

## CHAPTER IV.

Ole Kamp had been absent a year; and as he said in his letter, his winter's experience on the fishing banks of Newfoundland had been a severe one. When one makes money there one richly earns it. The equinoctial storms that rage there not unfrequently destroy a whole fishing fleet in a few hours; but fish abound, and vessels which escape find ample compensation for the toil and dangers of this home of the tempest.

Besides, Norwegians are excellent seamen, and shrink from no danger. In the numberless fiords that extend from Christiansand to Cape North, among the dangerous reefs of Finland, and in the channels of the Loffoden Islands, opportunities to familiarize themselves with the perils of ocean are not wanting; and from time immemorial they have given abundant proofs of their courage. Their ancestors were intrepid mariners at an epoch when the Hanse monopolized the commerce of northern Europe. Possibly they were a trifle prone to indulge in piracy in days gone by, but piracy was then quite common. Doubtless commerce has reformed since then, though one may perhaps be pardoned for thinking that there is still room for improvement.

However that may be, the Norwegians were certainly fearless seamen; they are to-day, and so they will ever be. Ole Kamp was not the man to belie his origin; besides, he had served his apprenticeship under his

father, who was the master of a Bergen coasting vessel. His childhood had been spent in that port, which is one of the most frequented in Scandinavia. Before he ventured out upon the open sea he had been an untiring fisher in the fiords, and a fearless robber of the sea-birds' nests, and when he became old enough to serve as cabin-boy he made a voyage across the North Sea and even to the waters of the Polar Ocean.

Soon afterward his father died, and as he had lost his mother several years before, his uncle Harald Hansen invited him to become a member of his family, which he did, though he continued to follow the same calling.

In the intervals between his voyages he invariably spent his time with the friends he loved; but he made regular voyages upon large fishing vessels, and rose to the rank of mate when he was but twenty-one. He was now twenty-three years of age.

When he visited Dal, Joel found him a most congenial companion. He accompanied him on his excursions to the mountains, and across the highest table-lands of the Telemark. The young sailor seemed as much at home in the fields as in the fiords, and never lagged behind unless it was to keep his cousin Hulda company.

A close friendship gradually sprung up between Joel and Ole, and quite naturally the same sentiment assumed a different form in respect to the young girl. Joel, of course, encouraged it. Where would his sister

ever find a better fellow, a more sympathetic nature, a warmer and more devoted heart? With Ole for a husband, Hulda's happiness was assured. So it was with the entire approval of her mother and brother that the young girl followed the natural promptings of her heart. Though these people of the North are undemonstrative, they must not be accused of a want of sensibility. No! It is only their way; and perhaps their way is as good as any other, after all.

So it came to pass that one day, when all four of them were sitting quietly together, Ole remarked, without any preamble whatever:

"An idea occurs to me, Hulda."

"What is it?"

"It seems to me that we ought to marry."

"I think so too."

"And so do I," added Dame Hansen as coolly as if the matter had been under discussion for some time.

"I agree with you," remarked Joel, "and in that case I shall naturally become your brother-in-law."

"Yes," said Ole; "but it is probable that I shall only love you the

better for it."

"That is very possible."

"We have your consent, then?"

"Upon my word! nothing would please me better," replied Joel.

"So it is decided, Hulda?" inquired Dame Hansen.

"Yes, mother," replied the girl, quietly.

"You are really willing?" asked Ole. "I have loved you a long time, Hulda, without saying so."

"And I you, Ole."

"How it came about, I really do not know."

"Nor I."

"But it was doubtless seeing you grow more beautiful and good day by day."

"That is saying a little too much, my dear Ole."

"No; I certainly ought to be able to say that without making you blush, for it is only the truth. Didn't you see that I was beginning to love Hulda, Dame Hansen?"

"I suspected as much."

"And you, Joel?"

"I was sure of it."

"Then I certainly think that you ought to have warned me," said Ole, smiling.

"But how about your voyages, Ole?" inquired Dame Hansen. "Won't they seem intolerable to you after you are married?"

"So intolerable that I shall not follow the sea any more after my marriage."

"You will not go to sea any more?"

"No, Hulda. Do you think it would be possible for me to leave you for months at a time?"

"So this is to be your last voyage?"

"Yes, and if we have tolerable luck, this voyage will yield me quite a snug little sum of money, for Help Bros. have promised me a share in the profits."

"They are good men," remarked Joel.

"The best men living," replied Ole, "and well known and highly respected by all the sailors of Bergen."

"But what do you expect to do after you cease to follow the sea, my dear Ole?" inquired Hulda.

"I shall go into partnership with Joel in his business, I have pretty good legs, and if they are not good enough, I will improve them by going into regular training. Besides, I have thought of a plan which will not prove a bad one perhaps. Why can't we establish a messenger service between Drammen, Kongsberg and a few other towns in the Telemark Communication now is neither easy nor regular, and there might be money in the scheme. Besides, I have other plans, to say nothing of--"

"Of what?"

"Never mind, now. I will tell you on my return. But I warn you that I am firmly resolved to make my Hulda the happiest woman in the country. Yes, I am."

