

CHAPTER XII.

So this was the young man's secret! This was the source from which he expected to derive a fortune for his promised bride--a lottery ticket, purchased before his departure. And as the "Viking" was going down, he inclosed the ticket in a bottle and threw it into the sea with the last farewell for Hulda.

This time Sylvius Hogg was completely disconcerted. He looked at the letter, then at the ticket. He was speechless with dismay. Besides, what could he say? How could any one doubt that the "Viking" had gone down with all on board?

While Sylvius Hogg was reading the letter Hulda had nerved herself to listen, but after the concluding words had been read, she fell back unconscious in Joel's arms, and it became necessary to carry her to her own little chamber, where her mother administered restoratives. After she recovered consciousness she asked to be left alone for awhile, and she was now kneeling by her bedside, praying for Ole Kamp's soul.

Dame Hansen returned to the hall. At first she started toward the professor, as if with the intention of speaking to him, then suddenly turning toward the staircase, she disappeared.

Joel, on returning from his sister's room, had hastily left the house. He experienced a feeling of suffocation in the dwelling over which such a dense cloud of misfortune seemed to be hanging. He longed for the outer air, the fierce blast of the tempest, and spent a part of the night in wandering aimlessly up and down the banks of the Maan.

Sylvius Hogg was therefore left alone. Stunned by the stroke at first, he soon recovered his wonted energy. After tramping up and down the hall two or three times, he paused and listened, in the hope that he might hear a summons from the young girl, but disappointed in this, he finally seated himself at the table, and abandoned himself to his thoughts.

"Can it be possible that Hulda is never to see her betrothed again?" he said to himself. "No; such a misfortune is inconceivable. Everything that is within me revolts at the thought! Even admitting that the 'Viking' has gone to the bottom of the ocean, what conclusive proof have we of Ole's death? I can not believe it. In all cases of shipwreck time alone can determine whether or not any one has survived the catastrophe. Yes; I still have my doubts, and I shall continue to have them, even if Hulda and Joel refuse to share them. If the 'Viking' really foundered, how does it happen that no floating fragments of the wreck have been seen at sea--at least nothing except the bottle in which poor Ole placed his last message, and with it all he had left in the world."

Sylvius Hogg had the ticket still in his hand, and again he looked at it, and turned it over and held it up between him and the waning light--this scrap of paper upon which poor Ole had based his hopes of fortune.

But the professor, wishing to examine it still more carefully, rose, listened again to satisfy himself that the poor girl upstairs was not calling her mother or brother, and then entered his room.

The ticket proved to be a ticket in the Christiania Schools Lottery--a very popular lottery in Norway at that time. The capital prize was one hundred thousand marks; the total value of the other prizes, ninety thousand marks, and the number of tickets issued, one million, all of which had been sold.

Ole Kamp's ticket bore the number 9672; but whether this number proved lucky or unlucky, whether the young sailor had any secret reason for his confidence in it or not, he would not be present at the drawing, which was to take place on the fifteenth of July, that is to say, in twenty-eight days; but it was his last request that Hulda should take his place on that occasion.

By the light of his candle, Sylvius Hogg carefully reread the lines written upon the back of the ticket, as if with the hope of discovering some hidden meaning.

The lines had been written with ink, and it was evident that Ole's hand had not trembled while tracing them. This showed that the mate of the 'Viking' retained all his presence of mind at the time of the shipwreck, and that he was consequently in a condition to take advantage of any means of escape that might offer, such as a floating spar or plank, in case the raging waters had not swallowed up everything when the vessel foundered.

Very often writings of this kind that are recovered from the sea state the locality in which the catastrophe occurred; but in this neither the latitude nor longitude were mentioned; nor was there anything to indicate the nearest land. Hence one must conclude that no one on board knew where the "Viking" was at the time of the disaster. Driven on, doubtless, by a tempest of resistless power, the vessel must have been carried far out of her course, and the clouded sky making a solar observation impossible, there had been no way of determining the ship's whereabouts for several days; so it was more than probable that no one would ever know whether it was near the shores of North America or of Iceland that the gallant crew had sunk to rise no more.

This was a circumstance calculated to destroy all hope, even in the bosoms of the most sanguine.

With some clew, no matter how vague, a search for the missing vessel would have been possible. A ship or steamer could be dispatched to the scene of the catastrophe and perhaps find some trace of it. Besides,

was it not quite possible that one or more survivors had succeeded in reaching some point on the shores of the Arctic continent, and that they were still there, homeless, and destitute, and hopelessly exiled from their native land?

Such was the theory that gradually assumed shape in Sylvius Hogg's mind--a theory that it would scarcely do to advance to Joel and Hulda, so painful would the disappointment prove if it should be without foundation.

