemed taller and more stately, and I mutely marvelled at the delicate beauty of her fair face and at the brightness of her deep-blue eyes.

Our eyes met, and we simply pronounced each other’s name.

“Halcro!” said she; “Thora!” said I.

And then Colin Lothian's dog sprang about her skirts in joyful greeting, and followed her to the middle of the room.

Bailie Duke, after a consultation with Mr. Drever, called Thora to the table and administered the oath. She pronounced the words with grave solemnity.

"I understand, Thora," said Mr. Duke, "that you know something concerning the death of Colin Lothian?"

"Yes," said Thora. "I know all about it, Mr. Duke."

"What! You can tell how it happened? You know who committed the deed?"

Lothian's dog here licked her hand. She sent it away, and it wandered about the room until it came to Tom Kinlay.

Page 143

“Yes, I can tell you that,” she replied.

And then she turned round, pointing with accusing finger at Tom Kinlay, “’Twas him that did it. I saw it all. See, even the dog kens its own master’s blood!”

At Kinlay’s feet crouched Lothian’s dog, snarling angrily as it looked at a stain on the young man’s trousers.

Consternation filled me as I heard this terrible accusation. Mr. Drever alone of those present seemed unmoved; he alone seemed to have expected it. Tom Kinlay’s face grew pale and haggard, and he almost tottered as he stood there with all eyes directed upon him.

When the excitement had subsided, Mr. Duke looked towards Thora and asked her to tell all she knew, in her own way, and to omit no detail. She accordingly stepped a little nearer to the table, resting her hand upon it, and gave her evidence in a clear, unfaltering voice. Her narrative was to the following effect:

On the day of the commencement of the snowstorm Thora, who had not been to school since her illness, went over to Clouston to visit her young friend Hilda Paterson. When the storm came on she issued out of the cottage and took the road as far as Stenness, and over the undulating land of Sandwick, where the snow wreaths were already so deep that often on her way she failed to recognize the landmarks. She travelled in uncertainty as to the direction she was taking, and felt utterly tired out—for she was not yet strong—when she came unexpectedly to a little cottage, and, to her dismay, found she had walked nearly three miles out of the direct road home.

The cottage was a tiny building of rough stones, and the snow found its way inside through the wide crevices in the walls. It was the home of one Mary Firth, a lone old woman who earned her living by knitting stockings and burning kelp. Opening the door, Thora entered the only room. There was no one within and the fire was dead out, for Mary Firth had gone away that morning to Kirkwall to sell her stock of knitting. Thora was cold and hungry; she considered it impossible to reach Crua Breck before dark, and the snow was falling heavily, so she determined to wait till old Mary returned. She got a few pieces of dry peat from a corner and piled them on the hearth, then sought for Mary’s flint and steel, and proceeded to kindle a fire. Its warmth was comforting, and she sat there on a low stool until the peats glowed hot and the kettle began to boil.

Still Mary did not return. There was no tea to be found in the cupboard and the only particle of food was a piece of oaten bannock. There were a few raw potatoes, however, and Thora put some of these in the fire to roast.

She was looking out at the falling snow through the little window, and expecting Mary, when in the distance she saw the figure of a man walking in the direction of Lyndardy

farm, and bending forward as he fought against wind and snow. Behind him was a dog, and she knew at once that the man was Colin Lothian.

Page 144

Now Thora had been anxious to meet the old wanderer ever since I had told her of the wreck of the Undine, and throwing her shawl over her head she ran out of the cottage to bid him enter and share the meal she had prepared.

She had not gone far, however, before she observed another person approaching old Lothian from the opposite direction. This was Tom Kinlay, and as she recognized him she paused and slowly retreated to the cottage without being observed, for she had no desire to meet him, or be seen by him at that moment.

As she looked round the two men met and stood face to face. The wind carried the sound of their voices towards her, and she heard angry words pass between them. Yet what they said was indistinct. She only gathered that they were quarrelling about something that Lothian had told to the excise officers. The dog barked at Kinlay, and he kicked the animal.

Finally, Tom allowed the old man to continue his way a few yards and shouted after him, “Well, anyhow, you’ll tell no more;” and as he said these words he raised a gun to his shoulder and fired.

The girl saw Lothian stagger and fall. Then Tom went and knelt down at the side of his victim as though he would complete his work with the knife he took from his belt. But, looking nervously round in the direction of the cottage, as though fearing that the report of the gun might bring some one out, he hurried away in the direction of the cliffs, carrying with him a rope which was coiled over his shoulder.

Already Thora had left the cottage, but Tom had not observed her. She ran through the snow towards the wounded man. The dog was yelping and running frantically about.

The old man raised himself to a sitting posture as she stooped and supported his head. He did not recognize her until she spoke.

“Where are you hurt, Colin?” she asked. “Do you not know me? I’m Thora.”

He tried to place his hand on his side, and fell back helpless.

“Can ye walk with me as far as Mary Firth’s?” she said.

“Nay, Thora, lassie,” he murmured. “I’ll not walk any more. My travelling is ower. The life flies out o’ me.”

