



LIFE STORIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

UNDINE

A ROMANCE

*Translated from the German of
Friedrich Baron de la Motte Fouquë*

BY

GEORGE P. UPTON

Translator of "Memories," etc.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS



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CHICAGO

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KNIGHT HULDBRAND AND UNDINE.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Friedrich Heinrich Karl, Baron de la Motte Fouque, was born at Brandenburg, Germany, February twelve, 1777. As his name indicates, he was of French extraction. In his earlier years he served in the army with distinction. About the year 1804 he devoted himself to literature, and thereafter produced a great number of plays, poems, and romances. The year 1813 found him in the army again, and he narrowly escaped with his life at the battle of Lutzen. Being disabled by accident for further service, he was honorably discharged and presented with a decoration. He delivered lectures upon history and poetry for a time, and it was while on a lecturing tour in 1843 that he died suddenly. Fouque belonged to the romance school of Theodor Hoffmann, Tieck, Jean Paul Richter, and others and became one of its most famous representatives. The *Magic Ring*, *Theodolf*, *Aslaugas Ritter*, and *Algin and Jucunda* are among his famous romances; but *Undine* is the best known and most exquisite of all, and is counted as his masterpiece. The material employed in it is fantastic. He takes the reader through enchanted forests and among mysterious gnomes and sprites. The malicious Kuhleborn, the quaint old fisherman and his dame, good Father Heilmann, the worldly Bertalda, the gallant but fickle Huldrbrand, are characters full of interest; but most beautiful and lovely in her supernatural form of watersprite, and afterwards in the suffering wife when she had found a soul, is Undine. Few characters in romance have surpassed it in grace, refinement, and poetical beauty. It merits a place in the *Life Stories*, for, after all, is not Undine semi-human?

G. P. U.

CHICAGO, May 1, 1908.

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CHAPTER I

HOW THE KNIGHT CAME TO THE FISHERMAN'S HOME

Many hundreds of years ago there lived a good old fisherman, who was sitting one fine evening before his door, mending nets. All about him lay a most beautiful country. The green slope upon which his cottage was built extended far out into a great lake. It seemed as if, delighted with the wonderful clear blue waters, it were pressing forward into their embrace, or else that the lake had fondly embraced the blooming headland with its tall waving grasses and the grateful shade of the trees. Each seemed to welcome and thereby enhance the beauty of the other. And yet this lovely spot was rarely visited, save by the fisherman and his family, for behind the promontory lay a dark forest, gloomy and pathless, which was shunned by all on account of the strange creatures and spectres that infested it. The good old man, however, often crossed it without being molested, when he went to the large city that lay beyond to sell the fine fish he caught. There was little danger for him even in this forest, for his thoughts were usually pious ones, and it was his custom to sing a hymn loudly as soon as he had entered its evil shades.

On this evening, as he sat peacefully over his nets, he was suddenly startled by a rustling noise in the forest, like that of an approaching horseman, and it seemed to come nearer and nearer. Visions that had haunted him on many a stormy night, of the spectres of the forest, floated through his mind, especially the image of a gigantic snow-white man who kept nodding his head mysteriously. Indeed, as he looked up, he seemed to see the creature advancing toward him through the trees. But he soon collected himself, remembering that, as no harm had ever befallen him even in the forest itself, on the open promontory evil spirits would have even less power over

him. At the same time he earnestly and devoutly repeated aloud a verse of Scripture, which so restored his courage that he almost laughed at his illusions. The nodding white man suddenly became a well-known brooklet that bubbled out from the forest and lost itself in the lake, while the cause of the rustling sound proved to be a gorgeously attired knight, who now came riding toward him from under the shadow of the trees.

The stranger wore a scarlet mantle over his purple, gold-embroidered jerkin; a red and purple plume adorned his cap, and at his golden belt glittered a splendid, richly decorated sword. His white charger was not so large as most battle-steeds, and trod so lightly over the green turf that it scarcely seemed to leave the impression of its hoofs.

The old man could not quite rid himself of his fears, but assuring himself that so pleasing an apparition could surely do him no harm, he lifted his cap courteously and went on with his work. The knight drew rein, and asked if he and his steed might have shelter there for the night.

"As for your horse, good sir," replied the fisherman, "I can offer him no better stall than this shady meadow, and no food but its grass; but you are heartily welcome to my simple hut and to the best supper and lodging I can offer you." The knight, quite satisfied with this, dismounted, unsaddled his horse with the fisherman's aid, and turned it loose on the meadow, saying to his host:

"Even had I found you less obliging, my good old man, you would scarcely have been rid of me to-night, for I see a wide lake lies before us, and God forbid I should cross the haunted forest again in the dark."

"Nay, let us not talk of that," said the fisherman, as he led his guest into the cottage. Near the hearth, upon which a scanty fire burned, and shed its gleam over the spotless little room, his aged wife was sitting in a great armchair. She arose as they entered, and greeted the noble guest kindly, but

resumed her place in the chair without offering it to him, whereat the fisherman smiled and said, "Do not be offended, young sir, if she does not give up the most comfortable seat in the house to you; among us poor folk it is always kept for the oldest."

What can you be thinking of, husband?" interposed the wife. "Surely our guest is a Christian, and would never have the heart to turn old people out of their places. Sit down there, my lord," she continued, addressing the knight; "that is a very comfortable seat yonder; only be careful with it, for one of the legs is none too strong."

The knight seated himself, and soon felt as much at home as if he belonged to the family and had just returned from a long journey.

The three friends talked together in the friendliest and most sociable manner. Of the forest, about which the knight asked many questions, the old man could not be induced to talk much; least of all, he declared, should it be mentioned after nightfall. But of household affairs and other matters they had much to tell, and they also listened with great interest to the knight's account of his travels. He told them his name was Lord Huldbrand of Ringstettin, and that he had a castle near the source of the Danube.

As they were talking, the stranger heard a splashing sound outside the window now and then, as if some one were throwing water against it. The old man frowned and looked displeased whenever this occurred, but finally, as a perfect shower flew against the panes and even spirted into the room through the badly fitting window-frames, he started up and cried out sharply: "Undine! Will you never stop these childish pranks? To-day, too, when we have a strange gentleman in the house!"

Silence at once followed, save for a suppressed tittering without, and the fisherman sat down again, saying:

"You must bear with this and possibly other foolish antics of hers, my noble guest, but no harm is meant. It is only our foster-daughter, Undine, who still clings to her childish ways though already in her eighteenth year. But, as I told you, she is really a good child at heart."

"That is very well for you to say!" retorted the old woman, shaking her head. "Her nonsense may be pleasant enough to you when you come home from fishing or from a journey; but to be troubled all day with her, as I have to be, never hearing a sensible word or getting any help in my household tasks, and trying to keep her out of mischief lest her folly ruin us completely,—that is another matter, and enough to try the patience of a saint!"

"Nay, nay, there!" said the old man, laughing, "you have trouble with Undine as I do with the lake. It often tears my nets and washes away my banks, yet I love it for all that, as you do our pretty little one, with all her teasing ways. Is it not so?"

"Well, well, one cannot be really angry with her, that is so," said his wife, nodding in assent.

Just then the door flew open, and in skipped a beautiful maiden. "You were only making fun of me, father," she said playfully; "where is your guest?"

The next instant she perceived the knight and stood as if entranced by the handsome stranger. Huldbrand also sat as if fascinated, trying to impress the charming figure on his mind before it vanished again, as he feared it might, in a fit of shyness. Not so, however. After looking long at him she came forward confidently, and, kneeling down beside his chair, began to play with a gold medal that hung from the costly chain about his neck.

"So you have come at last, most gracious guest!" she said. "Has it taken you so many years to find our humble cottage? and did you come through the haunted forest, my handsome friend?"

The old woman gave him no time to answer, but hastily ordered the maiden to arise and betake herself to her work. Undine, however, without replying drew a small stool close to Huldbrand's chair and seated herself at her spinning, gently saying, "I will work here."

The fisherman behaved as parents are wont to do with spoiled children. He pretended not to notice Undine's forwardness, and tried to talk of something else; but she would not let him.

"I asked our noble guest where he came from, and he has not told me yet," she declared.

"I came from the forest, fair sprite," answered Huldbrand.

"Then you must tell us how you fared and what strange adventures befell you," she went on, "for nobody can escape having them there."

Huldbrand could not repress a shudder at the recollections thus awakened, and looked involuntarily at the window, almost expecting to see one of the horrid creatures he had met in the forest leering at him through the panes; he saw nothing except the blackness of night. Composing himself, therefore, he was about to begin his tale, when the old man exclaimed: "Nay, nay, Sir Knight! It is no time now for such things."

Undine sprang furiously from her stool and defiantly exclaimed to the fisherman: "You say he shall not tell his story, father? He shall not? But I say he must, he shall!" With that she stamped her foot on the ground passionately, but was so droll and bewitching in her anger that Huldbrand was even more fascinated than by her gentler mood. This was too much for the old man, however. His smouldering anger burst out uncontrolled, and he berated Undine soundly for her disobedience and unseemly behavior toward the stranger, his good wife joining in.

At last Undine cried out, "Very well, then, if you choose to scold and not do what I want, you may sleep alone in your smoky old hut!" Darting from the door like an arrow, she flew out into the dark night.

CHAPTER II

THE WAY UNDINE CAME TO THE FISHERMAN

Huldbrand and the fisherman sprang from their seats and tried to stop the wrathful maiden, but before they could get to the door she had already vanished in the darkness, and not even a sound of her footsteps could be heard to tell them which way she had gone. The knight looked inquiringly at his host. It almost seemed to him that the fair apparition which had disappeared so quickly again in the dark must have been only another of those strange phantoms which had befooled him in the forest. But the old man only muttered to himself:

"It is not the first time she has played this trick on us. Now we have an anxious, sleepless night before us, for who knows what may happen to her all alone out there before morning?"

"For Heaven's sake, good father, let us follow her, then," cried Huldbrand anxiously.

"It would be of no use," replied the fisherman; "it would be a sin to let you go alone into the darkness and solitude of the forest in pursuit of that foolish child, and my old legs could never overtake the witch even if we knew whither she has fled."

"The least we can do is to call to her and beg her to return," said Huldbrand; and he began to shout at the top of his voice: "Undine! oh, Undine! Come back to us! come back!"

The old man gloomily shook his head, saying that it was of little use and that the knight did not know how wilful the child could be; yet he could not refrain from calling into the darkness himself now and then: "Ah! dear Undine, come back! Come back to us just this once, I implore you!"

It was as the fisherman had said; nothing was to be seen or heard of the runaway, and as he would not permit

Huldbrand to go in search of her, they were forced at last to return to the hut together. The hearth fire was nearly out, and the old woman, who was by no means so anxious as her husband over Undine's flight, had gone to bed, but the fisherman laid some dry sticks on the embers, and by the light of the kindling flame found a jug of wine which he placed on the table between himself and his guest.

"You too are anxious about that foolish child, Sir Knight," he said; "so it will be better to spend a part of the night talking and drinking than to toss about restlessly trying in vain to sleep, will it not?"

Huldbrand was satisfied; so the fisherman gave him the old woman's seat of honor, and they sat together over their wine, gossiping like two old cronies. Indeed, as often as they heard the slightest sound outside the window, sometimes even when there was no sound at all, one or the other would look out and say, "She is coming." Then they would listen for a few moments and, as nothing happened, would continue their talk with a sigh and a shake of the head. As they could hardly talk or think of anything but Undine, the fisherman offered to relate the story of her first arrival at the cottage; and as the knight was anxious to hear it, he thus began:

"It is now some fifteen years since I went one day with my fish through that forest to the city, leaving my wife at home as usual. There was good reason for it at that time, for the Lord had given us, old as we then were, a babe of wondrous beauty. It was a girl, and we often talked of seeking a new home, so that we might give our precious treasure a good education and provide for her future. We poor folk cannot always have things as we choose, as you know, Sir Knight. We must do what we can. I was turning these things over in my mind as I went along. This little home was very dear to me, and the noise and bustle of the town made me shudder when I thought I must take up my abode there or in some other place even worse. But I have never murmured at the will of God; on the contrary, I was secretly grateful to Him

for His latest gift. I cannot say that I ever met with any mischance in my journeys through the forest, or saw anything unusual. The Lord was ever by my side in its mysterious shades."

He uncovered his head and sat for a time absorbed in pious thoughts; then, replacing his cap, he continued: "On this side of the wood, as I was returning,—on this side, alas!—sorrowful news met me. My wife came toward me dressed in deep mourning, her eyes streaming like two rivulets.

"For God's sake, where is our child?' I groaned, 'tell me—tell me quickly!'

"With Him on whom thou callest, dear husband,' she answered; and we returned together, weeping, to the cottage. I looked about for the little body, and then heard for the first time what had happened. My wife had been sitting at the water's edge playing with the child, when suddenly it leaned over as if it saw something beautiful, wondrously beautiful, in the water. My wife saw it smiling, the sweet angel! Then it made a sudden spring out of her arms, down into the smooth waters. With all my searching I never, could find a trace of the tiny body.

"That evening we were sitting together in our cottage; we had no wish to speak, even had our tears permitted it, but were gazing silently into the fire, when something rattled at the door. It flew open, and a lovely little maid, some three or four years of age and richly dressed, stood smiling at us on the threshold. We were stricken dumb with amazement, and hardly knew at first whether it was really a human child or only a delusion. Then I saw that water was dripping from her golden hair and beautiful garments, and realized that the little maiden must have been in the water and must be in need of help.

"Wife,' said I, 'there was no one to save our precious babe for us; let us do for another what would have made us so happy had it been done for us.'

"We took the child in, gave her a warm drink, undressed her, and put her to bed; and all the while she smiled at us out of her great blue eyes, but never spoke a word. The next morning it was plainly to be seen that she had suffered no harm, and I asked her who her parents were and where she had come from; but she could only tell a strange, incoherent story. Her home must have been far from here, for in all these fifteen years I have been able to discover nothing of her origin, though she chatters now and then of such marvellous things one might suppose she had come down from the moon. She talks of golden castles with crystal roofs, and other strange things. The only thing she has told us clearly is, that she was sailing on the lake with her mother, fell from the boat into the water, and knew nothing more till she found herself lying comfortably under the trees upon our shore.