"And though the writing gives no clew to the scene of the catastrophe," he said to himself, "we at least know where the bottle was picked up. This letter does not state, but they must know at the Naval Department; and is it not an indication that might be used to advantage? By studying the direction of the currents and of the prevailing winds at the time of the shipwreck might it not be possible? I am certainly going to write again. Search must be made, no matter how small the chances of success. No; I will never desert poor Hulda! And until I have positive proofs of it I will never credit the death of her betrothed."

Sylvius Hogg reasoned thus; but at the same time he resolved to say nothing about the measures he intended to adopt, or the search he intended to urge on with all his influence. Hulda and her brother must know nothing about his writing to Christiania; moreover, he resolved to postpone indefinitely the departure which had been announced for

the next day, or rather he would leave in a few days, but only for a trip to Bergen. There, he could learn from the Messrs. Help all the particulars concerning the "Viking," ask the opinion of the most experienced mariners, and decide upon the way in which search could best be made.

In the meantime, from information furnished by the Navy Department, the press of Christiania, then that of Norway, Sweden, and finally all Europe, gradually got hold of this story of a lottery ticket transformed into an important legal document. There was something very touching about this gift from a shipwrecked mariner to his betrothed.

The oldest of the Norwegian journals, the "Morgen-Blad," was the first to relate the story of the "Viking" and Ole Kamp; and of the thirty-seven other papers published in that country at the time, not one failed to allude to it in touching terms. The illustrated "Nyhedsblad" published an ideal picture of the shipwreck. There was the sinking "Viking," with tattered sails and hull partially destroyed, about to disappear beneath the waves. Ole stood in the bow throwing the bottle containing his last message into the sea, at the same time commending his soul to God. In a luminous cloud in the dim distance a wave deposited the bottle at the feet of his betrothed. The whole picture was upon an enlarged representation of a lottery ticket bearing the number 9672 in bold relief. An unpretending conception, unquestionably, but one that could hardly fail to be regarded as a masterpiece in the land which still clings to legends of the Undines

and Valkyries. Then the story was republished and commented upon in France and England, and even in the United States. The story of Hulda and Ole became familiar to every one through the medium of pencil and pen. This young Norwegian girl, without knowing it, held a prominent place in the sympathy and esteem of the public. The poor child little suspected the interest she had aroused, however; besides, nothing could have diverted her mind from the loss that engrossed her every thought.

This being the case, no one will be surprised at the effect produced upon both continents--an effect easily explained when we remember how prone we all are to superstition. A lottery ticket so providentially rescued from the waves could hardly fail to be the winning ticket. Was it not miraculously designated as the winner of the capital prize? Was it not worth a fortune--the fortune upon which Ole Kamp had counted?

Consequently it is not surprising that overtures for the purchase of this ticket came from all parts of the country. At first, the prices offered were small, but they increased from day to day; and it was evident that they would continue to increase in proportion as the day of the drawing approached.

These offers came not only from different parts of Scandinavia, which is a firm believer in the active intervention of supernatural powers in all mundane matters--but also from foreign lands, and even from France.

Even the phlegmatic English grew excited over the matter, and subsequently the Americans, who are not prone to spend their money so unpractically. A host of letters came to Dal, and the newspapers did not fail to make mention of the large sums offered to the Hansen family. A sort of minor stock exchange seemed to have been established, in which values were constantly changing, but always for the better.

Several hundred marks were, in fact, offered for this ticket, which had only one chance in a million of winning the capital prize. This was absurd, unquestionably, but superstitious people do not stop to reason; and as their imaginations became more and more excited, they were likely to bid much higher.

This proved to be the case. One week after the event the papers announced that the amounts offered for the ticket exceeded one thousand, fifteen hundred and even two thousand marks. A resident of Manchester, England, had even offered one hundred pounds sterling, or two thousand five hundred marks; while an American, and a Bostonian at that, announced his willingness to give one thousand dollars for ticket No. 9672 of the Christiania Schools Lottery.

It is needless to say that Hulda troubled herself very little about the matter that was exciting the public to such an extent. She would not even read the letters that were addressed to her on the subject;

but the professor insisted that she must not be left in ignorance of these offers, as Ole Kamp had bequeathed his right and title in this ticket to her.

Hulda refused all these offers. This ticket was the last letter of her betrothed.

No one need suppose that this refusal was due to an expectation that the ticket would win one of the prizes in the lottery. No. She saw in it only the last farewell of her shipwrecked lover--a memento she wished to reverently preserve. She cared nothing for a fortune that Ole could not share with her. What could be more touching than this worship of a souvenir?

On apprising her of these different offers, however, neither Sylvius Hogg nor Joel made any attempt to influence Hulda. She was to be guided entirely by her own wishes in the matter. They knew now what her wishes were.

