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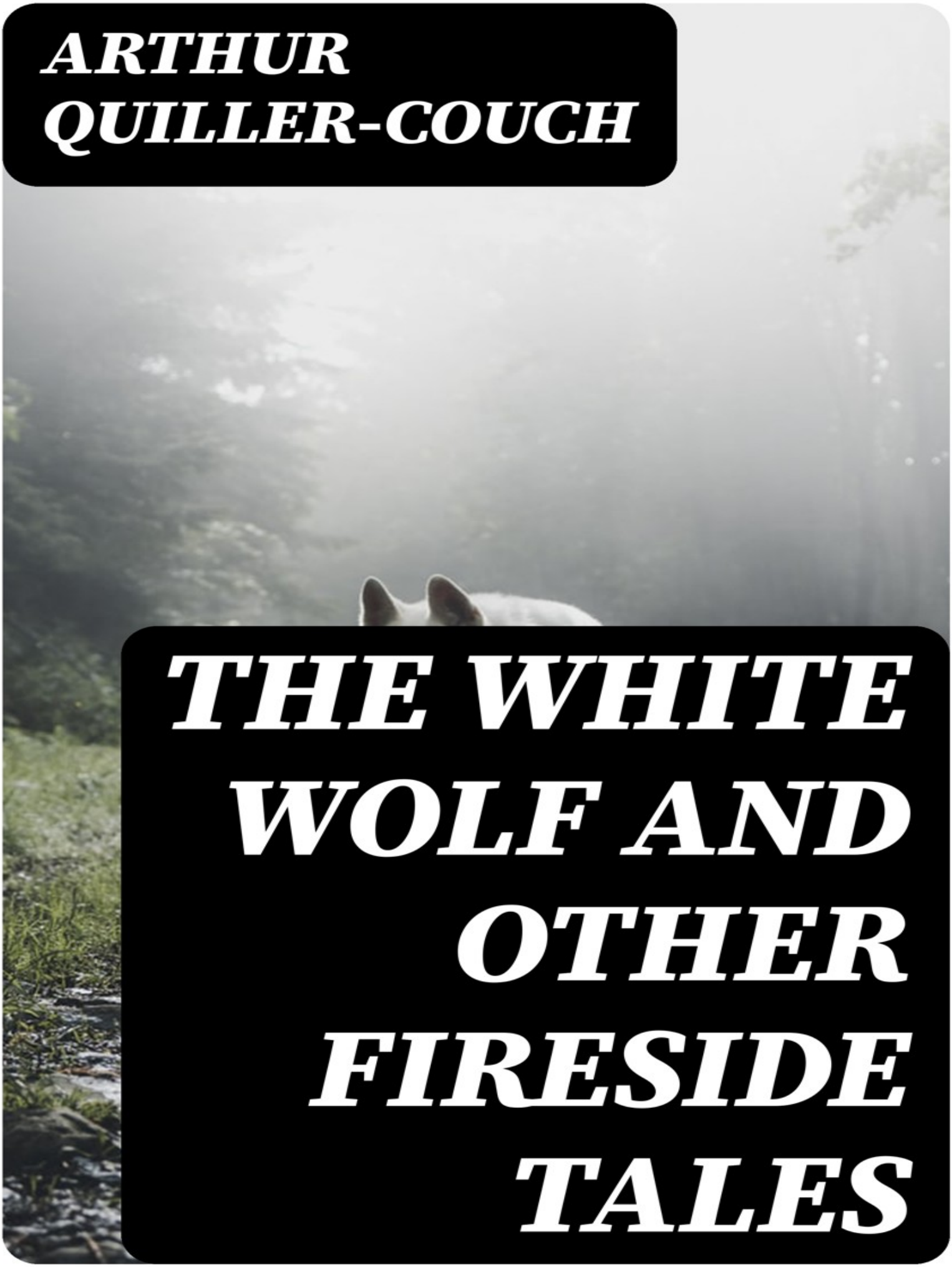