"We now had a new source of care and perplexity. To keep the foundling and bring her up in place of our poor drowned darling was easily decided upon; but who could tell whether she had been baptized or no? She herself was unable to answer the question. That she was a creature made to praise and glorify God, she did know; indeed, she told us often, and declared herself willing to submit to anything that might please or serve Him.

My wife and I reasoned thus: If she has never been baptized, it should be done without delay; if she has, then it is better to have too much of a good thing than too little. We therefore tried to think of a good name for the child, for as yet we knew not what to call her. Dorothea seemed fitting to us, for I had once heard it meant the gift of God; and she had indeed been sent by the Lord to comfort us in our sorrow. But she would not listen to that, declaring she had been named Undine by her parents, and Undine she would remain. That seemed to me a heathenish name, as it was not in the calendars. At last I took counsel of a priest in the town. He also objected to it, and at my urgent request came with me through the haunted forest to baptize her. As the little maid

stood up before us in her gay clothes, she looked so charming that the priest's heart went out to her, and with her artful flatteries and coaxings he quite forgot all his objections to the name of Undine. She was so christened, therefore, and behaved all through the ceremony with a gentleness and propriety most unusual in so wild and wayward a creature. For what my wife said was quite true,—we have had much to put up with from her. If I were to tell you—"

The knight here interrupted the old man, and called his attention to the noise of rushing waters, which he had heard before during the progress of the tale, and which now seemed dashing past the windows with increasing fury. Both sprang to the door. By the light of the moon, which now had risen, they saw that the brook which flowed out from the forest had broken wildly over its banks and was carrying along rocks and branches in its headlong course. As if awakened by the noise, a storm suddenly burst from the lowering clouds that chased each other swiftly across the moon; the lake groaned beneath the furious buffeting of the wind, and the trees creaked and bent dizzily over the rushing flood.

Undine! For Heaven's sake, where are you, Undine!" cried the two men, now quite beside themselves with anxiety; but no answer came. Forgetting everything else, they dashed out of the hut and ran off in different directions, calling and searching frantically for the lost one.

CHAPTER III

HOW UNDINE WAS FOUND AGAIN

The longer Huldbrand continued his vain search in the darkness, the more uneasy and confused he became. The fancy that Undine was only a spirit of the forest came back to him with renewed force; indeed, what with the roar of wind and wave, the crashing of branches, the utter transformation of the once quiet spot, even the hut and its occupants would have seemed a trick of his imagination had he not still heard in the distance the fisherman calling piteously to Undine, and his old wife's prayers and hymns sounding above the tumult.

At length he reached the brink of the overflowing stream, and saw by the moonlight that it was pursuing its turbulent course directly along the edge of the haunted forest, making an island of the little headland.

Merciful Heaven I" he thought, what if Undine should have ventured into that terrible wood, perhaps out of mere willfulness because I would not tell her of my adventures in it? And now the flood has cut her off, and she may be weeping there alone tormented by those spectres!"

A cry of horror escaped him, and he hastily rushed down over the rocks and fallen tree-trunks to the roaring torrent, intending to cross it and search for the wanderer on the other side. Visions of all the grisly shapes he had that day seen beneath the now wildly tossing branches, especially that of a tall white man who now seemed to nod and grin at him from the further shore, haunted him; but these grim recollections only urged him on the more when he thought of Undine possibly alone there in mortal terror.

Grasping a stout pine branch for support, he stepped boldly into the eddying current, and though scarcely able to keep his footing was making his way forward stoutly, when a

sweet voice close beside him warned him: "Trust not the stream! The old fellow is tricky!"

Huldrand well knew that musical voice, and stood as if transfixed amid the deepening shadows. Drifting clouds had obscured the moon, and the swift rush of the water at his knees confused him, but he would not yield.

"If you are not really there, if you are only hovering about me like a phantom, then will I no longer live, but become a shadow too, beloved Undine!" he cried, as he strode still deeper into the stream.

"Look around, look around, then, O fair and foolish youth!" said the voice once more. Turning his head, he saw in the reappearing moonlight a little island formed by the flood, and there, fair and smiling, lay Undine, nestling in the flowery grass under the closely interlacing branches.

Joyfully now the knight wielded his pine staff; a few more strides took him through the waves that roared between them, and he stood beside her safely reposing in her little shelter under the great trees. Undine had half arisen, and flinging her arms about his neck, she drew him down beside her on the soft turf.

"Now you shall tell me everything, dear friend," she whispered softly. "Those cross old people cannot hear us, and our leafy bower is far nicer than their wretched hut!"

"It is heaven!" cried Huldrand, and he clasped the fair flatterer to his heart and kissed her.

Meanwhile the fisherman had come to the edge of the stream and now shouted across: "Is it thus, Sir Knight, you return my hospitality, by making love to my foster-child, leaving me to search for her alone all night in terror and suspense?"

"I have only this moment found her, good father," replied Huldrand.

"So much the better for you," said the old man. "Now fetch her back here to me at once!"

But Undine refused, declaring she would rather go away altogether with the beautiful stranger into the haunted forest than return to the cottage where she could never do as she wished, and from which the knight sooner or later must depart. Twining her arms about Huldrand, she sang with inexpressible grace and allurements,—

Forth from the misty vale the wave
Outleaped, a freer course to gain;
But lost in ocean's vast expanse
It nevermore returned again.

The old fisherman wept bitterly at this, but Undine seemed to pay no heed to him; she continued fondling her lover till at last he said to her: "The old man's grief pains me at least, if it does not pain you. Let us go back to him!"

She fixed her great blue eyes on him in astonishment, then slowly and impatiently replied: "Very well, since you wish it. Whatever you like is my pleasure also. But first he must promise to let you tell without any interruption all that happened to you in the forest; as for the rest, that we shall see."

"Come back!" cried the fisherman, "only come back!" He could say no more. He only stretched out his arms toward her across the stream and nodded his head in assent to her demand, his gray hair falling over his face as he did so in a way that reminded Huldrand of the mysterious white man in the forest. Without giving himself time to think of this, however, the knight took the fair maiden in his arms and carried her across the narrow inlet left by the flood, between the islet and the main shore.

The old man embraced and kissed Undine in a transport of joy, and the old woman, as she joined them, also welcomed the wanderer most tenderly. There was no thought of reproaches, the more so as Undine seemed to have quite

forgotten her waywardness and overwhelmed her foster-parents with affectionate caresses. When at last they recollected themselves and looked about, the tempest had subsided, dawn was beginning to shed its rosy gleam upon the lake, and the birds were singing gayly on the wet branches. Undine still insisted upon hearing the knight's promised tale, and the old people now smilingly assented. Breakfast was laid under the trees, and they all sat down to it with glad hearts, Undine reclining at Huldbrand's feet upon the grass, while he began his story as follows.

CHAPTER IV

THE KNIGHT'S ADVENTURES IN THE FOREST

"It was perhaps some eight days ago that I entered the imperial city which lies just beyond the forest yonder. A fine tournament was being given there, and I spared neither steed nor lance. As I paused once in the lists to rest me from the noble sport and handed my helmet to a squire, my eyes fell upon a beautiful damsel standing in one of the balconies looking on. Upon inquiry I learned that the fair maid was Bertalda, ward of one of the richest and most powerful nobles in the neighborhood. I saw that she was watching me, and as is the custom with us young knights, though I had not ridden so very badly before, I now exerted myself to the utmost. I was Bertalda's partner in the dance not only that evening but each evening as long as the tournament lasted."

At this instant the knight felt a sudden sting in his left hand and paused to look at it. Undine had bitten sharply into his finger with her pearly teeth and was frowning darkly at him. Suddenly, however, the scowl gave place to a look of tender sadness, and she whispered softly, "So you are like all the rest!" and buried her face in her hands, while Huldbrand, troubled and perplexed, proceeded with his story.

"This Bertalda is a strange, haughty damsel. On the second day she no longer charmed me as at first, and on the third still less. But she showed me such favor that I remained with her, and so it chanced that one day in sport I begged of her her glove.

"'Yes, on condition that you ride alone into the haunted forest and bring me hack word of what it is like,' she answered.

"I really did not care so much for the token; but what is said is said, and a true knight does not wait to be urged twice to such an adventure."

"But I thought she loved you," broke in Undine. "So it would appear," said Huldbrand.

"Nay, then, she must be a fool, to send away him she loved, and into such a place too! The forest and its mystery would have waited long enough, for all I cared."

The knight smiled kindly at Undine, but without replying he continued: "Yesterday morning I started upon my journey. The sunbeams glanced so brightly on the tree-trunks and the greensward, and the leaves whispered together so merrily, that I laughed inwardly at those who fancied any evil was concealed in such a pleasant place. 'I shall soon have crossed it and back again,' I said to myself; and almost before I knew it I was deep in its green shades and had left the open plain far behind me. Then for the first time I realized how easy it would be to lose one's way in this great forest, and that therein lay the danger to travellers, perhaps; so I took care to observe the position of the sun, which by this time was high in the heavens. Looking up, I saw something black among the limbs of a tall oak, and taking it for a bear, was about to draw my sword, when a human voice, most harsh and discordant, called out to me:

"'Were I not up here to break off branches, how could we get fuel to roast you with at midnight, Sir Malapert?' And therewith the thing grinned, and rattled the boughs so that my horse took fright and bolted, before I could discover what sort of a devil's beast it was."

"Nay, do not mention his name" interrupted the old man, crossing himself, his wife doing the same; but Undine gazed at her lover with sparkling eyes, saying: "The best part of the story is that they have not really roasted him yet. Go on, fair sir!"

The knight continued accordingly: "In my steed's headlong flight I narrowly escaped being dashed against many a tree-trunk, but it was impossible to control the terrified beast, even though he was almost exhausted. At length, just as he was rushing toward a rocky precipice, a tall white man seemed to throw himself directly in front of the maddened animal, who reared and swerved aside. Exerting all my strength, I succeeded in stopping him, and then discovered that my rescuer was not a man at all, but a silvery brook that came leaping down the hill beside me and crossed the path, checking my horse's flight."

"Thanks, dear brook!" cried Undine, clapping her hands. But the old man kept shaking his head and seemed lost in thought.

"Hardly had I settled myself securely in the saddle and got a strong hold of the bridle once more," resumed the knight, "when a most extraordinary little man appeared beside me, more wrinkled and hideous than I can tell. He was of a brownish yellow color, with a nose almost as large as himself; he bowed and scraped to me, grinning continually with his wide mouth. His grimaces were so unpleasant that I thanked him curtly and turned my still frightened horse about, intending to seek some other adventure, or, if none were to be found, to make my way back again, for the sun was already sinking toward the west. But the little imp sprang about with lightning rapidity and stood in front of me again.

"'Look out there!' I cried impatiently, 'my horse is unmanageable and might run over you.'

"'So!' snarled the creature, chuckling more horridly than before, 'first pay me for having stopped your horse; but for me, you and your fine steed would have been lying at the bottom of yonder pit, ha! ha!'

"'Quit your grimaces,' I said, 'and be off with your money, then. It is all a lie, though, for it was that honest brook that saved me, not you, you wretched object!' With this I

dropped a gold piece in his outstretched cap and rode away. The creature uttered a howl, and with inconceivable swiftness was again at my side. I spurred my horse to a gallop, but he still kept up with me, though with difficulty it seemed, and twisting his body into the most extraordinary shapes, all the while holding up the gold piece and crying at each step: 'Bad gold, bad money! False coin, false gold!'



HULDRAND AND THE IMP.

"He croaked this out in such a hollow tone that it seemed as if he must drop dead after each cry, and his horrible red tongue hung far out of his mouth. Much disturbed, I stopped at last and demanded of him: 'Why do you howl so? Take another gold piece—take two if you like—and get you gone!' Thereupon he began his odious grimaces again, and cried out: 'No gold! I want no gold, young sir. I have had enough of that, as I will show you.'

"Suddenly the surface of the earth seemed to become round and transparent like a green glass globe, and far down in it I saw a crowd of imps playing with gold and silver. Head over heels they tumbled about, pelting each other with the precious stuff and puffing gold dust in each other's face. My odious companion seemed to stand half above, half below the surface, and made them pass him up handfuls of gold, which he held out to me derisively and flung tinkling down again into the depths. Then he showed the gold piece I had given him to the goblins, who held their sides with laughter and pointed their lean fingers at me, hissing. Wilder and wilder, nearer and nearer grew the tumult, till, seized with terror, as my horse had been, I plunged the spurs into him and dashed madly, I know not how far, into the forest for the second time.

"When we stopped once more, it was getting dark, but a white footpath gleamed before me through the branches, which I concluded must lead back to the city; but as I was about to follow it, the apparition of an unearthly white face with ever-changing features stared at me from among the leaves. I tried to escape from it, but whichever way I went it followed me. Enraged at last, I tried to drive my horse at it; but a shower of white foam met us and forced us to turn away again blinded. Thus it drove us ever farther and farther from the footpath, compelling us to proceed in one direction. So long as we kept to this, it remained close at our heels, it is true, but did us no harm.

"Now and then, as I glanced at it, the white head seemed to be placed on an equally huge white body, but I

could never be sure that it was not merely a waterfall. Warily we continued to fly from the figure, which nodded at us frequently, as if to say, "That is right, that is right!" At length we emerged from the forest yonder, when I beheld your little cottage with the lake and the trees, and where at last the white face vanished."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the fisherman. He then began to wonder how their guest might best make his way back to his friends in the city; whereupon Undine laughed softly to herself. Perceiving this, Huldbrand remarked, "I thought you were glad to have me here; why are you so pleased, then, at the thought of my departure?"

"Because you cannot get away," replied the maiden. "Just try to cross the overflowing stream in a boat, on horseback, or afoot, if you choose. Do not attempt it, for you would surely be dashed to pieces against the whirling stones and tree-trunks. As for the lake, I know that well; even my father does not venture on it in his boat."