Joel, moreover, approved his sister's decision unreservedly. Ole Kamp's ticket must not be sold to any person at any price.

Sylvius Hogg went even further. He not only approved Hulda's decision, but he congratulated her upon it. Think of seeing this ticket sold and resold, passing from hand to hand, transformed, as it were, into a piece of merchandise, until the time appointed for the drawing

arrived, when it would very probably become a worthless scrap of paper?

And Sylvius Hogg went even further. Was it, perhaps, because he was slightly superstitious? No. Still, if Ole Kamp had been there, the professor would probably have said to him:

"Keep your ticket, my boy, keep it! First, your ticket, and then you, yourself, were saved from the wreck. You had better wait and see what will come of it. One never knows; no, one never knows!"

And when Sylvius Hogg, professor of law, and; a member of the Storthing, felt in this way, one can hardly wonder at the infatuation of the public, nor that No. 9672 could be sold at an enormous premium.

So in Dame Hansen's household there was no one who protested against the young girl's decision--at least no one except the mother.

She was often heard to censure it, especially in Hulda's absence, a fact that caused poor Joel not a little mortification and chagrin, for he was very much afraid that she would not always confine herself to covert censure, and that she would urge Hulda to accept one of the offers she had received.

"Five thousand marks for the ticket!" she repeated again and again.

"They offer five thousand marks for it!"

It was evident that Dame Hansen saw nothing either pathetic or commendable in her daughter's refusal. She was thinking only of this large sum of five thousand marks. A single word from Hulda would bring it into the family. She had no faith either in the extraordinary value of the ticket, Norwegian though she was; and to sacrifice five thousand marks for a millionth chance of winning one hundred thousand was an idea too absurd to be entertained for a moment by her cool and practical mind.

All superstition aside, it is undeniable that the sacrifice of a certainty, under such conditions, was not an act of worldly wisdom; but as we said before, the ticket was not a lottery ticket in Hulda's eyes; it was Ole's last farewell, and it would have broken her heart to part with it.

Nevertheless, Dame Hansen certainly disapproved her daughter's resolve. It was evident, too, that her dissatisfaction was constantly increasing, and it seemed more than likely that at no very distant day she would endeavor to make Hulda change her decision. Indeed, she had already intimated as much to Joel, who had promptly taken his sister's part.

Sylvius Hogg was, of course, kept informed of what was going on. Such an attempt on the mother's part would only be another trial added to those Hulda was already obliged to endure, and he was anxious to avert

it if possible. Joel mentioned the subject to him sometimes.

"Isn't my sister right in refusing?" he asked. "And am I not justified in upholding her in her refusal?"

"Unquestionably," replied Sylvius Hogg. "And yet, from a mathematical point of view, your mother is a million times right. But the science of mathematics does not govern everything in this world. Calculation has nothing to do with the promptings of the heart."

During the next two weeks they were obliged to watch Hulda very closely, for the state of her health was such as to excite serious anxiety. Fortunately loving care and attention were not wanting. At Sylvius Hogg's request, the celebrated Dr. Bock, a personal friend, came to Dal to see the young invalid. He could only prescribe rest, and quiet of soul, if that were possible; but the only sure means of curing her was Ole's return, and this means God only could provide. Still, Sylvius Hogg was untiring in his efforts to console the young girl. His words were ever words of hope, and strange as it may appear, Sylvius Hogg did not despair.

Thirteen days had now elapsed since the arrival of the ticket forwarded by the Navy Department. It was now the thirteenth of June. A fortnight more, and the drawing of the lottery would take place with great pomp in the main hall of the University of Christiania.

On the morning of the thirtieth day of June Sylvius Hogg received another letter from the Navy Department. This letter advised him to confer with the maritime authorities of Bergen, and authorized him to immediately organize an expedition to search for the missing "Viking."

The professor did not want Joel or Hulda to know what he intended to do, so he merely told them that he must leave them for a few days to attend to some business matters.

"Pray do not desert us, Mister Sylvius," said the poor girl.

"Desert you--you, whom I regard as my own children!" replied Sylvius Hogg.

Joel offered to accompany him, but not wishing him to know that he was going to Bergen, the professor would only allow him to go as far as Moel. Besides, it would not do for Hulda to be left alone with her mother. After being confined to her bed several days, she was now beginning to sit up a little, though she was still very weak and not able to leave her room.

At eleven o'clock the kariol was at the door of the inn, and after bidding Hulda good-bye, the professor took his seat in the vehicle beside Joel. In another minute they had both disappeared behind a large clump of birches at the turn in the road.

That same evening Joel returned to Dal.

END OF FIRST HALF.