"If you but knew how easy that will be!" replied Hulda, offering him her hand. "Am I not that already, and is there a home in all Dal as pleasant as ours?"

Dame Hansen hastily averted her head.

"So the matter is settled?" asked Ole, cheerfully.

"Yes," replied Joel.

"And settled beyond recall?"

"Certainly."

"And you feel no regret, Hulda?"

"None whatever, my dear Ole."

"I think, however, that it would be better not to appoint the day for your marriage until after your return," remarked Joel.

"Very well, but it will go hard with me if I do not return in less than a year to lead Hulda to the church at Moel, where our friend, Pastor Andersen, will not refuse to make his best prayer for us!"

And it was in this way that the marriage of Hulda Hansen and Ole Kamp had been decided upon.

The young sailor was to go aboard his vessel a week later; but before they parted the lovers were formally betrothed in accordance with the touching custom of Scandinavian countries.

In simple and honest Norway lovers are almost invariably publicly betrothed before marriage. Sometimes the marriage is not solemnized until two or three years afterward, but one must not suppose that the betrothal is simply an interchange of vows which depend only upon the honesty of the parties interested. No, the obligation is much more sacred, and even if this act of betrothal is not binding in the eyes of the law, it is, at least, so regarded by that universal law called custom.

So, in this case, it was necessary to make arrangements for a ceremony over which Pastor Andersen should preside. There was no minister in Dal, nor in any of the neighboring hamlets. In Norway they have what they call Sunday towns, in which the minister resides, and where the leading families of the parish assemble for worship. They even lease apartments there, in which they take up their abode for twenty-four hours or more--time to perform their religious duties--and people return from the town as from a pilgrimage.

Dal, it is true, boasted of a chapel, but the pastor came only when he



was summoned.

After all, Moel was not far off, only about eight miles distant, at the end of Lake Tinn, and Pastor Andersen was a very obliging man, and a good walker; so the worthy minister was invited to attend the betrothal in the twofold capacity of minister and family friend. The acquaintance was one of long standing. He had seen Joel and Hulda grow up, and loved them as well as he loved that young sea-dog, Ole Kamp, so the news of the intended marriage was very pleasing to him.

So Pastor Andersen gathered together his robe, his collar, and his prayer-book, and started off for Dal one misty, moisty morning. He arrived there in the company of Joel, who had gone half-way to meet him, and it is needless to say that his coming was hailed with delight at Dame Hansen's inn, that he had the very best room in the house, and that the floor was freshly strewn with twigs of juniper that perfumed it like a chapel.

At one o'clock on the following day the little church was thrown open, and there, in the presence of the pastor and a few friends and neighbors, Ole and Hulda solemnly promised to wed each other when the young sailor should return from the last voyage he intended to make. A year is a long time to wait, but it passes all the same, nor is it intolerable when two persons can trust each other.

And now Ole could not, without good cause, forsake her to whom he had

plighted his troth, nor could Hulda retract the promise she had given to Ole; and if Ole had not left Norway a few days after the betrothal, he might have profited by the incontestable right it gave him to visit the young girl whenever he pleased, to write to her whenever he chose, walk out with her arm in arm, unaccompanied by any member of the family, and enjoy a preference over all others in the dances that form a part of all fêtes and ceremonies.

But Ole Kamp had been obliged to return to Bergen, and one week afterward the "Viking" set sail for the fishing banks of Newfoundland, and Hulda could only look forward to the letters which her betrothed had promised to send her by every mail.

And these impatiently expected letters never failed her, and always brought a ray of happiness to the house which seemed so gloomy after the departure of one of its inmates. The voyage was safely accomplished; the fishing proved excellent, and the profits promised to be large. Besides, at the end of each letter, Ole always referred to a certain secret, and of the fortune it was sure to bring him. It was a secret that Hulda would have been glad to know, and Dame Hansen, too, for reasons one would not have been likely to suspect.

Dame Hansen seemed to have become even more gloomy and anxious and reticent than ever, and a circumstance which she did not see fit to mention to her children increased her anxiety very considerably.

Three days after the arrival of Ole's last letter, as Dame Hansen was returning alone from the saw-mill, to which place she had gone to order a bag of shavings from the foreman, Lengling, she was accosted near her own door by a man who was a stranger in that part of the country.

"This is Dame Hansen, is it not?" he inquired.

"Yes; but I do not know you," was the reply.

"That doesn't matter," rejoined the man. "I arrived here only this morning from Drammen, and am now on my way back."

"From Drammen?" repeated Dame Hansen, quickly.

"You are acquainted, I think, with a certain Monsieur Sandgoist, who lives there?"

"Monsieur Sandgoist!" repeated Dame Hansen, whose face paled at the name. "Yes, I know him."

"Ah, well! When Monsieur Sandgoist heard that I was coming to Dal, he asked me to give his respects to you."

"Was that all?"

"And to say to you that it was more than probable that he would pay you a visit next month. Good health to you, and good-evening, Dame Hansen."