Thora wrung her hands, not knowing what to do. The darkness of night was coming on. They were far away from any dwelling, save the little cottage, and the snow wreaths on the desolate moor were becoming every moment more impassable.

“I will run to Stromness for Dr. Linklater,” she said.

“No, lassie, no; there’s no use o’ doing that,” said Colin. “The doctor can do nothing. Go away home and let me die.”

“No, I canna leave you, Colin,” she said woefully. “And how can I go home when my own brother has done this thing?”

“Tom Kinlay is no brother o’ yours, Thora!” gasped Colin. “Nor Carver your father!”

“What do you mean, Colin? Oh, what do you mean?” cried she. “Carver not my father! Who is my father, then?”

Page 145

“Listen!” said Colin.

But he had not strength to say more. He dropped his head back and groaned. And then she saw that he was dead.

She took the plaid from under him and spread it over his body to protect it from the snow. Then leaving the dog in charge of its dead master, she hurried first to the cottage to see if Mary Firth had returned. She wiped her hands of the blood that was on them, and made her way through the snow to Stromness.

It was almost midnight when she arrived in the town, for her journey had been a long and a difficult one. All the houses were in darkness, and there was not a person to be seen in the deserted streets. She made her way to the schoolhouse, and after much trouble succeeded in arousing Andrew Drever.

But when the door was opened she had not strength to speak. She fainted from exhaustion as soon as she sat down in the kitchen. Mr. Drever gave her food, which revived her; but it was not until she had had several hours’ sleep that she could recount even a part of what had occurred on the moor. But the schoolmaster understood this much, that Colin Lothian was lying dead near to Mary Firth’s cottage, and, leaving the girl for a few minutes, he ran to Dr. Linklater’s and sent him to make further discoveries.

Such was the substance of Thora’s evidence, though I have given it in fuller detail than as she delivered it to Mr. Duke.

When she had been cross-questioned by Bailie Thomson the inquiry was closed by Mr. Duke, and the case remitted to a higher court. Tom Kinlay was thereupon taken by Macfarlane to his prison cell to await the delivery of the formal charge of murder.

I was taking up my gun and preparing to leave when Andrew Drever requested me to remain in order to be present at the consideration of a further question that had arisen out of his investigations of the case. Mr. Duke remained in his chair, talking with Thora, while Bailie Thomson and Mr. Fox went out. Presently, however, I was somewhat surprised to see Captain Flett enter, with Peter Brown; and I could only conjecture that there was now to be some explanation as to the meaning of the two boxes being on the table—the box out of the cave and the little chest from the Pilgrim. But what was said and done at this supplementary inquiry may well be reserved for another chapter.

Chapter XL. Ephraim Quendale.

“Tom Kinlay is no brother of yours, Thora; nor Carver your father!”

These words were ringing in my ears. What did they mean?

I was questioning in my own mind what Colin could have meant when Mr. Drever asked us all to sit at the table. He had some statement to make.

Turning to Mr. Duke he said:

“In the remarkable evidence just given by Thora—I will not now call her Thora Kinlay—-you who heard it were no doubt astonished at the revelation made to her by Colin Lothian in his dying moments.”

Page 146

“Yes, dominie,” said Mr. Duke. “I have just been asking Thora what Colin could have meant. Can you throw any light on the matter yourself?”

“I believe we can throw some light on it, bailie, and perhaps you can help me to make the matter clear.”

The schoolmaster stood with his hand resting on the chest that had been brought from the cave.

“First of all,” said he, “I will ask if you remember Carver Kinlay’s arrival in the Mainland?”

“Right well do I remember it,” said Mr. Duke. “He was cast ashore in the wreck of a Danish barque about a dozen years ago, or more. What was the ship’s name, now?”

“The Undine?” suggested Mr. Drever.

“Ay, that’s just it, the Undine. And Sandy Ericson found Carver in some hole in the cliff two or three days after the wreck.”

“That was so,” said Andrew. “And you will also mind that Carver was not alone in the cave. There was a child with him—a little girl.”

“Yes, yes; I mind that now, Andrew. The child was Thora herself.”

“And that cave was the same that the smugglers were taken in on Saturday,” said David Flett.

“The very same,” said the dominie. “And this box, here, has remained in the cave ever since the wreck. See, the ship’s name is painted on it!”

And he turned the box with the name outward. We read the word “Undine.”

The schoolmaster then opened the box and took from it a bundle of papers and a book, handing them to the bailie.

“By these you will see, sir, that the barque Undine sailed from Glasgow, bound for Copenhagen, and that her owner’s name was Quendale—Ephraim Quendale, of Copenhagen. The ship’s book will also show you that at Glasgow she took on board the man Carver Kinlay and his wife, his son Tom, and an infant girl.”

“The girl Thora—” put in Bailie Duke.