Huldbrand rose laughing to see whether Undine's words were true. The old man accompanied him, and the maiden playfully ran along beside them. They found she was quite right. So the knight was forced to remain on the island, which the slope had now become, until the flood subsided.

As they went back to the cottage, he whispered in his fair companion's ear, "Tell me, little Undine are you angry with me for staying?"

"Never mind!" replied the maiden, in a peevish manner, "If I had not bitten your finger, who knows what more we might have heard about Bertalda?"

CHAPTER V

HOW THE KNIGHT LIVED ON THE ISLAND

You may sometime have chanced, dear reader, after many vicissitudes in the world, to come upon some pleasant spot where love of peace and simple joys revived within you; where childhood's home with all its pure affections almost seemed to have risen from the grave for you; and you felt that there indeed it would be well to live and have your habitation. True, it may have been only an illusion for which you have afterwards been forced to atone, but that does not concern us now, nor will you care to dwell upon those bitter moments. Think only of that sweet foretaste of angelic rest, and you can conceive what Knight Huldbrand felt while he lived on the island.

With quiet satisfaction he often watched the stream rushing past more wildly every day, its channel ever widening and making his isolation more complete. A part of the time he would spend roaming about with an old crossbow he had found in a corner of the hut, waylaying the birds as they flew by him, and bringing whatever he could kill to the kitchen for food. At such times Undine would reproach him bitterly for taking the life of the joyous little creatures soaring so happily in the blue depths of the sky and would even weep over the dead birds; while at other times, if he returned empty-handed, she would find fault with him for his laziness and awkwardness, which compelled them to put up with fish and crabs for food. But in either case her pretty fits of anger charmed the knight, especially as she seldom failed to atone for them by the fondest caresses.

The fisherman and his wife, having been taken into the young people's confidence, looked upon them as a betrothed or rather as a married pair, shut out from the world to dwell with them upon the island. This very isolation made Huldbrand feel

as if he were already Undine's husband. It seemed to him that there was nothing beyond these encircling waters, or that, at any rate, he could never cross them to go back to the world of men; and if at times he was reminded of deeds of chivalry by the neighing of his steed or the sight of the coat-of-arms embroidered on his saddle and trappings, or if his good sword dropped unexpectedly from the nail on which it hung and slipped out of its sheath, he would silence his misgivings by assuring himself that Undine was not the fisherman's daughter, but most likely was sprung from some noble family in far-off lands. The only thing that disturbed him was to hear the old woman scolding Undine. The wilful maiden only laughed at her, to be sure, but it seemed to him as if his own honor had been touched. He could not altogether blame the old woman, either, for Undine richly deserved ten times more than she ever received. He still felt kindly toward his hostess, therefore, and their quiet life continued undisturbed.

One day there was real trouble. It had become a habit with the knight and the fisherman to enjoy a jug of wine together at noon and also in the evenings while the wind howled without, as it usually did now at night. But the supply which the old man had brought with him from the town had given out long since, and the two were vexed and out of sorts without it. Undine laughed at them all day, but they did not share her mirth so heartily as usual, and toward evening she left home to get away, as she said, from two such doleful countenances.

As darkness came on, it began to look stormy again. The waters roared and foamed, and the two men sprang to the door in alarm, thinking of the anxiety of that night when Huldbrand first came to the cottage. But they soon saw Undine coming toward them clapping her hands in great glee.

"What will you give me if I bring you some wine?" she cried. "But you need not give me anything if you will only look more cheerful than you have looked all this long tiresome day—that will be reward enough. Come with me and see what

the waves have cast up on the shore. I will promise to sleep a whole week if it is not a cask of wine!"

The two followed her to a sheltered cove, and there, sure enough, lay a barrel which held out promise of the goodly liquor for which they yearned. They rolled it toward the hut with all possible haste, for the storm was rising, and through the gathering darkness they could see the waves rearing their white heads as if watching for the coming rain. Undine helped the two men as much as she could, and when the tempest seemed about to burst above from setting out at once, even in this darkness. I promise you, however, if I ever return to an inhabited country again I will seek out him or his heirs and repay them double and treble the value of this wine."

The old man nodded approvingly at the knight and drained his glass with a clearer conscience.

But Undine retorted: "Do as you please with your money, but it would be foolish to go out into the night to search for any one. I should cry my eyes out if anything happened to you; and would you not rather stay with me and the good wine?"

"Ay, that indeed!" replied Huldbrand, with a smile.

"Then," said Undine, "it was silly of you to talk so. Every one should think of himself first. What does it matter about other people?"

The fisherman's wife turned away with a sigh and shook her head; but her husband, forgetting his usual indulgence, reproved the maiden sharply: "One would think you had been brought up by Turks and heathens!" He wound up with, God forgive me, and you too, wayward child!"

"But that is what I think, whoever brought me their heads she shook her fist playfully at the black clouds, crying: "Take care that you do not drench us! We are still some way from home."

The old man reproved her for such wicked presumption, but she only laughed softly to herself, and no harm ensued. On the contrary, they succeeded, against their expectations, in reaching the comfortable hearth in safety with their prize; and not till after the cask had been opened and was found to contain a choice wine, did the rain break in torrents from the lowering clouds and the wind roar through the tree-tops, lashing the waves to fury. Enough bottles were soon filled from the great cask to supply them for several days, and they sat cosily about the glowing hearth, drinking and jesting, while the storm raged without. All at once the fisherman grew serious.

"Good Heaven!" he cried, "here we sit enjoying this noble gift, while he to whom it belonged and from whom it was carried away must have lost his life in the waves!"

"Oh no, he has not!" declared Undine, smiling slyly at the knight, who answered earnestly:

"On my honor, good father, if I but knew how to find and rescue him nothing should keep me up," retorted Undine; "so what is the use of talking about it?"

Silence!" commanded her foster-father.

Whereupon the maiden, who in spite of her audacity was sometimes easily suppressed, clung to Huldbrand, trembling. "Are you also angry with me, dear friend?" she asked softly.

The knight pressed her hand and stroked her hair gently, but could not answer. Anger with the old man for his harshness toward her had kept him silent, and so the two couples sat gloomily facing each other.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRIDAL

Soft knock at the door broke the stillness and startled them all; for some trifling occurrence, happening unexpectedly, will often strike terror to the senses. Added to this, the mysterious forest was close at hand, and the cottage now seemed inaccessible to any human being. While they looked at each other doubtfully, the knocking was repeated, accompanied this time by a deep groan. The knight started to seize his sword, but his host whispered, "If it should be what I fear, no mortal weapon will avail us."

Undine, however, went straight to the door and cried boldly and indignantly, "If you are bent upon mischief, you earth-spirits, Kuhleborn shall teach you better manners!"

These strange words only seemed to add to the uneasiness of the others. They looked askance at the maiden, and Huldbrand was just summoning courage to question her, when a voice without replied: "I am no earth-spirit, unless you so call one who still inhabits mortal clay. If you fear God and are willing to aid me, you who dwell within, then open to me quickly!"

At these words Undine flung open the door and held a lamp out into the stormy night, thus revealing the form of an aged priest, who started back in amazement at the unexpected sight. So radiant a vision appearing at the door of this lowly hut might well seem the work of magic. He began to chant: "All good spirits, praise ye the Lord!"

"I am no phantom," said Undine, smiling. "Am I so frightful to look upon? You can see that pious words have no terrors for me. I too worship God and praise Him in my own way—each according to his nature as He has created us. Come in, good father, you will find most worthy people here."

The priest entered, bowed low, and looked about him. He was of mild and venerable appearance, but water dripped from every fold of his dark robe and from his long white beard and hair. Huldbrand and the fisherman conducted him at once to a chamber and furnished him with fresh clothing, while the two women dried his priestly garments by the fire. He thanked them humbly and kindly, but would on no account accept the knight's proffered cloak; he chose instead an old gray mantle of the fisherman's, and wrapped in this he returned to the kitchen, where the old woman insisted upon his seating himself in her armchair. "You are old and weary, father," she declared, "and also a priest."

Undine pushed the little stool on which she usually sat at Huldbrand's side under the stranger's feet, and waited on him with the greatest care and solicitude; and when the knight attempted to tease her about it in a whisper, she answered gravely, "He is a servant of the Creator of us all, and that is not a subject for jesting."

After the priest had been refreshed with food and wine, he told them his story. He had set out on the previous day, he said, from his monastery, far beyond the great lake, for the Bishop's palace, in order to report to him the distress that had been caused to the monks and their poor tenants by these extraordinary floods. After making a wide circuit to avoid them, he had found himself forced that evening to cross an arm of the lake with the aid of two honest boatmen. Scarcely, however, had our little vessel touched the water," he continued, "when the frightful storm arose that still is raging about us; and it seemed as if the waters had only awaited our coming to begin their mad sport. The oars were soon torn from the boatmen's hands, and their broken fragments carried away by the waves. Thus helpless and abandoned to the fury of the elements, we drifted toward your shores, which we soon saw rising before us amid the foam and spray. The boat tossed about more wildly and dizzily every moment. Whether it was overturned or I was washed out I cannot say, but I was dashed

along in momentary expectation of a speedy death, till at last a wave flung me up here under the trees on your island."

"Island, indeed!" the fisherman broke in. "Only a short time ago it was a peninsula, but now that the stream and the lake seem to have gone mad together, all around us is changed."

"So I discovered," said the priest, "as I staggered along the shore in the darkness, amid the howling of the storm; but I presently perceived a well-beaten pathway which seemed to lose itself in the shadows; following it, I soon spied the light in your cottage and ventured hither; nor can I ever sufficiently thank my Heavenly Father, who has not only saved me from a watery grave but led me to such kind and pious people as yourselves; the more so as I seem likely never to see any other of my fellow beings in this life."

"Why do you say that?" asked the fisherman.

"Who can tell how long this disturbance of the elements may last?" returned the other. "Moreover, I am an old man. My own stream of life may be lost in the earth before the waters subside; nor is it impossible that they may so far separate you from the forest that you can no longer cross them, even in your boat; and the people of the outer world, absorbed in their own concerns, will quite forget your existence."

"God forbid!" murmured the old woman., crossing herself.

Her husband smiled at her and said: "How inconsistent you are! That would make no difference to you at least, dear wife. How many years is it since you crossed the edge of the forest? And whom have you seen in all that time save Undine and myself? Sir Huldbrand and the priest have been but a short time with us, and even if we were forgotten on the island they would still be here; so you would be even better off, after all."

"That may all be true," she replied, "yet it is a strange feeling to be cut off entirely from one's own kind, however little we may have seen or known of them."

"Then you will stay with us," whispered Undine tenderly to the knight, as she nestled closer to his side.

But ever since the priest had ceased speaking, Huldbrand had been lost in thought. The world beyond the forest stream seemed dimmer and farther away than ever, the blooming island where he now dwelt more fair and smiling, and his bride—was she not the sweetest flower that grew in all the world? The priest was at hand—Just then the old woman glanced at Undine reprovingly for clinging to her lover so closely in the holy man's presence, and a stream of angry words seemed about to follow. Huldbrand could no longer contain himself, and turning to the priest, he said, "Good father, you see before you a betrothed couple, and if the maiden and the old people will but consent, you shall unite us in marriage this very evening."

The fisherman and his wife were astonished. The thought had often crossed their minds, to be sure, but they had never spoken of it, and the knight's proposal fell upon their ears like something new and unheard of. Undine had grown serious all at once and sat gazing pensively down as if in deep thought, while the priest closely inquired about their relations and made sure of the old folks' consent. After much discussion the affair was finally settled, and the old woman bustled off to prepare the bridal chamber and fetch two consecrated tapers she had long kept laid away for the wedding ceremony. The knight meanwhile was twisting two rings off his gold chain for his bride and himself to exchange.

But Undine, seeing this, came to herself. "Wait!" she cried, "my parents did not send me into the world wholly destitute; they must long ago have looked forward to such an occasion as this." She ran out of the room, and quickly returned with two beautiful rings, one of which she handed to her bridegroom, keeping the other herself. The old fisherman

was amazed, and his wife, who now appeared, was even more so, for neither of them had ever seen these jewels before.

"My parents," added Undine, "had these rings sewed into the fine dress I wore when I came to you, and bade me say nothing of them to any one until my wedding-day. So I took them out secretly and have kept them hidden away till now."

The priest here put an end to further inquiry by lighting the holy tapers, which he placed on a table; then calling the young couple to him and speaking a few solemn words, he united them in marriage. The old people bestowed their blessing, while the bride leaned upon her husband's arm, trembling and thoughtful.

When the ceremony was over, the priest said: "You are curious people! Why did you tell me you were the only persons on the island? During the whole ceremony there was a tall handsome man in a white cloak standing just outside the window opposite to me. He must still be near the door, if you wish to invite him in."

"Heaven forbid!" cried the dame, with a shudder; the old man shook his head silently, while Huldbrand rushed to the window. He fancied he could see a streak of white without, but it soon vanished in the darkness; so he assured the priest he must have been mistaken. Then they all seated themselves sociably about the hearth.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT FURTHER BEFELL ON THE WEDDING EVENING

All through the ceremony Undine had been perfectly quiet, but now her wild spirits seemed to overflow, and she became more capricious and freakish than ever, tormenting her husband, her foster-parents, and even the venerable priest with all sorts of elfish pranks; but whenever the old woman was about to reprove her, a few serious words from Huldbrand referring significantly to Undine as his wife would silence her. In reality the knight himself was little pleased with his bride's childish behavior, but nothing could stop her. Whenever she noticed his disapproval, as sometimes happened, she would become subdued for the moment, and seating herself beside him, would avert his displeasure with smiles and caresses. But the next moment she would break out again with some mad prank and be wilder than ever. At length the priest said to her, in a serious but kindly way, "My dear child, one cannot but be charmed with you; but remember it is now your duty to keep your soul in harmony with that of your husband."