“Wait a bit, sir,” said Andrew, continuing. “There were four persons saved from the wreck in pilot Ericson’s boat. These were Kinlay’s wife and their boy Tom, a Danish seaman, and a gentleman passenger. That passenger, sir, was Ephraim Quendale

himself, the owner of the ship, who, from what I gather, seems to have been returning to his native land, having been on a trip to Scotland with his young wife and their child.

“On the morning after the wreck some bodies were washed ashore, and, if you will remember, amongst these was the body of a beautiful young woman, in whose arms was still clasped the shattered body of a little child. You see, Mr. Duke, there were two children on board the vessel, both of them girls, of about the same age. The drowned woman was recognized by Quendale as his wife, and she was afterwards buried with the child in the old burying ground of Yeskenaby.

“Two days afterwards—that is to say on the fifth day after the wreck—Ephraim Quendale and the Danish sailor left Orkney.”

Here Andrew Drever put his hand in his breast pocket and drew out a paper.

Page 147

“I have here,” he said, “a letter that I got yesterday from widow Ericson. It is a letter addressed to her husband, Sandy Ericson, and it was written by Ephraim Quendale on the eve of his departure from Kirkwall to Copenhagen. I will read it:

“’Pilot Ericson—

“’I have been fortunate enough to find a ship in this port bound for my own land. We sail this morning for Copenhagen, and I shall not be able to see you to thank you personally for what you have done for me in my hour of misfortune. But I shall be back again in your island, please God, in a few weeks’ time. I beg that you will do me the goodness to have my beloved wife’s name, Thora Quendale, inscribed on the tombstone, and also that you will take charge of all wreckage that may be gathered from the remains of my poor ship. I grieve sorely that you were unable to find the body of the other child; for I still have my doubts, notwithstanding that the woman Kinlay was so positive that the child we buried was not her own. It was sad that the little head was so disfigured. The eyes would have proved all to me. My own darling’s eyes were heavenly blue, like her mother’s. Should you discover the other body, I beg you will write me a full description of its appearance and forward it by the first ship to me, at Copenhagen, in Denmark.

“‘Ephraim Quendale’”

The schoolmaster handed the letter to Bailie Duke, who read it over to himself and asked a few questions regarding its contents.

“Mr. Quendale never returned to Orkney?” said he.

“No,” replied the dominie.

“Strange. And did Pilot Ericson never hear from him?”

“Never.”

“And what about the wreckage?”

“There was none of special value,” said Andrew. “This box that we have here is, I believe, the only thing of value that remained, and, as you know, it was only discovered a few days since.”

“But Kinlay appears to have known of it,” observed Mr. Duke.

“Certainly he knew of it,” the dominie returned; “but its value consists in the papers it contains, most of them being in the Danish language, which Kinlay was ignorant of. Had he known that tongue he would doubtless have seen that a large number of the documents are drafts upon the National Bank of Denmark, and other claims of value.”

“Very good, Andrew; we’ll examine them afterwards,” said the magistrate. “There was no other wreckage? no other bodies washed ashore?”

“No. It was while he was looking out for further remains of the wreck that Sandy Ericson discovered Carver Kinlay in the Gaulton Cave, and with him the child we know as Thora.”

“Kinlay’s own child, that is,” observed the bailie.

“I believe not, Mr. Duke,” said Andrew. “She is the daughter of this Mr. Quendale, the owner of the wrecked ship.”

“Indeed! You believe that, Andrew?”

“I firmly believe it.”

“Had we not better send for Mrs. Kinlay, to hear what she has to say on the matter?” said Mr. Duke.

Page 148

“Mrs. Kinlay is dangerously ill. However, I was at Crua Breck yesterday and saw her. It seems that when Sandy took the bairn to her, she, in her excitement at its recovery, claimed it as her own. There was no clothing on the child to identify it by, you see, and she did not discover her mistake for some hours after Sandy had gone. But Sandy had told her that Mr. Quendale was to return to Pomona very soon, and Thora was kept there until her father should come back.”

“But, Andrew, man, how do you explain their keeping Thora and bringing her up as their own bairn if, as you affirm, she was known to be the daughter of other parents?”

“Simply in this way,” said Mr. Drever; “Carver, you see, knew very well that Mr. Quendale was expected back in Orkney. He kept the girl, as his wife confesses, hoping for a ransom from so wealthy a father. But having begun, very foolishly, by passing Thora off as his own bairn, he was obliged to continue to recognize her as such before folk, still believing that her true father would reappear.”

Bailie Duke was not altogether satisfied with this explanation.

He turned to Thora and said: “Did Carver always treat you kindly, Thora—as a father?”

Thora looked up appealingly to him, with tears on her cheek, saying: “No, Mr. Duke. He was good to me before folk; but he was very hard sometimes.”

“And your mother—I mean Mrs. Kinlay—was she good to you?”

“She has aye been good to me; but not like a mother,” said Thora, as plaintively as a lost lamb.

“And you never suspected that she was not your true mother?” asked Mr. Duke.

“Not till Colin Lothian spoke to me about it.”

“There is certainly some mystery about all this,” said the bailie, turning to Andrew Drever. “But it remains with us to communicate with this Mr. Quendale, if he is still alive.”