"Soul!" cried Undine, laughing, "that sounds well, and your advice might be useful and necessary for most people, but supposing one has no soul at all—what then, pray? And that is the case with me."

Deeply wounded, the priest was turning away from her in righteous indignation, but she came close to him and said appealingly: "Nay, father, hear me before you are cross with me, for it would grieve me to have you so, and besides you should not be angry with a creature who has never done you any harm. Only be patient with me and I will explain all."

She was evidently on the point of relating something, when suddenly some secret terror seemed to seize her and she burst into tears, while her companions, not knowing what to

think, gazed at her in anxious silence. At length, drying her eyes and looking earnestly at the priest, she went on: "It must be a beautiful and yet a terrible thing too, to have a soul. I implore you, holy father, tell me, would it not be better to remain without one?"

Undine paused as if waiting for his reply, keeping back her tears and gazing at the priest with such a look of awe and apprehension that the others started from their seats in alarm and shrank away from her. "Heavy must be a soul's burden," she continued, as no one spoke; "heavy indeed, for its approaching shadow already fills me with grief and terror; and alas! I was wont to be so happy and light-hearted!" She again burst into tears and buried her face in her hands.

At this the priest approached and adjured her solemnly to confess all. She fell on her knees before him, repeating after him all the pious words he spoke; and praising God, she declared herself at peace with the world. At last he turned to the knight. "Sir bridegroom," he said, "I leave you alone with her whom I have given to you. I can find no evil in her, but much that is strange and mysterious. I charge you to be prudent, loving, and faithful." So saying, he left the room, and the old people followed him, crossing themselves.

Undine was still kneeling, but she uncovered her face and said, glancing timidly at Huldbrand: "Alas! you will have nothing more to do with me now; and yet I have done nothing bad. I am only a poor child." She looked so sweet and piteous, as she spoke, that her husband quite forgot all his mystification, and hastening to her clasped her to his heart. Undine smiled through her tears (it was like the glow of sunrise reflected on a sparkling brook), and stroked the knight's cheek with her soft hand, whispering gently, "You cannot leave me, beloved!"

Huldbrand resolutely shook off the dark thoughts that still lingered in his mind, and the suspicion that he had married some sprite or creature from the spirit world, but he could not refrain from asking one question:

"Only tell me, dear little Undine, what it was you were saying about earth-spirits and Kuhleborn when the priest knocked at the door."

"Oh, that was only a child's foolish story," she replied, laughing. "First, I frightened you, and then you frightened me. And that is the end of the romance of our wedding-day!"

Nay, not so!" said the enamoured knight. Extinguishing the candles, he clasped his lovely bride in his arms and covered her with kisses in the bright moonlight which now poured in through the window.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING

Huldbrand was awakened by the bright morning sunshine and lay quiet for a time, busy with his thoughts. Whenever he had fallen asleep in the night he had been haunted by horrible dreams of grinning spectres that suddenly changed into beautiful women, or of beautiful women who were suddenly transformed into dragons; and starting up in terror from these hateful visions he would find only the moonlight lying cold and white without the window. Then he would look anxiously at Undine slumbering peacefully beside him in all her wonted sweetness and beauty, and pressing a kiss upon her rosy lips, compose himself to sleep again, only to be roused by fresh horrors.

Looking back on all this in broad daylight, he blamed himself for ever having permitted himself a doubt of his beautiful wife, and frankly acknowledged his weakness to her. She answered him by only taking his hand and sighing deeply, though a glance more tender and confiding than he had ever before seen in her eyes assured him that she was not angry. He arose cheerfully, therefore, and went to join the others, whom he found sitting about the fire with anxious faces, no one daring to speak his thoughts, while the priest seemed secretly praying to avert some evil. As the young husband appeared, however, beaming with happiness, their faces brightened, and the fisherman began to jest with him in a quiet way that caused even his wife to smile indulgently.

Meanwhile Undine had dressed herself, and now appeared in the doorway. All rose to greet her, and stood transfixed with surprise, for she looked the same yet seemed a different being. The priest was the first to address her with a look of fatherly kindness on his face, and as he raised his hands in benediction she sank devoutly on her knees before

him, begging his forgiveness for all her folly of the day before and beseeching him in the most touching tone to pray for the salvation of her soul. Then she arose and kissed her foster-parents, thanking them for all their kindness to her. "Dear people," she said, "now I feel from the bottom of my heart how much you have always done for me!"

In the midst of her caresses, seeing that the housewife was concerned about the breakfast, she went directly over to the hearth, cooked and laid out the meal, and would not allow her good old foster-mother to be troubled over it. All through the day she was quiet, gentle, and thoughtful—at once the busy housewife and the shy, tender, loving bride. Those who had known her so long expected every moment to see a sudden transformation into one of her elfish moods, but they looked in vain; her angelic sweetness and humility continued unbroken. The priest could scarcely take his eyes from her, and said many times to Huldbrand, "Sir, it was a treasure that Heaven bestowed upon you yesterday by my unworthy aid; cherish her as she deserves, and she will prove a blessing to you for time and all eternity."

As the shades of evening began to fall, Undine took the knight's arm tenderly and drew him out of doors, where the fresh green grass and slender tree-trunks were lighted up by the rays of the setting sun. A look of tender sadness shone in the young wife's eyes, and on her lips there seemed to tremble some secret which as yet found vent only in gentle sighs. She led her lover on in silence, answering him only with glances full of love and shy submission, till they came to the banks of the overflowing stream, which, much to the knight's amazement, they found rippling along in gentle wavelets, without a trace of its recent fury.

"By to-morrow it will be completely dry," said Undine, tearfully, "and then you will be free to go wherever you choose."

"Not without you, little Undine," replied the knight, smiling at her; "even had I the wish to forsake you, the

Church, the priesthood, the Emperor, and the whole empire could interpose and bring your truant back again."



THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING.

"That shall be as you will," murmured Undine, half laughing, half weeping, "but I do not think you will desert me;

I love you far too well for that. Carry me over to that little island yonder,—there we will part if it must be. I could easily wade across the streamlet by myself, but it is sweet to feel your arms around me, and I shall have rested happily in them once more at least."

Huldbrand, filled with strange and anxious emotion, could not answer. He took her in his arms and carried her over, remembering as he did so that it was from this very island he had taken her back to the fisherman on that first night. On the other side of the brook he laid his fair burden down on the soft turf and was about to seat himself beside her; but she cried: "Nay, nay, not here; sit opposite to me, so that I may read my fate in your eyes before your lips have spoken. Listen well, now, and I will tell you all." And she began as follows:

"You must know, my sweet darling, that in the elements there are creatures almost like yourself in form, but who are rarely visible to mortal sight. In fire the strange salamanders glitter and play; deep within the earth dwells the tricky race of gnomes; the woods are inhabited by nymphs, who are spirits of the air also; while the seas, rivers, and brooks contain the countless tribes of water-sprites. Their halls of crystal through which gleams the light of sun and stars are wondrous fair to see; tall shrubs of coral, laden with red and purple fruit, grow in the gardens; the white sea-sands are strewn with varicolored shells and treasures of olden days, too precious for the present to enjoy and long since hidden by the mysterious silver veil of the deep; many a noble monument still gleams below there bedewed by the loving waves and adorned with flowery mosses and wreaths of seaweed. Those who dwell there are far more fair to look upon than mortals. Many a fisherman who has had the good fortune to surprise some beauteous naiad rising from the water as she sang would spread the report of the wonderful apparition; and these beings came to be called Undines by men. You see before you an Undine, dear friend."

The knight tried to convince himself that his beautiful wife was only in one of her peculiar moods and teasing him with some fanciful tale; but try as he would he could not believe this for a moment. A strange thrill shot through him, and he stared in silence at the fair speaker, who sighed deeply and continued:

"We should be far better off than you the other human people (for so we call those whose forms resemble our own) but for one thing. We and the other children of the elements vanish into dust, body and spirit, leaving no trace behind; and although the time comes for you mortals to awake again to a higher life, we must remain forever commingled with our native sand and fire, wind and wave, for we have no souls. The elements sway us, obey us often as long as we live, and absorb us when we die; and we are happy, with nothing to grieve us, as the nightingale, the goldfish, and all nature's bright children are. But no one is contented with his lot. My father, who is a mighty prince in the Mediterranean Sea, desired his only daughter to possess a soul, even at the cost of the sorrows that might thereby fall to her lot. But a soul cannot be gained by those of our kind except by being united to a mortal in the closest bonds of love. I now have one, and I owe it to you, unspeakably beloved one, nor will I ever cease to bless you for it, even should it bring me life-long misery. For what would become of me were you to leave me? Yet I would not hold you by deceit. If it is your wish to leave me, do it now and go back to the land alone. I will plunge into this brook; it is my uncle, who leads a hermit life here in the forest, far from all his friends. But he is very powerful and rules over many great rivers; and as he brought me here to the fisherman, a laughing child, so will he take me back to my parents a loving, suffering woman with a human soul."

She would have said more; but Huldbrand, full of the deepest love and compassion, caught her in his arms and carried her back to the mainland. There with tears and kisses he vowed never to forsake his beloved wife; calling himself

even more blessed than the Greek sculptor Pygmalion, whose beautiful statue of his love was brought to life by Venus. Undine, clinging to his arm in fondest trust as they walked back to the cottage, felt how little she had cause to regret her father's wonderful crystal palaces.

CHAPTER IX

DEPARTURE OF THE KNIGHT AND HIS YOUNG BRIDE

When Huldbrand awoke the next morning, he found his fair companion missing and began again to wonder whether his marriage, and the lovely Undine herself, had not all been a delusion of magic. But she soon came in, kissed him, and seating herself on the bed beside him, said: "I was up early and went out to see whether my uncle had kept his word. He has already called the waters back into their quiet bed, and now takes his solitary, thoughtful course through the forest as before. His comrades in the air and in the lake have also betaken themselves to rest. All is peaceful hereabouts once more, and you may set out on your homeward way dry-footed whenever it pleases you."

The knight felt as if he must still be dreaming, so little could he reconcile himself to the idea of his wife's strange relations; but he said nothing of this, and Undine's beauty and devotion soon banished his secret misgivings. Later, as they stood together in the doorway, looking out over the verdant headland and its encircling waters, he felt such a fondness for this cradle of his love that he said to her: "Why need we leave so early as to-day? Surely we shall find no happier days in all the world than we have spent in this secluded spot. Let us watch the sunset two or three times more at least, before we go."

"As my lord wishes," replied Undine, with sweet humility; "but it will grieve the old people sorely to part with me at any time, and if they learn that I now have a soul with which to love and honor them as they deserve, their feeble spark of life may be extinguished by their grief. At present they take my gentleness and piety for a passing mood only, like the calmness of the lake when the winds are still; they will

soon become as attached to some flower or tree as they have been to me. They must not discover this new-found gift just as they are about to lose me forever in this world; but how am I to conceal it from them if we are together any longer?

Huldbrand was of like mind. He went to the old couple to arrange with them about the departure of himself and Undine, and it was decided they should set out without delay. The priest accompanied them. After a hasty farewell, Huldbrand lifted his lovely bride to the horse's back, and having quickly crossed the dry bed of the stream, they entered the forest. Undine wept silently but bitterly, while the fisherman and his wife were loud in their lamentations, seeming to feel a foreboding of the loneliness that would follow the loss of their lovely Undine.

The travellers soon reached the depths of the forest. They made a charming picture in these green shades,—the graceful figure seated on the noble, richly caparisoned steed, and attended on one side by the priest in the white robes of his order, on the other by the gallant young knight with his bright costume and flashing sword. The young couple had no eyes but for each other; they soon fell into a wordless exchange of glances, from which they were presently aroused by the murmur of conversation between the priest and a travelling companion who had joined them unperceived.

The stranger was clad in a white garment something like that of the priest, but the hood was drawn down closely over his face, and it fell in such voluminous folds about him that he was continually forced to gather it up and throw it over his arm, though apparently not impeded by it in the least in his walk. When the young people first became aware of his presence, he was saying: "And so I have lived in the forest here for many a year, good father; nor yet can I be called a hermit in your sense of the word, for I know nothing of penance, nor do I feel myself in any need of it. The reason I am so fond of the forest is that it is pretty in its way and

amuses me as I wander through its leafy glades, with now and then an unexpected sunbeam glancing down upon me."

"You are a singular person," replied the priest, "and I would gladly know more of you."

"And who are you, pray, if I may be so bold?" asked the stranger.

"They call me Father Heilmann," answered the holy man, "and I come from Saint Mary's monastery, on the other side of the lake."

"So?" said the other. "My name is Kuhleborn, and if it comes to ceremony, I might as well be called Lord or Freiherr Kuhleborn, for I am as free as the birds of the air or even a little more so. For example, I am now going to have a word with the damsel yonder." And in a trice he was close at Undine's side and reaching up to whisper in her ear. But she shrank from him in terror, saying, "I have nothing more to do with you now."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the stranger, "what a very grand marriage you must have made, no longer to recognize your own relations! Have you forgotten your uncle Kuhleborn, who brought you here so carefully upon his back?"

"But I entreat you," pleaded Undine, "trouble me no more. I fear you now, and my husband will become suspicious of me if he finds I have such strange relations."

"Do not forget, little niece," said Kuhleborn, "that I am here to protect you lest those foul earth-spirits play stupid tricks on you. Let me accompany you without more ado. The old priest yonder seems to have a better memory than you, for he declares my face is familiar to him and thinks I must have been with him in the boat when he fell into the water. And he is right, forsooth, for I was the waterspout that washed him out of it and landed him safe on shore in time for your wedding."

Undine and the knight looked at Father Heilmann, but he was walking on as if in a dream and apparently oblivious of

all that was said. At last Undine turned to Kuhleborn. "We are coming to the edge of the forest now," she said, "and shall no longer need your protection. Nothing can harm us now but you; so begone in love and kindness, I beseech you, and let us depart in peace i "

This seemed to enrage Kuhleborn. He made a horrible grimace and showed his teeth at Undine, who shrieked aloud to her companion for help. Like lightning, Huldbrand leaped to the other side of the horse and aimed a blow of his sharp sword at Kuhleborn's head; but instead of that he struck into a waterfall dashing down from a high cliff near by, which suddenly, with a splash and a sound like laughter, drenched them to the skin and awakened the priest from his reverie. The latter remarked: "I have been expecting this for some time; that brook dashed down the hill so close to us. At first I almost thought it was human and could speak."

But the waterfall whispered these words distinctly in Huldbrand's ear:

"Rash youth, bold youth,
I chide thee not! I hate thee not!
So thou guard thy bride with ruth,
Valiant soldier! reckless youth!"

A few more steps and they were in the open plain. The imperial city lay before them, and the evening sun which was gilding its turrets soon dried the wet garments of the travellers.

CHAPTER X

HOW THEY LIVED IN THE CITY

The sudden disappearance of the young Knight of Ringstettin had made a great commotion among the people of the town, with whom he was universally popular, not only for his gallantry in the lists and in the dance, but also for his kindly ways. His followers refused to stir from the place without their master, though not one had been brave enough to follow him into the haunted forest. They remained at their inn, therefore, indolently hoping, as men are wont to do, and keeping his memory alive by their regrets. When, soon after his departure, however, the great storm arose and the floods came, there seemed no doubt that the handsome stranger must have perished. Bertalda made no attempt to conceal her grief, and cursed herself for having urged him to that fatal ride into the forest. Her ducal foster-parents had come to take her home, but she persuaded them to stay on till there was some definite news of Huldbrand's fate. She even tried to induce some of the young knights who eagerly sought her favor to go and search for the bold adventurer in the forest, but would not pledge her hand as a reward for the venture, since she still hoped to bestow it on the absent knight, should he return; while, as for a glove or ribbon or even a kiss, no one was willing to risk his life for such a trifle in order to bring back such a dangerous rival.

Huldbrand's sudden appearance was therefore hailed with general rejoicing, and all the more so at his bringing back a beautiful young wife with Father Heilmann as witness to their marriage. The only one not pleased was Bertalda, who could not help being grieved, partly because she really loved the young knight with all her heart, and partly because she had displayed her sorrow over his prolonged absence more openly than was now becoming. She behaved with prudence, however, and accommodated herself to circumstances

cheerfully, living on most friendly terms with Undine, who was generally supposed to be a princess whom Huldbrand had delivered from the power of some vile wizard of the forest. When she or her spouse was questioned about it, they were either silent or replied evasively. Father Heilmann's lips were sealed on all such idle matters; and as he had returned to his monastery soon after their arrival, people were forced to content themselves with their own conjectures. Even Bertalda knew no more of the real truth than any one else.

Undine, meanwhile, grew fonder every day of this charming maiden. "We must have known each other before this," she would often say, "or else there must be some secret attraction between us; for unless there were some such deep and mysterious cause no one could love another as I have loved you from the very first." Bertalda, too, could not deny that she felt disposed to like and trust Undine, whatever reason for complaint she may have thought she had against her more fortunate rival. This mutual fondness led the one to persuade her husband, the other her parents, to defer the day of departure repeatedly; indeed it was even suggested that Bertalda should go with Undine for a visit to the castle of Ringstettin, at the source of the Danube.

They were speaking of this one beautiful evening while strolling about the market-place, which was surrounded by lofty trees. The young couple had brought Bertalda out with them for a little walk and were sauntering up and down in the starlight, often pausing in their conversation to admire a beautiful fountain that bubbled and sparkled in the middle of the square. The lights of neighboring houses shone through the trees. They heard the hum of voices of children at play and of other pleasure-seekers like themselves. They were alone, yet part of the cheerful, living world. The difficulties of the day seemed to vanish of themselves, and the three friends could no longer understand why there should have been the least doubt as to Bertalda's accompanying them on their homeward journey.



AT THE FOUNTAIN.

Just as they were about to fix a day for departure, a tall man came toward them from the centre of the market-place, bowed respectfully and whispered something to the young wife. Though apparently displeased with the interruption and with the speaker, she stepped a little to one side with him, and

they began to whisper together in what sounded like some foreign tongue. Huldbrand thought he recognized the stranger, and watched him so intently that he paid no heed to Bertalda's wondering questions. All at once Undine clapped her hands

joyfully and turned away, laughing, from her companion, who walked off shaking his head angrily and stepped into the fountain. This assured Huldbrand he was right in his conjecture; but Bertalda asked, "What did that man of the fountain want with you, dear Undine?"

The young wife laughed softly to herself. "The day after to-morrow, on your birthday, you shall know, sweet child!" was all she would say, but she invited Bertalda and her foster-parents to come and dine with them on that day. Then they parted.

"Was it Kuhleborn?" asked Huldbrand, with a secret shudder, as they walked home alone through the darkening streets.

"Yes, it was he," replied Undine, "and he tried to put all sorts of stupid nonsense into my head; but in the midst of it he unintentionally delighted me with a most welcome piece of news. If you wish to hear it now, dear lord and husband, you have only to speak and I will tell you all; but if you would give your Undine the greatest happiness, you will wait till the day after to-morrow and share in the surprise."

The knight gladly granted a request so winningly made. As Undine was falling asleep, she murmured happily to herself, "How surprised and pleased you will be over the message from the man of the fountain, dear, dear Bertalda!"

CHAPTER XI

BERTALDA'S BIRTHDAY

The guests were seated about the table, Bertalda at the head, decked out like a Goddess of Spring with flowers and jewels, the gifts of her friends and foster-parents; on either side of her were Undine and Huldbrand. The banquet was drawing to an end, and when dessert was brought in the doors were thrown open, according to the good old German custom, that the common people might enter and have their share of the festivities, while servants distributed wine and cake among them.

Huldbrand and Bertalda waited with suppressed impatience for the promised explanation, and kept their eyes upon Undine, who still remained silent, smiling happily to herself now and then, and playfully holding back the secret about to burst from her lips, as children sometimes keep their choicest bits for the last. Her two companions shared this delightful sensation in eager anticipation of this new happiness that was to be made known to them. Some of the guests now begged Undine for a song. This request seemed to suit her pleasure; so sending for her lute, she began as follows:

Morning so bright,
Flowers so gay,
Grasses so fragrant and tall,
On the wave-washed brink of the sea,
Among the grasses what
Glistens so brightly?
Is it a great white blossom
Dropped from the sky upon the greensward?
Ah! it is a tender child
Unconsciously playing with flowers.
Whence, whence hast thou come, sweet one?
From a far away unknown land,

The ocean has brought it hither.
 Nay, stretch not out thy little hand,
 No answering hand will clasp it.
 Even the flowers are strange and silent.
 They cannot give thee the heart's desire.
 Far away is the true mother breast.
 So early, even at life's threshold
 With heaven's own light in thy face
 Thou hast lost already the best,
 Poor child, and knowest it not.
 A noble knight comes riding by,
 And checks his steed before thee.
 He takes thee to his castle.
 There thou bloom'st, the fairest in the land.
 But thou hast left the highest joy
 Upon the unknown wave-washed shore.

Undine smiled sadly as she laid down her lute, and the eyes of the Duke and Duchess were wet with tears. "It was thus I found you that morning, poor orphan," said the Duke, deeply moved, to Bertalda. "As our beautiful minstrel rightly says, you have lost the highest joy, and we can never restore it to you."

"Listen also how it fared with the poor parents," said Undine, and taking up the lute again, she sang:

The mother wanders through the rooms,
 Seeking the lost in vain,
 And only finds an empty house!
 Empty house! oh bitter words!
 Empty house, which once the child
 Filled, day and night, with joy.
 The buds are bursting on the trees,
 The sunlight shines anew each morn;
 But, mother, cease thy searching,
 The child shall come no more.
 And when the evening twilight glows,
 And father seeks the hearth again,

He seeks to smile away his grief,
 But tears soon follow smiles.
 The father knows that in these rooms
 A deathly silence must remain.
 The mother only sits and sighs,
 For no little child smiles at her.

"Oh, Undine, for Heaven's sake, where are my parents?" cried the weeping Bertalda. "You certainly know. You must have found it out, you wonderful creature, or you could not have torn my heart as you have done. Are they here now? Can it be possible?" And her eyes glanced over the brilliant assemblage, lingering on a reigning princess who sat next to her foster-father.

Undine leaned forward, her eyes brimming over with happy tears. "Where are the poor afflicted parents?" she asked, and the old fisherman and his wife appeared from out the crowd of spectators, looking inquiringly from Undine to the beautiful damsel, their daughter.

"It is she—she is your daughter," said the delighted benefactress.

The old people clasped their long-lost child in their arms, thanking God and weeping aloud for

joy. But Bertalda, overcome with chagrin and anger, tore herself rudely from their embrace. The discovery was too much for her proud spirit—just at the moment, too, when she was fully expecting to rise to even greater splendor, and her fancy had already pictured crown and sceptre falling to her lot. She at once conceived the idea that her rival had contrived it all on purpose to humiliate her before Huldbrand and the world. She burst into a storm of abuse and reviled Undine and the old people, calling them such odious names as "Impostors!" and "Hired impostors!"

The old woman muttered to herself: "Mercy on us! what a wicked woman she has become! yet I feel in my heart

she is my own child." But the fisherman had folded his hands and was praying silently that this might not be his daughter; while Undine, pale as death, looked from one to another, overcome by the suddenness with which her happy anticipations had been changed to an agony of wretchedness such as she had never before felt, even in her dreams.

"Have you no soul, Bertalda? Have you really no soul?" she cried repeatedly, endeavoring to restore her wrathful friend to reason, as if from a sudden frenzy or some horrible nightmare. But as Bertalda only raged the worse, and the injured parents began to lament piteously, and the company to dispute, Undine suddenly arose and begged so earnestly for leave to speak in her own husband's house that all grew silent. Taking Bertalda's place at the head of the table, she stood there with such an air of modest dignity that all eyes were fixed upon her, while she spoke as follows:

"You people who look upon one another so angrily and so rudely destroy the pleasure of my feast, alas! I little knew your foolish ways and cruel hearts, nor shall I ever be able to understand you in all my life. That all my plans have gone amiss is not my fault, but your own, believe me, little as you may think it. I have only one thing more to say, but that you shall hear. I have told no lie. I have no proof except my word, but I will swear to the truth of what I have said. It was told me by the very person who lured Bertalda away from her parents into the water and afterwards laid her in the green meadow where the Duke would pass."

"She is a witch!" cried Bertalda, "a sorceress, who communes with evil spirits! she acknowledges it herself!"

"Nay, that I do not!" answered Undine, a world of innocence and candor shining in her eyes; "nor am I a sorceress. Look at me!"

"Then she lies and boasts!" broke in Bertalda; "she cannot prove that I am the child of these low-born folk. My noble parents, I beseech you, take me away from this place

and from this town where they all conspire to bring shame upon me!"

The venerable Duke made no motion to comply with this, and his wife said: "Nay, we must know where we stand. God forbid that I should stir a step from this room till we have learned the truth."

At this the old woman came forward and made obeisance to the Duchess. "You give me heart to speak, noble lady," she said. "If this wicked young woman is my daughter, she has a violet mark between her shoulders and another on the instep of her left foot. If she will but come with me into another room—"

"I will not disrobe, before that peasant woman I" said Bertalda, turning away contemptuously.

"But you will before me," retorted the Duchess, sternly; "follow me into the next room, damsel, and this good woman shall go with us."

The three withdrew accordingly, leaving the rest in anxious suspense. In a few moments they returned, Bertalda deadly pale, and the Duchess said: "Right is right, and I must acknowledge that our Lady Hostess has spoken truly. Bertalda is the fisherman's daughter; it is unnecessary for any one to know more than that." The princely pair then departed, taking with them their adopted child, and were followed at a sign from the Duke by the fisherman and his wife. The other guests withdrew in silence or whispering among themselves, while Undine sank weeping into Huldbrand's arms.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THEY DEPARTED FROM THE IMPERIAL CITY

The Lord of Ringstettin was not altogether pleased with the issue of the events of this day, yet he could not but be proud of the truth and generosity of heart displayed by his lovely wife. "If her soul was indeed my gift," he was forced to own to himself, "it was a far better one than my own, at all events"; and he resolutely banished every thought except of how to soothe her grief. He resolved to take her away the following morning from a place that must now be so painful to her and where recent events must have prejudiced the people against her.

In this he was mistaken, however. They were so accustomed to finding something mysterious about her that her strange discovery of Bertalda's birth did not greatly surprise them; on the other hand, all who heard of that damsel's history and her outrageous behavior were indignant at her. But the knight and his wife knew nothing of this as yet, nor would it have proved any comfort to Undine if she had; so it seemed best to leave the walls of the town behind them as speedily as might be.

With the first streak of dawn a splendid coach stood waiting at the door of the inn for Undine, the steeds of Huldbrand and his squire pawing the ground impatiently beside it. As the knight appeared leading his fair bride, a fisher girl approached them.

"We do not want any of your fish," said Huldbrand to her; "we are just going away."

At this the girl began to weep bitterly, and they saw to their surprise that it was Bertalda. They turned back with her into the house at once, and she told them that the Duke and Duchess had been so angry with her for the pride and violence

she had shown the day before, that they had withdrawn their protection from her entirely, though not without first making her a handsome allowance. The fisherman, too, had been well repaid and had set out with his wife the evening before to return home.

"I would have gone with them," she continued, "but the old man who is said to be my father —"

"He really is your father, Bertalda," interposed Undine; "the person whom you called the man of the fountain told me all about it. He was trying to persuade me not to take you with us to the castle of Ringstettin, and the secret escaped him."