“He is not alive,” said Andrew, with conviction.

“Oh, then, you know something of him?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Drever; and here he turned to me and asked me, to my surprise, to relate all that had occurred during my solitary voyage in the Falcon. I did not see what possible application this could have to the case, or how it could be connected with the mystery of Thora’s parentage. But I related my adventure.

I told how David Flett had been knocked overboard, and of the mate and Jerry leaving me alone on the schooner; of my difficult navigation of her, and of my discovery of the Pilgrim. Here the schoolmaster called the magistrate to give attention, and I guessed that it must be with the ill-fated ship that the mystery was to be in some way cleared. I told how I saw the supercargo seated at the table in the cabin, and how I had read the last entry in his log book.

Andrew Drever opened the book, which was before him, and passed it to Mr. Duke, saying: “You will observe, sir, that the last date written here is January, 1831. Thirteen years ago.”

Page 149

“Thirteen years ago!” exclaimed Mr. Duke, turning over the pages. “Ah! now I begin to see your application. Go on, Halcro.”

I then spoke of finding the charts, and described how the Pilgrim had touched at Kirkwall.

“She called at Kirkwall to put me ashore for hospital,” interposed Peter Brown.

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Duke. “And are you going to say that this Pilgrim was the vessel in which Mr. Quendale sailed for Copenhagen?”

“Copenhagen was the port she sailed for—calling at Akureyri, in Iceland,” quietly explained the dominie. “Go on, Halcro.”

I then described the captain’s room, and told of the man I had seen lying dead in the sleeping bunk. I spoke of the diamond ring.

“Have you got that ring?” asked the magistrate.

“Yes,” I said, feeling in my waistcoat pocket and producing it from the folds of a piece of muslin. I handed it to the schoolmaster, whom I had not told about it before. He examined the sparkling stones and handed it on to Mr. Duke. I saw Mr. Duke eyeing it curiously. As he looked at the inner circle of gold a light came to his eyes.

“Ah, hello!” said he. “There are some letters engraved here. Can you read them, dominie? The characters are foreign. It looks like German or Russian.”

Andrew took the ring nearer to the light.

“The characters are Danish!” said he excitedly. “It is the name ‘Thora Quendale!’”

“Well, all this is unmistakable evidence,” said Mr. Duke. “I think you have proved, Andrew, that this passenger on the Pilgrim and the owner of the Undine were one and the same person. The ring is a lady’s ring. Probably it belonged to Quendale’s wife.”

“I think it likely that he took it from his dead wife’s finger,” said the schoolmaster, handing the ring back to me.

“No, sir,” I said. “The ring isna mine. It belongs now to Thora, and Thora shall have it;” and making my way towards her I took her fair hand in mine.

White and smooth it was, like the hand of a lady, with long tapering fingers and shapely nails. A strange new sensation came over me as I held it in my own rough palm. My heart beat quicker, and I felt myself growing red in the face.

“Take the ring, Thora, and wear it for the sake of those who have gone before;” and I slipped the glistening ring upon her finger.

“Thank you, Halcro!” she said, very softly. “Thank you! I will wear it for my father and mother’s sake, and also for yours.”

“For my sake, Thora!” and I looked down into her eyes.

There was an expression in them that I had not seen there before. I started back with a sudden recollection. Here before me I saw the same blue eyes, the same fair hair, the same beautiful face and rounded neck that I had seen pictured in the locket that fell from the dead man’s hand on board the Pilgrim! Here was proof added to proof. There could no longer be any doubt in my mind that Thora was indeed the daughter of the beautiful woman who was cast ashore at Inganess, and whose body now lay in the old neglected graveyard across the moor—the daughter of Thora and Ephraim Quendale.

Page 150

Chapter XLI. The Last Of The Kinlays.

Thora Quendale—as I must now call my young girl friend—returned that evening to her old home at Crua Breck. We walked together that far over the hardened snow; and many were the questions she asked me concerning all that I had seen and learnt of her dead father. What was he like? Was he tall, and great, and noble as she imagined him? What was the colour of his hair? How old did I think he was? And did I suppose he had suffered much in that dreadful ice prison in the far north?

To all of which I answered as best I could, with my very slight knowledge of the facts she was so much interested in. O, if I had only known who that passenger was that lay dead in the captain's room! I could perhaps have discovered more about him before the ship went down.

As we walked side by side across the white moorland, my companion looked again and again at the glittering ring on her finger.

"I am glad," I said, "that I happened to bring the ring away with me."

She sighed.

"I'd rather you had brought my mother's picture. That would have been more to me than anything else."

"Alas!" I said. "But I did not know then that it was the picture of your mother, Thora; and I thought it would be wrong to take it from his hand. For it was perhaps the only thing he had to look upon in those weary long days in the ice prison that could remind him of his happier times. I think it must have been the last thing his eyes rested upon while his life lingered."

"Maybe you're right, Halcro," said she; "but I'd like to have seen the picture.

"Tell me," she continued, "d'ye know where my mother's grave is?"

"Yes, well do I know it, and I'll take you to it some day when the snow is away."

We walked along silently after this, and parted at the gate of Crua Breck farm.

A few days after Bailie Duke's preliminary examination of witnesses, the procurator fiscal—the official by whom such inquiries are conducted in Scotland on behalf of the Crown—arrived from Kirkwall. The case had already been made clear in preparation for him, and he had little else to do than take the evidence formally and arrange it in legal order.

The matter became somewhat involved with the action against the smugglers, for it transpired that Tom Kinlay had, after telling his father of the affair at the inn, been sent by Carver to spy on Colin Lothian, and to watch the cliffs and give an alarm in case the revenue authorities had determined to institute a plan of attack from the land. The evidence against him was too strong to admit of a doubt as to the ultimate issue of the examination, and a single day's inquiry was sufficient to establish the case against him. He was accordingly carried off to Kirkwall, and there committed to prison on the charge of having "wilfully, wickedly, and with malice aforethought, murdered Colin Lothian by shooting him with a gun."

Page 151

The trial was awaited with much interest by the people of the Mainland. No one doubted that the prisoner would be found guilty of a capital offence. The only question that gave any one concern was the nature of the punishment that his guilt would merit.

But several weeks before the date fixed for the trial an event occurred which made all speculation superfluous. One morning the rumour reached Stromness that Tom Kinlay and all the smugglers had escaped from Kirkwall jail. At first this was generally discredited, for the building in which the men were confined was a notably strong one; but later reports confirmed the rumour. The authorities had trusted more to the strength of the prison than to the vigilance of the guard; and one dark night, by the aid of some of their comrades outside and the treachery of one of the jailers, the prisoners effected an easy escape. Dodging through the narrow streets they went by various ways to the harbour, and there took forcible possession of a small brig that was lying at anchor in the bay. Before the alarm spread the vessel was far out at sea beyond the possibility of pursuit. The escape was well planned, and as the brig was fully provisioned, her destination could only be surmised.

It was commonly believed that the fugitives would return to their old trade of smuggling, and, as the men's knowledge of navigation was known to be extremely limited, it was not thought that they would venture upon a voyage to very distant parts.

At this time I was away on a short trip in the Falcon. We touched at the island of Rousay, and here we learnt that some smugglers in a strange brig had, two days earlier, made a daring raid upon one of the small villages, robbing the inhabitants of their most precious possessions. We heard a similar story at Papa Westray. But it was not until our return to Stromness that we associated these piratical raids with Tom Kinlay and his companions.

A few weeks afterwards a Glasgow barque, named the Surprise, put in at Stromness, and reported having, on passing one of the Outer Hebrides, rendered assistance to a wrecked vessel, which, though bearing another name, answered exactly to the description of the stolen brig. Among the passengers on the Surprise was Captain Gordon, who had left his ship, the Lydia, at Greenock, and was now on his way to Leith. He had gone out in the ship's boat to the wreck. One of the crew was saved, an Orkney man; but the rest were all lost, including, as we afterwards heard, young Tom Kinlay, whose career of crime was thus brought to an early termination.

Mrs. Kinlay, who was a gentle and good woman, had much tribulation to bear up against in the unhappy deaths of her husband and son; and, having but little of the sympathy of her neighbours, she resolved to leave the island. Accordingly, as soon as she recovered her health, the farm, stock, and furniture at Crua Breck were sold, and the unfortunate widow took passage over to Caithness, where she remained among her relatives for the rest of her days.

Page 152

A great dread came upon me when I heard that Mrs. Kinlay had left for Scotland. I thought that Thora Quendale had gone with her, and that I had lost sight of my dear girl friend for ever. I feared even to ask if this was so; but passing along the road one evening, soon after we had dropped anchor in the bay, I chanced to meet Andrew Drever walking home with a string of trout hanging at his side.

Having exchanged a few friendly remarks with me, he asked if I would go and spend the evening with him.

“Come and take some supper with us, lad,” said he. “Thora will be glad to see ye.”

“Thora!” I exclaimed.

“Ay, Thora. Did you not know Thora lives with us now?”

“No; I thought she had gone to Caithness with Mrs. Kinlay.”

“Nay, nay,” said Andrew; “Thora can look after herself now, since we heard from Copenhagen. But come along as soon’s you can, and we’ll tell you all about it.”

And with that he trudged away humming a lightsome tune.

Chapter XLII. A Choice Among Three.

Not many minutes after I left the schoolmaster, when I was passing by the wharf, I met Jack Paterson. Jack was standing looking down into the water, with his two hands deep in his trousers pockets, and his face bearing an expression of curious indecision.

“Hello, Jack, what’s troubling you now?” I asked, approaching him.

“Troubling me! Well, I suppose it is troubling me, too. The fact is, Ericson, I’ve been asked to take command of the new pilots.”

“Well, man, that’s surely nothing to look so gloomy about, is it?”

“No, lad; and I wouldna trouble sae muckle if I could see my way clear to takin’ the offer. But, ye see, Halcro, I canna do the piloting without a boat.”