"Well, my father, if you will have it so," said Bertalda,— "my father said: 'You shall not stay with us till you become a different creature. When you choose to make your way to us alone through the haunted forest, it will be a proof that you wish to belong to us. But come only as a fisher girl, not as a fine lady.' I must do as he says, for the whole world has forsaken me, and there is nothing left for me but to live and die in the lowly hut of my parents as a humble fisherman's child. The thought of the forest fills me with fear. They say it is full of frightful spectres, and I am so timid! But what else is there for me? I came here only to implore the Lady of Ringstettin's pardon for my unseemly behavior yesterday. I am sure you meant well, noble lady, but you little knew how it would pain me. Then in my distress wicked words escaped me. Forgive me, forgive me! I am already so unhappy! Think what I was even yesterday morning, and what I am now!"

A burst of tears checked her utterance, and Undine, similarly moved, fell upon her neck, weeping also. It was long before she could control herself, but at length she said: "You shall go to Ringstettin with us, and all shall be as we had planned before; only call me Undine again, not 'Dame' and 'Noble Lady.' Since we were exchanged as children, let us share each other's fortunes and live so unitedly that no human power can ever part us. Come, then, with us to Ringstettin. There we will arrange to share everything like sisters."

Bertalda glanced timidly at Huldbrand. The sight of the beautiful forsaken damsel filled his heart with pity, and giving her his hand he urged her kindly to confide herself to them. "We will send word to your parents," he said, "to let them know why you do not come." He was about to add much more concerning the good old people, but seeing that Bertalda shrank from the thought of them, he said no more. Taking her arm, he placed first her and then Undine in the coach, and rode cheerfully beside them, urging the driver on so stoutly that the imperial city with all its painful recollections soon lay behind them, and the ladies could now enjoy with better heart the beautiful country through which they passed.

After a journey of several days they came one fair evening to the castle of Ringstettin. The young lord had many matters to arrange with his steward and men, and Undine was left alone with Bertalda. They were walking on the high ramparts of the castle, admiring the charming landscape that lay stretched before them through the fertile Swabian country, when a tall man approached and greeted them courteously. He looked to Bertalda like the man of the fountain she had seen in the imperial city, and the resemblance seemed all the more striking when at an angry gesture of dismissal from Undine he went away with the same rapid step and ominous shake of the head as before and disappeared in a neighboring thicket.

"Do not be afraid, dear Bertalda," said Undine, "this time that hateful man shall do you no harm," And therewith she told her the whole history of her own origin, and how Bertalda had disappeared from the fisher folk and she had come to them in her place. At first Bertalda was greatly alarmed at this tale and thought her friend must have become suddenly mad, but she gradually became convinced of the truth of Undine's lucid narrative, which so well accounted for the strange events that had occurred of late, and which moreover bore the unmistakable stamp of that truth which never fails to awaken a responsive echo in the heart. She was bewildered at finding herself living in the midst of a fairy tale

such as she had hitherto only heard related, and gazed at Undine with awe; yet nevertheless she could not help feeling a chill come over her affection, and wondered that evening at supper how the knight could love a being whom she now regarded more as a spirit than human.

CHAPTER XIII

LIFE AT THE CASTLE OF RINGSTETTIN

As the writer of this tale is moved to the heart by it and hopes that others may be also, he begs his reader's forbearance if he now covers a long space of time in a few words and barely touches upon what happened therein. He well knows that it might be related in detail, how Huldbrand's heart gradually began to turn from Undine to Bertalda; how Bertalda's ardent love for the young knight became more and more evident, till the poor wife grew to be treated as an alien, more to be feared than pitied; how Undine's tears troubled the knight's conscience without reawakening the old love, so that sometimes when he was moved to be kind to her a shudder would creep over him and he would turn from her again to Bertalda, the child of earth;—all this might be dwelt upon, and perhaps should be. But the writer's heart shrinks from such a task, for he has known such things in his experience and cannot bear even the shadow of their memory. You, too, may have had these feelings, gentle reader, since such is the fate of mortal man; and it is well if you have felt rather than inflicted them, for in this it is more blessed to receive than to give. In that case, at such memories only a gentle sadness will steal over you and a tear course down your cheek, perchance, for the withered blossoms once so fondly loved. But enough of this; we will not pierce our hearts thus a thousand separate times, but content ourselves with saying that so it befell in the present case.

Poor Undine was very wretched, and the others were far from happy; Bertalda especially was jealous and ready to suspect Undine at the slightest deviation in her lover's devotion. She had gradually assumed an air of command, to which Undine meekly submitted, while the deluded Huldbrand openly supported her. What added still more to the discomfort of the occupants of the castle were the various strange

apparitions that haunted Huldbrand and Bertalda in the dark vaulted passages, such as had never before been heard of within the memory of man. The tall white personage, known to him only too well as Uncle Kuhleborn, to her as the man of the fountain, often appeared to them with threatening aspect, especially to Bertalda, who had more than once been made ill from fright and even thought of leaving the castle. She controlled herself, however, partly because of her passion for Huldbrand, although there had been as yet no open declaration of love between them, and partly because she knew not whither to turn her steps if she did leave.

In answer to Huldbrand's message that Bertalda was with them, the old fisherman sent a few scrawled lines, scarcely legible, saying: "I am now a poor old widower, for my dear faithful wife is dead; but lonely as I am in the cottage, I would rather have Bertalda there than here, so long as she does not harm my dear Undine. I will curse her if she does!" These last words Bertalda threw to the winds, but she respected her father's wish that she should stay away, as people are wont to do in such cases.

One day, while Huldbrand was away, Undine summoned the servants and ordered them to fetch a large stone and carefully cover over the fine fountain that played in the centre of the castle courtyard. The men demurred, saying they would then have to go far down into the valley to get water, but Undine smiled sadly. "I am sorry to add to your labors, good friends," she replied; "I would far rather bring up the water jugs myself, but this fountain must be closed. Believe me, there is no other way of avoiding a still greater evil."

The servants, glad of any opportunity to serve their kind mistress, said no more, but seized the huge stone and were about to place it over the fountain when Bertalda ran up, ordering them to stop. She used this water herself to bathe in, it was so good for her complexion, and she would never consent to its being sealed up. But this time, instead of yielding, Undine remained firm, declaring it was her place as

mistress of the house to arrange its affairs as she thought best, and no one should call her to account except her lord and master.

"See!" cried Bertalda, anxiously, how the poor, beautiful water leaps and boils at being hidden forever from the sunshine and the cheerful human faces whose mirror it was intended to be!"

In truth the fountain did seem to boil and gurgle strangely, as if something were trying to force its way to the surface, but Undine only insisted the more firmly that her orders should be obeyed. This was hardly necessary, however. The castle retainers were as glad to obey their kind lady as they were to cross Bertalda; so in spite of her threats and anger the stone was soon laid securely over the basin of the fountain. Undine then leaned over it thoughtfully and wrote on it with her slender hand; she must have held something sharp and biting in it, for when she had turned away and the others approached, they found all kinds of strange characters on the stone which had not been there before.

When Huldbrand returned that evening, Bertalda met him with tears and complaints of Undine's action. He looked sternly at his poor wife, who averted her glance but said firmly, "C Surely my lord and spouse would not rebuke even one of his vassals before hearing him, much less should he rebuke his wedded wife!"

"Speak, then; what induced you to commit this strange act?" demanded the knight, frowning darkly.

"I prefer to tell you alone," sighed Undine.

"It can be said just as well before Bertalda," he returned.

"Yes, if you so command," said Undine. "But do not compel me to, I implore you."

She was so meek and appealing in her submission that the knight's heart seemed penetrated by a sunbeam from

happier days, and putting his arm around her kindly, he led her into his own chamber, where she told him as follows:

"You well know that wicked uncle, Kuhleborn, my dearest lord, and have often been angered by his presence in this castle, where he has more than once frightened Bertalda. It is because he is soulless—merely an empty mirror of the outer world, incapable of reflecting any inward feeling. He has noticed sometimes that you were displeased with me, and I have wept over it while Bertalda laughed; and because of this he has imagined all sorts of unjust things and interfered unbidden in our concerns. What is the use of my reproaching him or sending him away harshly? He will not believe a word I say. One of his shallow life knows not that the joys and sorrows of love are so closely interwoven that no human power can separate them; that a smile may lie hidden beneath our tears, and tears gush forth at the bidding of a smile."

Undine looked up at Huldbrand smiling through her tears as she spoke, and he felt all the glamour of the old love stealing once more into his heart. Perceiving this, she drew closer to him and proceeded: "Since Kuhleborn was not to be driven away with words, I was forced to close the door against him, and his only approach to us was through that fountain. He is at variance with the other water-spirits hereabouts, and only farther down the Danube, where some of his friends have joined the river, does his power begin again. That is why I had the stone placed over the fountain and inscribed it with signs that will baffle my jealous uncle and prevent his crossing your path or mine or Bertalda's any more. The stone can be lifted off again at any time, for the inscriptions have no power over mankind; so if you choose you can grant Bertalda's request, but truly, she knows not what she asks. The bad Kuhleborn has a special spite against her, and if any of the things he prophesies were to happen, as they easily might without her meaning any harm, alas! even you, my beloved, might not be free from danger!"

Huldbrand was deeply touched by his noble wife's magnanimity in baffling her formidable protector so completely, even when reviled by Bertalda for it. He embraced her tenderly and said, "The stone shall remain where it is, and everything shall be as you wish, now and always, my precious Undine!"

She returned his caresses joyfully, grateful for these long un wonted words of love; and she added: "Since you are so kind and gracious to me to-day, best friend of all, may I venture to make one request? You are like the summer, which in the height of its splendor crowns itself with thunder clouds like a true king and god of earth. So do you sometimes frown and your eyes flash lightning, and it becomes you well, though I in my folly often weep thereat. Only promise me that you will never do this when we are on the water, or even near to it, for there my family have power over me. They might tear me from you in their relentless anger, and I should be forced to spend the rest of my life below there in their crystal palaces, never to return to you; or, if they should send me up once more, ah, Heaven! that would be still worse. No, no, beloved, do not let it come to that if you love your poor little Undine!"

He solemnly promised this, and they left the room together and peaceful once more. In the hall they met Bertalda with some workmen she had sent for in the meantime, and she accosted them in the bitter manner she had assumed of late, saying: "Now that your secret conference is over I suppose we can have the stone removed. Get to work, you people, and attend to it at once."

But Huldbrand, indignant at her arrogance, exclaimed sharply, "Let the stone remain where it is!" and rebuked Bertalda for her rudeness to his wife. Whereat the workmen departed, exulting inwardly, while Bertalda turned pale and hurriedly went to her chamber.

The supper hour came and they waited in vain for her. She was sent for, but her room was empty, and the messenger

brought back only a sealed letter directed to the knight. He opened it, greatly perplexed, and read:

"I am ashamed that I am only a poor fisherman's daughter. I will atone for having forgotten it by going to dwell in my parents' wretched home. Be happy with your beautiful wife!"

Grieved to the heart, Undine besought her husband to hasten after the maiden and bring her back. But alas! there was little need. His passion for Bertalda had returned afresh, and he hurried through the castle asking if any had seen what direction the fugitive had taken in her flight. He learned nothing, however, and had already mounted his horse in the courtyard, determined to try the road by which he had brought Bertalda to the castle, when a peasant lad met him and assured him he had met the lady on the way to the Black Valley. The knight shot through the gate like an arrow and dashed off in the direction indicated, quite deaf to the anxious cries of Undine, who called after him: "To the Black Valley? Oh, not there, not there! or, in the name of Heaven, take me with you!"

Finding he did not hear her, she had her white palfrey saddled with all speed and rode away after the knight, without permitting any one to accompany her.

CHAPTER XIV

BERTALDA'S RETURN WITH THE KNIGHT

The Black Valley lay deep in the heart of the mountains. What its name is now no one knows, but in those days the country folk gave it that name because of its dark appearance caused by the huge trees, many of which were pines. Even the brook which rippled along between the rocks looked almost black and had none of the sparkle of streams which reflect the blue sky above them. Now in the gathering darkness it looked even blacker and wilder as the knight rode anxiously along its bank, first fearing that delay might permit the fugitive to escape him, and then that too great haste might cause him to overlook her if she was concealed somewhere. He had ridden far into the valley by this time and thought he must surely overtake her ere long if he was on the right track. The doubt that this might not be so caused him painful anxiety. What would become of the delicate Bertalda alone in the stormy night, which was already growing black and terrible?

At last he saw something white gleaming through the trees on the mountain-side, and thinking he recognized Bertalda's gown, he started toward it. But his horse refused to stir, and reared so violently that, fearing to lose time and finding himself impeded on horseback among the bushes, he dismounted. Fastening the snorting animal to an elm-tree, he made his way carefully along on foot. Cold dew from the branches dropped upon his cheeks and forehead; distant thunder rolled from time to time beyond the mountains, and everything looked so weird and strange that he began to feel a sudden fear of the white figure lying on the ground,—so near now that he could plainly discern the form of a sleeping or fainting woman, clad in a long white gown such as Bertalda had worn that day. He came close to her, shook the branches, and rattled his sword; but she did not stir.

"Bertalda!" he cried, softly at first, then louder and louder, till the beloved name reechoed from the mountain-tops. But all was in vain; the sleeper did not awake. The natural darkness of the valley and approaching night prevented him from distinguishing the sleeper's features; but a chill misgiving crept over him, and he knelt down on the ground beside the figure. Just then a sudden flash of lightning illuminated the scene, and there before him he saw a frightfully distorted countenance, while a sepulchral voice cried, "Give me a kiss, beloved shepherd!"

Huldrand started up with a cry of horror, and the hideous figure confronted him. "Get you home," it muttered; "evil spirits are abroad. Home! or I will get you!" and it clutched at him with its long white arm.

"Ha! malicious Kuhleborn, I know you now!" cried the knight, recovering himself. "I care not, since it is only you, foul spirit. Here is a kiss for you!" He aimed a furious blow at the apparition with his sword; but the phantom suddenly dissolved, and a drenching shower of spray left him in no doubt as to the enemy he had met.