“I see, I see. Ay, Jack, but that’s a pity, man. And ye canna get the money towards buying the St. Magnus?”

“No; the St. Magnus is for sale, I weel ken that, and she’s a right good boat. But where can a poor crofter body like me get the siller, think ye?”

“’Deed, I dinna ken, Jack; but maybe the siller will come somehow. There’s many a one in Orkney would advance it for you, surely. Dinna be cast down about it, man. What about your crew?”

“Weel, I was thinkin’ of yersel for one, Halcro?”

“Of me!”

“Ay, and Jimmie Crageen, and Ronald Ray from Kirbister, and Steenie Barrie; all o’ them good honest men and weel acquainted wi’ the Orkneys. What d’ye say, Halcro? Will ye join us?”

“I canna say, Jack. Ye see there’s the Falcon. I couldna leave Davie Flett very well; though I’ll not deny I’d rather be a pilot than anything else.”

“Weel, ye’ll think of it any way; and if we can get the money, there’s no doubt but we’ll manage the business right enough.”

With that I left Jack on the wharf and continued my way, meditating upon this chance of fulfilling my ambition of being a Pomona pilot.

Page 153

I had not gone far, however, when I heard a quick step behind me.

“Ericson, Ericson!” some one called.

I turned and saw Lieutenant Fox following me in full uniform, and with a young midshipman attending him. He came up to me, and, after a few ordinary observations, said:

“I wanted to ask you something, Ericson. We’re short-handed on the Clasper, and we need the help of a man who knows these islands well; someone who knows all about the people, and can be of service in keeping down the smuggling. Now, what d’ye say? Will you join us yourself?”

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Fox,” I replied, for I had already half made up my mind about the piloting, and with true Orkney instinct I clung to the old ways of my family. “I’m afraid not, sir. You see I’m aboard the Falcon just now, and if I leave Davie Flett it will only be to join the new pilots.

“But if you’re needing a hand,” I continued, thinking just then of Willie Hercus, “I can get you a lad that knows just about as much of the Orkneys as I do, one that has always wished to be a man-o’-war’s man.”

“I’d rather have yourself, Ericson,” said the officer. “Just think about it, will you? It’s a good opening for you, and you may yet reach the quarterdeck and become an admiral, and fly your own pennant before you’re as old as Davie Flett. Let me know as soon as you decide. But if you can’t join us, send your friend. Good evening!”

As the young lieutenant walked away with a great clattering of his long sword, I looked at his laced cocked hat and his epaulettes, and fancied myself in a similar uniform. However, my native simplicity came to my rescue, and, good as this opportunity of serving my Queen appeared, I yet thought fondly of the pilot’s busy, perilous life. Something told me that it was my destiny to be a pilot, as my fathers for three generations had been before me.

I went into Oliver Gray’s inn, and there found my skipper, Davie Flett, awaiting me. He was talking with a little old man, whom I soon recognized as Isaac the Dutch Jew, who had bought the viking’s ruby from Tom Kinlay. When I entered, Isaac retired to a far corner of the parlour and watched me closely as I talked with Captain Flett.

“When do we sail, captain?” I asked, as I sat down beside the skipper.

“Tomorrow night,” said he.

And I judged that I should now have to determine without delay which of the three appointments I should take—remain with Flett, join the revenue cutter, or become a pilot.

“I’ve just been speaking with Lieutenant Fox of the Clasper,” I said. “He wants me to go into the revenue business.”

“Ay! and so you’re to be a blue jacket, eh?” mused Flett, without offering any objection to my leaving the Falcon.

“No,” I replied, “I’m not sure yet that I’ll join them, captain. The fact is, I have also seen Jack Paterson, and he wants me to become a pilot.”

Page 154

“That’s more in your line, my lad. Tak’ my advice and join the pilots. Ye’ll do better as a pilot than anything else. It’s in your blood. As for the Falcon, I said when you came aboard us that you could easily leave if you chanced upon something better. We can soon get another lad to fill your berth. Maybe ye ken a lad yersel’ that would come aboard us?”

“Ay, that I do,” I responded. “There’s Robbie Rosson, he’d be glad of the chance.”

“Bring him to me then, Halcro, and we’ll take him along with us next trip to see if he likes it.”

Here was a fortunate opportunity. By my own advancement I was to be the means of helping my two school companions. Willie Hercus was to join the revenue cutter; Robbie Rosson was to go aboard the Falcon. As for myself, I may say that it was a foregone conclusion with me that I should take to the piloting.

“Has Paterson got a boat yet, Halcro?” asked the skipper.

“No, that is his one difficulty. He wants the money. I wish I could only get some money from somewhere.”

Captain Flett lapsed into silence, as though, acting in his customary fashion, he was contriving in his mind how best to secure a pilot boat for Jack Paterson. Presently the old Jew edged nearer to us and said to me:

“Did I hear you say you vant money, mine young friend?”

“That’s a thing a good many folk want,” said I. “Why?”

“Vy? Oh, just because I tink you have got someting vort a great lot of money. Dot little black stone you showed me; long time ago, you know.”

Here Captain Flett interposed, speaking with Isaac in Dutch. A long conversation followed in that language, during which Flett asked me for my viking’s stone. The old Jew took the talisman in his long fingers. He regarded it as though he were familiar with its structure, twisting it round and screwing the thin band of gold that encircled it. Then a very wonderful thing happened. He gave the stone a few taps upon the table and the metal ring fell off. The stone dropped open in two pieces like a shell, and in the heart of it appeared a bright clear gem that sparkled in the light of the oil lamp hanging above us. I looked on in dumb amazement.

This stone, Jarl Haffling’s talisman, that I had carried about with me so long, fondly believing that it had the power to protect me from all perils, was it no talisman after all? I doubted it now. Whatever dangers I had gone through had been surmounted by no aid from this supposed amulet, but simply by my own endeavours. But useless as it no

doubt was in this particular, I could well imagine that the bright diamond which had been so cunningly enclosed within its hard stony shell might be of considerable value.

That it was of great value I soon discovered from what the old Hebrew informed me. He took from his inner pocket a tiny pair of scales, and proceeded to weigh the glittering jewel in the balance. Then he made some calculations on a dirty piece of paper, speaking as he did so in Dutch with Captain Flett.

Page 155

“D’ye want to sell the thing, Halcro?” said the skipper. “He says he canna buy it himsel’, but he kens its value. He’s the agent of a diamond merchant in Amsterdam.”

I hesitated to answer, reflecting upon my need of money. My mother was poor; I could help her by selling this thing, and then, if I should get for it more than sufficed for her immediate needs, was there not this pilot boat to buy? I might be able to become part owner of the St. Magnus.

“What does he say the diamond is worth?” I asked of Flett.

The sum he named astonished me. I could scarcely contain my wonder at the thought of it.

“Five hundred guineas,” answered Flett.

Five hundred guineas! Why, that was a fortune.

“Would you give me that much for it?” I asked, looking at old Isaac.

“Ah! mine young man, you tink me rich. I could not offer you five hundred shilling for the stone. I only tell you it is vort so much.”

He thereupon replaced the gem within its covering of stone, drew on the band of gold again, and returned to me my talisman in its original condition. Then he drank the gin that was in the glass before him, and put back his little scales into his pocket. Before leaving us he handed me a little card on which was inscribed the name of a diamond merchant in Amsterdam.

“You are a sailorman,” he said, buttoning up his coat. “You may be in Amsterdam one day. If you go to dat address dey vill buy the stone from you; but do not take one groschen less dan five hundred guineas. Good day, mynheer!”

And he went out.

“Weel,” said Davie Flett, “I must say that’s a queer auld fellow.”

“He seems to have turned honest,” I said.

“The auld scoundrel has taken a liking for you, Halcro,” said the skipper, smiling.

“But,” said I, “I almost wish he had bought the diamond.”

“Nonsense, lad! keep it and bide ye’re time. Besides, you forget the dominie’s ‘Law of Treasure Trove’”

“Ah, yes, I suppose I would only be entitled to a third of the money after all,” I said. “But what about the pilot boat?”

“That will be all square, my lad. Did they not tell you that I had bought the St. Magnus?”

“No! do you really mean that, captain?”

“Certainly I mean it. And you and Jack Paterson can start the piloting as soon’s ye like.”

That night, as I sat at Andrew Drever’s fireside talking of Jarl Haffling’s talisman, Thora Quendale told us how, when one day after her illness she was sitting in an armchair, with the stone dangling by a string from her hand, she fell asleep before the warm fire. She was awakened by hearing a footstep in the room; it was Tom Kinlay’s. She felt for the stone, but it was gone. Tom had stolen it. This was how it came into his possession. Evidently it was by a mere accident that he left it at the top of the cliff, before going down to the cave, after the death of Colin Lothian.

Page 156

That night, too, Andrew Drever told me, as he had promised to do, how he had received news from Copenhagen concerning Thora; how the insurance money on the ship Undine and on Mr. Quendale's life was to revert to Thora. This would surely make her a wealthy woman. But the business connected with this, and the inheritance of her father's real and personal property, required that Thora should go to Copenhagen to establish her claims in person at the chancery courts of Denmark. Mr. Drever was interesting himself specially on her account in the capacity of a guardian, and he was soon to accompany her to Denmark and leave her there, probably for several years.

Chapter XLIII. Thora's Answer.

It was a fresh, breezy, August afternoon. In the open sea, far out, east of the Skerries, we were scudding along blithely, with a flock of seagulls flying wantonly in our wake. The low hills of the Orkneys rose like a faint haze on the horizon to westward. Light waves, touched with green, curled over into snowy spray about our sides as our boat bent over and plunged buoyantly through them. Blue was the far-stretching sea, and bluer still the summer sky.