"He is trying to frighten me away from Bertalda," he said to himself, "and thinks he can induce me by his goblin tricks to abandon the poor terrified maiden so that he may visit his vengeance upon her. But that shall never be, poor feeble creature of the elements! Little do you know what a human heart is capable of when moved by righteous purpose." The truth of these words seemed to penetrate him, and he felt his courage revive. Fortune, too, now seemed to be with him, for before he had reached the spot where his horse was tied, he clearly heard Bertalda's piteous cries as if she were near by, notwithstanding the increasing fury of the storm. With flying feet he followed the sound, and soon came upon the terrified maiden attempting to ascend the mountain so that she might escape at any risk from the valley's awful gloom.

Huldrand met her affectionately, and however strong was her determination to adhere to her resolution, she felt only

too keenly the joy of being rescued by her beloved Huldbrand from these dreadful solitudes and being so cordially urged to return with him to the cheerful life at the castle. She yielded almost without a protest, but was so exhausted that the knight was glad when they had reached his horse, which he quickly unfastened, intending to place the fair wanderer upon him and lead her carefully through the dangerous shades.

But Kuhleborn's appearance had made the beast almost frantic. Even the knight himself would have found it difficult to mount the plunging steed, while to lift Bertalda to his back was an impossibility. They resolved, therefore, to proceed on foot, Huldbrand pulling his horse along by the bridle with one arm and supporting the exhausted damsel with the other. Bertalda summoned all her strength, that she might escape as quickly as possible from this terrible valley. But fatigue weighed heavily upon her, and she shook in every limb, partly from the recollection of what she had suffered at Kuhleborn's hands, and partly from terror at the fury of the tempest and peals of thunder in the mountain forests. At length she slipped from her guide's protecting arm and sank upon the mossy ground, saying, "Go, noble lord, and leave me. Here will I expiate my sinful folly, for I must perish soon of terror and fatigue."

"Never will I forsake you, sweetest friend!" cried the knight, vainly striving to control his frantic steed, which now began to rear and plunge more wildly than ever. He endeavored to keep him far enough away from the recumbent maiden that she might not be still more agitated by fear of his trampling hoofs; but no sooner had he succeeded in withdrawing a short distance than she began in the most piteous manner to beseech him to return, thinking she was to be abandoned in this cruel wilderness. He was uncertain what to do, and would gladly have turned his horse loose in the darkness had he not feared that in this restricted space he might gallop over the spot where Bertalda lay.

While thus perplexed, he was delighted to hear a wagon slowly descending the rocky road behind him. He called for help, and a man's voice answered, urging him to be patient and promising aid. Soon after two white horses appeared through the bushes; their driver wore a white smock-frock, and a large white linen cloth covered the load they were drawing. At a loud shout from their master the obedient horses stopped, and the man came up to help Huldbrand subdue his terrified charger.

"I know what ails the beast," he said. "When I first travelled through here, my horses behaved no better. It is because there is a malicious water-sprite living hard by who delights in teasing tricks like this. But I have learned a charm, and if you will let me whisper it in your horse's ear he will stand as quietly as mine yonder, in a moment."

"Try your charm, by all means, only do it quickly," cried the impatient knight. Whereupon the wagoner drew the unruly steed's head down toward him and whispered a few words in his ear. The animal calmed down at once and stood perfectly quiet, an occasional snort and his heaving sides being the only traces of his former fury.

Huldbrand had no time to inquire how this had been accomplished. He hastily arranged with the stranger to convey Bertalda to the castle of Ringstettin in his wagon, which he declared was loaded with soft bales of cotton, while the knight himself was to follow on horseback. But the animal seemed too exhausted to bear his master's weight; so the driver urged Huldbrand to get into the cart with Bertalda and fasten his horse behind. "The road is down hill," he said, "and it will be easy for my horses."

The knight took his advice and climbed into the wagon beside Bertalda. His steed followed patiently, while the driver walked beside them.

In the stillness of night, though mutterings of the departing storm were still audible about them, and in the

comforting sense of safety, the two young people fell into familiar conversation. He reproached her gently for her hasty flight, and she excused herself humbly, her love for him shining forth through all she spoke, like a lamp guiding a lover through the darkness to where his beloved waits. The knight felt this, and replied to her meaning rather than to her words.

Suddenly the driver shouted in stentorian tones: "Ho, there, my steeds! Up with your feet! Steady now, and remember what you are!"

Huldbrand leaned over the side of the wagon and observed that the horses were wading, or almost swimming rather, in the midst of a rushing river. The wheels were whirling and roaring like those of a mill, while the driver had mounted his vehicle and was overlooking the rising flood.

"What sort of a road is this?" cried the knight. "It will take us into the middle of the stream!"

"Nay, sir," replied the wagoner, "it is just the contrary. The stream is in the middle of the road. Look around and see how everything is flooded!" In truth the whole valley seemed to be heaving and tossing in newly risen waves, which continued to increase rapidly.

"It is Kuhleborn, the evil water-sprite, who is trying to drown us!" cried the knight. "Have you no charm against him, good friend?"

"I have one, truly," replied the man, "but neither can nor will make use of it till you know who I am."

"This is no time for riddles," shouted Huldbrand; "the flood is rising every instant. What do I care to know who you may be?"

"Nevertheless, you should care," retorted the driver, "for I myself am Kuhleborn!" And there with he leered hideously at them into the wagon—which was no longer a wagon, nor were the horses. All seemed to melt away into foaming waves, while the driver himself reared aloft into the

shape of a huge billow, bearing the struggling horse down beneath the flood. Towering above the head of the unhappy lovers, he was about to swallow the] up, when suddenly Undine's sweet voice was heard above the tumult, and the moon just then breaking through the clouds revealed her standing on the heights above.

She called to Kuhleborn in a threatening tone and the mountainous wave subsided with a low murmur; the waters flowed quietly away in the moon light, as Undine like a white dove flew to them from her height. Taking Bertalda and Huldbrand by the hand, she led them to a soft grassy spot of the hillside, where she restored their courage and revived their exhausted strength with choice refreshments. After this she assisted Bertalda on to her own white palfrey, and thus all finally regained the castle of Ringstettin in safety.

CHAPTER XV

THE JOURNEY TO VIENNA

Life went on quietly at the castle for some time after these adventures. Huldrand appreciated more and more the celestial goodness Undine had shown in hastening so nobly to their rescue in the Black Forest, where Kuhleborn again had power. Undine not only felt the peace of conscience which follows the performance of good deeds, but was encouraged by the reawakened love and confidence of her husband.

Bertalda showed a genuine feeling of gratitude and humility at last. When Huldrand or Undine made reference to the closing of the fountain or mentioned the recent scenes in the forest, she begged them not to speak of those things, for the thought of the one filled her with shame and of the other with terror. Nothing more was said to her about them therefore; indeed, of what use would it have been? Quiet happiness now reigned in the castle of Ringstettin, and secure in present enjoyment the future seemed abundant in the brightest prospects. Thus the winter came and passed, and spring with its fresh buds and blossoms and bright blue skies smiled upon them. What wonder they grew light-hearted, and that, like the storks and swallows, the roving spirit awoke within them?

One day as they were wandering idly along the banks of the Danube, Huldrand discoursed to his companions of the glories of that noble stream, and how, ever widening, it flowed on through the fertile country, gaining fresh beauty with every mile of its course.

"What a fine thing it would be to follow it down to Vienna!" broke out Bertalda; but relapsing at once into her newly acquired humility, she blushed and became silent.



THE DANUBE JOURNEY.

This impressed Undine, and desiring to give her beloved friend pleasure, she said, "Why should we not do so?"

Bertalda was filled with joy, and they began at once to indulge in glowing fancies of the pleasure of such a journey.

Huldrand readily agreed to the plan, but once he whispered anxiously to Undine, "Will not Kuhleborn again have power over us there?"

"Let him come!" Undine replied, laughing. "I shall be with you, and he will not dare play any of his tricks."

The last obstacle now seemed to have been removed. Preparations for the journey were speedily made, and they set forth in high spirits and with bright anticipations. The first days on the Danube were full of enjoyment, and the farther they sailed along the noble river the finer was the view. As they reached a beautiful region and had just begun to admire the prospect, Kuhleborn gave evidence of his presence; but his tricks were harmless, for whenever the waves rose higher or the winds proved contrary, Undine would rebuke him and make him quiet. Soon, however, he would break out again, and again Undine would be obliged to restrain him, so that the pleasure of the little party was destroyed by anxiety. The boatmen also began to whisper among themselves and look askance at the travellers, whose servants even seemed to be suspicious of them. Huldbrand could not help thinking: "This comes of not wedding with one's own kind. It is an unnatural union, that of a man and a naiad." Then he would excuse himself, as most of us are fond of doing, and add: "But then, I did not know she was a naiad. It may be my misfortune that I am hampered and tormented at every step by the mad antics of her uncle, but it surely is not my fault!"

These reflections somewhat reassured him, but they also made him the more vexed with Undine, whom he soon began to regard with displeasure, the cause of which she understood but too well. Exhausted by grief at his angry looks and by her own constant efforts to avert the malice of Kuhleborn, she sunk toward evening into a deep slumber, lulled by the gentle motion of the boat. No sooner were her eyes closed than they seemed to see a horrible human head rising out of the waves, not like that of a swimmer, but erect, as if fixed on the surface of the water, and floating along with the boat. Each turned to point out to the others the cause of his alarm, and found the same terror stamped on every countenance, though all were looking and pointing in different

directions wherever the half-grinning, half-scowling monster met their eyes. But as they tried to explain the matter to one another, exclaiming, "Look! look there!" "No, yonder!" each suddenly discerned the other's apparition, and the water

seemed to swarm with horrid heads. Their startled exclamations aroused Undine, and before the light of her clear eyes the distorted faces vanished. This was too much for Huldbrand. He started to his feet and was about to launch imprecations upon her, when Undine cried imploringly: "Be not angry with me, my lord. Remember we are on the water." The knight forbore, and sitting down again was soon lost in thought.

After a time Undine whispered, "Would it not be better for us to abandon this foolish journey, my love, and return to the quiet life of Ringstettin?"

But Huldbrand angrily replied: "So I must be a prisoner in my own castle, and not be able to breathe freely even there unless the fountain is closed up. Would that all your outlandish relations—" At this Undine softly placed her hand upon his lips. He said no more and subsided again into his reverie.

Bertalda meanwhile was indulging in all sorts of strange conjectures. She knew only a little about Undine's origin, while Kuhleborn still remained a terrifying and unfathomable mystery to her, nor had she even heard his name. While thinking over these things, she unconsciously loosened a golden necklace that Huldbrand had bought for her a few days before from a travelling merchant, and was playing with it close to the surface of the river, dreamily enjoying its bright reflection, when all at once a huge hand rose up, seized the necklace, and disappeared with it. Bertalda shrieked, and a scornful laugh reechoed from the depths below. At this the knight could no longer restrain his anger. Springing to his feet, he loudly cursed those beings who insisted on forcing themselves into his family and his private life, and dared them—nixies or sirens—to face his bright sword.

Bertalda continued to weep over the loss of her precious necklace, and her tears added fuel to his wrath; but Undine held her hand in the water over the side of the boat, murmuring softly to herself, only stopping her mysterious whispers now and then to entreat her husband: "Do not chide me here, dear lord! Say what you will, but not here, not here! You know why." Presently she drew her hand out of the water and held up a magnificent coral necklace that glittered so brightly it dazzled all eyes. "Take this," she said kindly to Bertalda, "to make up for the one you have lost, and be not troubled any longer, poor child."

But Huldbrand interposed, snatched the necklace from Undine's hand, and flung it back into the water, shouting wrathfully: "So you are still in league with them, are you? In the name of all the witches, go back to them with your trinkets and leave us mortals in peace, buffoon!"

Poor Undine looked at him with fixed but streaming eyes, and still holding out the hand which had offered the necklace to Bertalda. At last she sobbed faintly: "Farewell, farewell, dearest of friends! The sprites shall not harm you. Remain true to me and I will shield you from their tricks. But alas! I must leave you. The days of my young life are over. Woe, woe is me! What have you done? Oh, woe is me!" Suddenly she disappeared over the edge of the boat. Whether she sank into the depths or was carried away by the stream no one could say, but she was lost to sight in the waters of the Danube, and nothing was heard but the sad whispers of the wavelets as they washed against the boat, seeming to echo, "Woe, woe is me! Be true to me—woe—woe!"

Huldbrand fell prone in the bottom of the boat and lay there bathed in tears till a deep swoon left the unhappy man unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT FURTHER BEFELL HULDBRAND

Shall we mourn or rejoice that grief is so seldom lasting? I mean the grief which has its source in the springs of life, which is so bound up with the lost beloved one that he seems no longer lost to us, and which keeps his image enshrined until the same fate overtakes us. Good men keep the shrine sacred, and yet the first bitterness of sorrow does not remain. New images will intervene. We learn the frailness of all earthly things, and acknowledge to ourselves that even grief at last will disappear.

It was thus with the master of Ringstettin. At first he could only weep as his poor loving Undine had done when he snatched away from her the shining trinket which she thought would give Bertalda so much pleasure. He would stretch out his hand like her and weep anew, and cherished a secret hope he might be lost in tears. Who has not felt the same in times of overwhelming sorrow?

Bertalda mingled her tears with his, and they lived quietly at Ringstettin for a long time, preserving the beloved memory of Undine and almost forgetting their former attachment to each other. Undine often appeared to Huldbrand in his dreams; she would caress him softly and tenderly and depart again, weeping quietly, so that sometimes on awaking he doubted whether his cheeks were wet with her tears or his own. But as time went on these appearances became less frequent, and the knight's grief softened. He might possibly have lived the rest of his life with no other desire than to dwell on Undine's memory and talk of her, had not the old fisherman appeared unexpectedly at the castle one day, and insisted upon taking Bertalda home with him as his child. He had heard of Undine's disappearance and would no longer consent to Bertalda's remaining in the castle alone with Huldbrand.

"I do not care to know whether my daughter loves me or not, at present," he said; "but her honor is at stake, and in such a case there is nothing else to be considered!"

The old man's demand and the prospect of utter loneliness that threatened Huldbrand in the castle revived the affection for Bertalda that in his grief for Undine he had quite forgotten. The fisherman opposed many objections to their proposed marriage. Undine had been very dear to him, and he doubted, though hardly knowing why, whether the lost one was really dead. But if Undine indeed lay at the bottom of the Danube or had been carried out into the ocean by it, then Bertalda should be reproaching herself for having been the cause of her death, instead of desiring to step into her poor victim's place. But the knight was also dear to the fisherman. The entreaties of his daughter, who had grown much gentler, and her tears over the loss of Undine, could not but have their effect. He gradually yielded, staying on at the castle without demur, so that at last a messenger was sent to fetch Father Hellmann, who in earlier, happier days had blessed the union of Huldbrand and Undine, to officiate at the knight's second marriage.

No sooner had the pious man read the master of Ringstettin's letter than he set out for the castle at much greater speed than the messenger had come to him. Whenever the rapid pace deprived him of breath, or his aged limbs ached with fatigue, he would say to himself: "The wrong may yet be prevented. Fail not, my wasted powers, till I have reached the goal!" He pushed on with renewed vigor, neither stopping nor resting, till late one evening he entered the courtyard at Ringstettin.

The betrothed couple were sitting hand in hand beneath the trees, the old fisherman near them, lost in thought. They started up eagerly at sight of the priest and advanced to meet him; but scarcely heeding their words of welcome, he begged the knight to retire with him into the castle. As Huldbrand hesitated, surprised and indignant at this request, the old man

added: "But why should I speak with you in private, Lord of Ringstettin? What I have to say concerns Bertalda and the fisherman as well, and as they must hear it some time, the sooner the better. Are you so certain, then, Knight Huldbrand, that your first wife is really dead? I can hardly believe it myself. I do not care to speak of the mysteries concerning her, nor have I in truth any real knowledge of them; but that she was a pure, loving wife is beyond doubt. For fourteen nights now she has appeared at my bedside in dreams, wringing her poor hands in anguish and sighing: 'Oh, dissuade him, dear Father! For I am still alive. Oh, save him! save his life and soul!' I knew not what this vision portended till your message came, and I have hastened hither, not to wed but rather to stay those who may not be united in holy wedlock. Leave her, Huldbrand! Leave him, Bertalda! He is still another's. See you not how his cheek blanches even now at the thought of his lost wife? It is not thus a bridegroom should look, and the spirit tells me that never shall you again know joy if you leave him not."

In their inmost hearts they all felt that Father Heilmann's words were true, but they would not accept his advice. Even the old fisherman would not consent to any change from what had already come to be looked upon as settled within the last few days. So they persisted in their determination in spite of the warnings of the priest, who finally left the castle with a mournful shake of the head, without even accepting its shelter for one night or tasting of the refreshments they offered him. Huldbrand declared that Father Hellmann was only a whimsical old dotard, and sent at daybreak to the nearest cloister for a monk, who readily promised to come in a few days and perform the ceremony for them.

CHAPTER XVII

HULDBRAND'S DREAM

The dawn was just beginning to break, and Huldrand lay half sleeping, half waking, upon his couch. In his sleep his dreams were haunted by spectres, and he awoke in terror; yet if he tried to rouse himself in earnest, he felt himself gently fanned apparently by swans' wings, and heard the caressing sound of waves that soothed him back again into half-consciousness.



THE KNIGHT'S SWAN DREAM.

At length he did fall asleep really and seemed to be suddenly lifted on the rushing pinions of the swans and borne far over land and sea, to the sound of sweetest singing. Swan's song—the swan's song," he thought to himself—that must betoken death." But evidently that was not its significance in

this case, for all at once he seemed to be floating over a great sea, which a swan warbled in his ear was the Mediterranean. As he looked down, the water became transparent to the bottom, and there greatly to his joy he saw Undine sitting in her crystal halls. She was weeping bitterly, it is true, and looked far sadder than in those happy days when they first lived together at Ringstettin, or even before they began that fatal journey down the Danube. The change impressed the knight deeply; but Undine did not seem to be aware he was near. Kuhleborn now approached and rebuked her for her tears; whereupon she composed herself and gazed at him so firmly and proudly that he almost quailed before her as she said: "Even though I am doomed to dwell here beneath the waters, my soul is with me, and I may well weep. Little can you know of what such tears are to me, or how blessed is all that belongs to a loving, faithful human heart."

Kuhleborn shook his head incredulously and mused for a space; then he continued: "Nevertheless, little niece, you are still subject to the rules of the elements and must pronounce the death sentence should he prove faithless to you and marry again.

"Nay, he is still a widower," replied Undine, "and loves me and mourns for me."

"Yet he will soon be a bridegroom also," said Kuhleborn, with a scornful laugh. "Wait but a few days. Then the nuptial benediction will have been spoken, and you must go to earth and put the faithless one to death!"

"That I cannot do," said Undine, smiling, "for I have had the fountain tightly closed against me and all my race."

"But what if he leave the castle?" replied Kuhleborn. "Or supposing he should have the fountain opened?—for he thinks little of such matters."

"That is why his spirit is now hovering above the Mediterranean," said Undine, still smiling through her tears. "I

have arranged it purposely, so that he should hear our conversation as a warning."

At this Kuhleborn looked up angrily at the knight, stamped his foot, and then shot away like an arrow through the waves, seeming to swell in his fury to the size of a whale. The swans began to fly singing once more, and the knight felt himself borne away again high over mountain and stream till he was wafted at last into the castle of Ringstettin, where he awoke to find himself in his bed.

This time he really was awake, for one of his squires at that moment entered and told him that Father Heilmann was still stopping in the neighborhood. He had seen him the evening before in a hut he had built for himself in the forest, out of branches, covered with moss and brushwood. When asked why he tarried, after having refused to sanction the union of the betrothed couple, he answered: "It is not only the wedded that have need of benedictions; and though I came not to a marriage, there may yet be other work for me to do—one must be prepared for all. Nor are mournings and marriages always very far distant from each other, as he who does not wilfully deceive himself may soon discover."

Huldbrand pondered deeply over these words and also over his dream. But it is hard to stay a man who has once resolved upon a fixed course of action, and the plans remained unchanged.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW HULDBRAND'S SECOND MARRIAGE WAS CELEBRATED

If I were to relate how the wedding festival at Ringstettin was celebrated, it would seem like a glittering mass, covered with black crape, through the folds of which the splendor would seem less a delight to the eye than a bitter mockery of the ceremony. It was not disturbed by apparitions, for, as we know, the earth was safe from the tricks of water-sprites; but to Huldbrand, to the fisherman, and even to the guests, it seemed as if the feast were without soul, for their gentle, beloved Undine was not there. Whenever the door opened, every one turned involuntarily to look for her; and when it proved to be only the steward with some new dish or an attendant bringing a fresh supply of wine, they would turn their eyes sadly away. The flashes of gayety, occasioned now and then by some stray jest, were extinguished in mournful recollections of the absent one.

Bertalda was the gayest and most thoughtless of them all, but at times it seemed strange even to her to be sitting at the head of the table, arrayed in her green wreath and gold-embroidered robes, while Undine's body was lying at the bottom of the Danube or floating with it out into the ocean. Ever since her father spoke these words they had rung continually in her ears, and to-day especially she could not banish them from her mind.

The company broke up before nightfall, not out of deference to the bridegroom's impatience to be alone with his bride, but dispersing gloomily as if oppressed by a foreboding of evil. Bertalda retired to her dressing-room followed only by her women, the knight by his pages. At this melancholy festival there was no gay and sportive train of youths and maidens to attend the wedded couple.

Bertalda struggled to shake off her gloomy feelings. She had her women lay out a magnificent set of jewels, Huldbrand's gift, with a rich array of robes and veils, that she might choose the richest and gayest of them to wear on the morrow. Her attendants improved this opportunity to wish all happiness to their young mistress, failing not to praise the beauty of the bride in the most glowing terms. They enlarged upon this theme, till Bertalda, looking at herself in the glass, sighed, "Only look at the freckles here on my neck!"

They insisted these were only beauty spots that heightened the fairness of her skin; but Bertalda dissented, declaring it was a blemish just the same. "And I could have removed it," she sighed, "had they not closed the fountain which used to furnish me with that delightful water. Oh, if I only had a jug of it to-day!"

"Is that all you need?" said an attendant, as she quickly left the apartment.

"Why, she will not be so rash," exclaimed Bertalda, feigning astonishment, "as to have the stone removed to-night!"

The sound of footsteps in the courtyard was soon heard, and from her window she beheld the servant leading men with levers on their shoulders to the fountain.

"Well, I wish it, anyway," she said to herself, "if only they are not too slow about it." Pleased that at last a mere hint of hers could accomplish what had so long been refused her, she watched the work by the bright moonlight.

The men tugged away at the great stone with all their strength, sighing now and then as they remembered that they were undoing the work their beloved lady had ordered. But the task was easier than they had expected. It almost seemed as if some power from within the fountain were aiding them to lift the stone.

"It feels as if there were a water-spout below," declared the astonished workmen to one another. Higher and higher rose the stone till almost of itself it rolled heavily down upon the pavement with a hollow sound, while from the fountain there slowly arose what looked at first like a white column of water, but which they soon perceived to be the figure of a woman robed in white. She was weeping bitterly, and clasped her hands in anguish over her head as she moved toward the castle with slow and measured step. The servants fell back from the fountain aghast; while, transfixed with terror, the bride and her women still gazed from the window.

When the pale woman was directly beneath them, she looked up, and through the veil Bertalda seemed to recognize the wan features of Undine. The shadowy figure advanced slowly and hesitatingly, like one going to execution. Bertalda screamed for some one to call the knight; but none dared stir, and the bride herself relapsed into silence, as if afraid of the sound of her own voice. So they stood motionless as statues, while the strange figure entered the castle, ascended the staircase, and passed on through the familiar halls and passages, weeping silently. Alas! how differently had she entered in days gone by!

The knight had dismissed his attendants and was standing, partly undressed, before a large mirror, a candle burning dimly beside him, when suddenly he heard a gentle tapping at the door. Just so used Undine to knock when she meant to surprise him in sport.

"It is only a trick of fancy," he said to himself. "I must to bed."

"Ay, that thou must, but to a cold one," he heard a weeping voice whisper from without. And then in the mirror he saw the door open slowly, slowly, and the white figure enter, closing it softly behind her. "They have opened the fountain," she moaned; "now I am here, and thou, alas, must die!"

His heart wellnigh stopped beating as he felt this was so, but he pressed his hands over his eyes, exclaiming: "Do not overwhelm me with terror in the hour of my death. If that veil hides the frightful visage of a spectre, then do not lift it, but let me die in peace."

"Alas!" replied the figure, "wilt thou not look upon my face once more? I am still as fair as when thou didst woo me by the waters."

"Oh, that this were true," sighed Huldbrand, "and that I could die in thine arms!"

"It shall be so, my own beloved," she answered, and throwing back the veil, she revealed the angelic beauty of Undine's face. Trembling alike with love and the thought of approaching death, Huldbrand advanced. She greeted him with a celestial kiss but did not release him from her embrace. Nay rather, she pressed him more and more closely to her and wept as if her very soul were leaving her. Drowned in the flood of her tears that seemed to fill his heart with their bitter sweetness, his breath left him, and he sank out of her arms upon his couch, a corpse.

"My tears have been his death," said Undine to the attendants she met in the anteroom, and passing through the terrified groups, she disappeared in the fountain.

CHAPTER XIX

KNIGHT HULDBRAND'S BURIAL

When he learned of the death of the master of Ringstettin, Father Heilmann returned to the castle and appeared just as the monk who had married the ill-fated pair was rushing out of the gateway, overcome with terror and dismay.

"All is well," said the holy man to him. "Now my work begins, and I shall need no helper."

His attempts to console the bride, so suddenly widowed, were of little avail—she was too worldly by nature. The fisherman, though sorrowing in his very heart, was more reconciled to the fate that had overtaken Huldbrand; and when Bertalda persisted in calling Undine a murderess, he calmly said to her: "It could not have been otherwise. It was the judgment of God, and no one could have suffered more over Huldbrand's sentence than she who was forced to execute it, our poor, deserted Undine!"

The fisherman did all he could in arranging the funeral ceremonies which were to be conducted in a manner befitting the rank of the dead knight. It was decided to bury the knight beside his ancestors, in a neighboring churchyard which he, like themselves, had endowed with many gifts and privileges. His shield and helmet rested upon the bier to be buried with him, for Huldbrand of Ringstettin was the last of his family.

The mourners began their sad procession, and the wail of their burial chants rose to the clear blue sky. The priest headed them, bearing a tall crucifix, and was followed by Bertalda leaning upon the arm of her old father. As they moved along, a closely veiled white figure, with hands raised and clasped as if in deepest grief, took her place among the black-robed mourners. Those nearest her were terrified and

started away from her, and the confusion spread as others found the white figure next to them. Some of the attendants plucked up courage to accost her and order her away, but she always managed to elude them and regain her place, moving along with mournful, measured tread. At last all the mourners had withdrawn from her vicinity, so that she found herself immediately behind Bertalda; whereupon she moved still more slowly, so that the widow might not observe her presence. After this there was no further confusion.

Thus they advanced until they came to the churchyard, when the mourners formed in a circle about the open grave. Now for the first time Bertalda noticed the stranger, and partly in anger, partly in fear, she ordered her to leave. The veiled figure gently shook her head and extended her hands beseechingly toward Bertalda. It reminded her so strongly of the day when Undine offered her the coral necklace on the Danube river that she was moved to tears.

Father Heilmann now bowed his head, and all knelt in silent prayer about the grave. When they arose the white figure had vanished; but on the spot where she had knelt, a crystal brook suddenly leaped out from the greensward. It rippled joyously along until it had almost encircled Huldbrand's grave, then flowed more quietly on until it lost itself in a quiet pool by the side of the churchyard. In these later days the villagers point out this spring to travellers, which they still believe is the poor, rejected Undine, who thus forever holds her beloved in her embrace.

THE END.