Away to the eastward, whither our bowsprit pointed, a white-sailed clipper grew larger as we approached her. The Danish ensign flew at her mizzen; the familiar signal for a pilot streamed from her fore peak. My heart beat quicker, telling me who was aboard this fair vessel as nearer and nearer we drew. Now we could distinguish the tiny figures moving about her yards, as one by one her studding sails were taken in.

Sitting in the stern sheets of my own pilot boat, I watched and watched for some sign on the ship's quarterdeck. At last a white object appeared over the rail, waving with regular motion. I took out my handkerchief and unfurled it in reply, still with faster beating heart.

"Lower away, my lads!" I cried, putting the helm to starboard.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Willie Hercus, who had left the Clasper and was now our mate. Then down fell our sails, flapping loud in the breeze, and out went our long sweeping oars.

We crept in under the vessel's counter; a rope was thrown to us, and in a few moments I was on her quarterdeck, standing all trembling and nervous before a tall beautiful woman, whose deep-blue eyes and fair, breeze-blown hair were all that I could see—-everything else was lost to me.

"Halcro!" she exclaimed, holding out her two sunburnt hands in greeting.

"Thora!" I murmured, taking her hands in mine.

“You have expected me, then?” she said, as I drew her gently to the rail to let the sailors pass.

We stood there, looking into each other’s face, in which the four years that had passed since our last meeting had left their maturing touch.

“I have been expecting you these two months past,” I said, looking wistfully over the sea. “There has never come a ship from Denmark but I have boarded her, hoping to see you.”

Page 157

“Well, you see me at last, and am I altered?”

“You are only more beautiful, Thora, more womanly. And so you are coming back to Pomona to visit us again?”

“No, not to visit you, Halcro. I am homeward bound this time. I am never going to leave old Orkney again. My schooling is over, and there is no one left in Copenhagen now to keep me there. I am going to settle down in some cottage near our dear sea cliffs, where I can see the ships passing from my garden seat and dream my life away in pleasant solitude.”

“In solitude!” I stammered; then shyly asked:

“Did you not get my last letter, Thora?”

“What! the one in which you told me of Jessie’s marriage to Captain Gordon, and that the dominie had retired from his school, and that you were promoted to captain, and had called your new boat the Thora? Yes, certainly, I got it.”

“But there was something else I said in it, Thora—something more important to me than these things you speak of. Did you not read that part?”

Thora looked meekly down at the white planks of the deck, her cheeks growing rosy and her breath coming quick. Then turning her eyes aft towards the steering wheel, she said, crossing the deck:

“Captain Ericson, do you not think you should be attending to the piloting of this ship?”

“No,” I said, following her across to the lee side, where the great mizzen sail shielded us from the view of others on board. “No; my mate, Willie Hercus, is looking after that. I am off duty today. I am here not as pilot; I have come out to welcome you home.”

Then, after a long silence, during which we both looked overboard upon the dancing waves, where the porpoises rolled in play, and the gulls dipped lightly on balanced wings, I said:

“Thora, you did not answer all my letter when you wrote. You were not offended, were you, by what I said?”

“I know what you mean, Halcro,” she said, resting her hand upon the rail and turning her eyes full upon me, “I was not offended, or I should not now be here. I did not answer you in writing. I have come to answer you in person.”

She put her hand in mine, and added the one word:

"Yes."

And that was the answer that Thora spoke on that summer day, long ago, as we stood together on the ship that brought her over from the home of her fathers to the land in the northern seas that was more truly her own. And the ship sailed on, over the blue waters and through breezy sounds and among verdant isles; into sunlit fiords, where the sea birds flew; on, under the dark weatherbeaten cliffs and lofty rocks, where the cormorant sat perched on high. And at last, as the dusk of the evening gathered and the light of the sunset silvered the waters, down went the chain with rattling noise, and we came to an anchor in the peaceful haven of Stromness.

The end.

Notes.

Page 158

i According to the standard of value in 1843, the ingot of silver, weighing six ounces, would be worth 1 pound, 13s., 0d.

ii Peerie = little.

all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

Page 159

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation” or *pglaf*), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.net

Page 160

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.net), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from
  the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method

you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he

Page 161

has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or

damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. *Limited warranty*, *disclaimer of damages* — Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. *You agree that you have no Remedies for negligence*,

Page 162

strict liability, *Breach of warranty or Breach of contract except those provided in paragraph* F3. *You agree that the foundation*, *the trademark owner*, *and any distributor under this agreement will not be liable to you for actual*, *direct*, *indirect*, *consequential*, *punitive or incidental damages even if you give notice of the possibility of such damage*.

1.F.3. *Limited right of replacement or refund* — If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you '*as-is*', *with no other warranties of any kind*, *express or implied*, *including but not limited to warranties of* MERCHANTIBILITY *or fitness for any purpose*.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. *Indemnity* — You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Page 163

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.gutenberg.net/fundraising/pglaf.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's *ein* or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://www.gutenberg.net/about/contact

For additional contact information:
Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible

by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To *send donations* or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://www.gutenberg.net/fundraising/donate

Page 164

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://www.gutenberg.net/fundraising/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.net

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.