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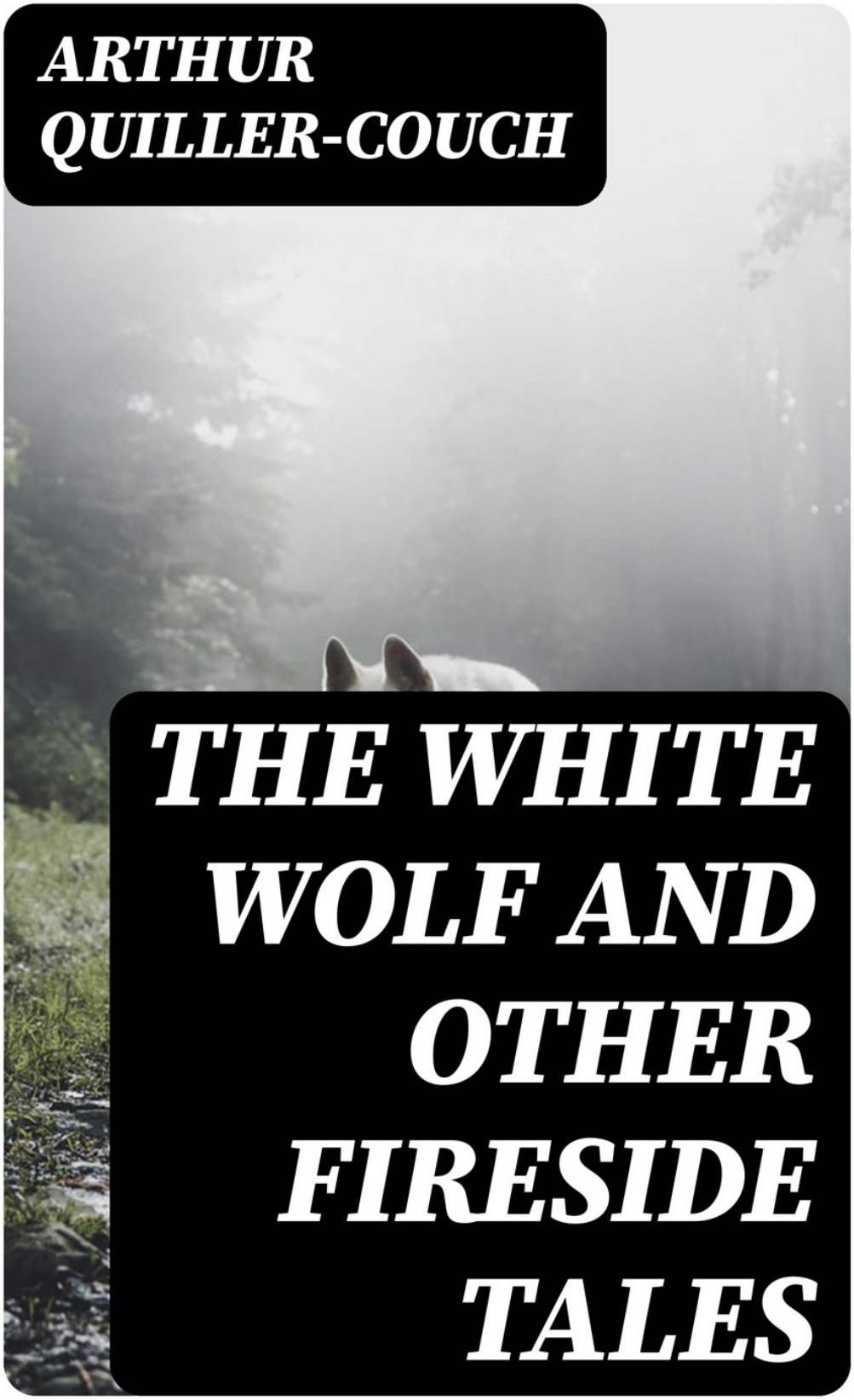

THE WHITE WOLF AND OTHER FIRESIDE TALES

Arthur Quiller-Couch

The White Wolf and Other Fireside Tales

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I.—THE TALE OF SNORRI GAMLASON

In the early summer of 1358, with the breaking up of the ice, there came to Brattahlid, in Greenland, a merchant-ship from Norway, with provisions for the Christian settlements

on the coast. The master's name was Snorri Gamlason, and it happened that as he sailed into Eric's Fiord and warped alongside the quay, word was brought to him that the Bishop of Garda had arrived that day in Brattahlid, to hold a confirmation. Whereupon this Snorri went ashore at once, and, getting audience of the Bishop, gave him a little book, with an account of how he had come by it.

The book was written in Danish, and Snorri could not understand a word of it, being indeed unable to read or to write; but he told this tale:—

His ship, about three weeks before, had run into a calm, which lasted for three days and two nights, and with a northerly drift she fell away, little by little, towards a range of icebergs which stretched across and ahead of them in a solid chain. But about noon of the third day the colour of the sky warned him of a worse peril, and soon there came up from the westward a bank of fog, with snow in it, and a wind that increased until they began to hear the ice grinding and breaking up— as it seemed—all around them. Snorri steered at first for the southward, where had been open water; but by and by found that even here were drifting bergs. He therefore put his helm down and felt his way through the weather by short boards, and so, with the most of his men stationed forward to keep a look-out, fenced, as it were, with the danger, steering and tacking, until by God's grace the fog lifted, and the wind blew gently once more.

And now in the clear sunshine he saw that the storm had been more violent than any had supposed; since the wall of ice, which before had been solid, was now burst and riven in many places, and in particular to the eastward, where a

broad path of water lay before them almost like a canal, but winding here and there. Towards this Snorri steered, and entered it with a fair breeze.

They had come, he said, but to the second bend of this waterway, when a seaman, who had climbed the mast on the chance of spying an outlet, called out in surprise that there was a ship ahead of them, but two miles off, and running down the channel before the wind, even as they. At first he found no credit for this tale, and even when those on deck spied her mast and yard overtopping a gap between two bergs, they could only set it down for a mirage or cheat of eyesight in the clear weather.

But by and by, said Snorri, they could not doubt they were in chase of a ship, and, further, that they were fast overtaking her. For she steered with no method, and shook with every slant of wind, and anon went off before it like a helpless thing, until in the end she was fetched up by the jutting foot of a berg, and there shook her sail, flapping with such noise that Snorri's men heard it, though yet a mile away.

They bore down upon her, and now took note that this sail of hers was ragged and frozen, so that it flapped like a jointed board, and that her rigging hung in all ways and untended, but stiff with rime; and drawing yet nearer, they saw an ice-line about her hull, so deep that her timbers seemed bitten through, and a great pile of frozen snow upon her poop, banked even above her tiller; but no helmsman, and no living soul upon her.

Then Snorri let lower his boat, and was rowed towards her; and, coming alongside, gave a hail, which was

unanswered. But from the frozen pile by the tiller there stuck out a man's arm, ghastly to see. Snorri climbed on board by the waist, where her sides were low and a well reached aft from the mast to the poop. There was a cabin beneath the poop, and another and larger room under the deck forward, between the step of the mast and the bows. Into each of these he broke with axes and bars, and in the one found nothing but some cooking-pots and bedding; but in the other—that is, the after-cabin—the door, as he burst it in, almost fell against a young man seated by a bed. So life-like was he that Snorri called aloud in the doorway, but anon, peering into the gloomy place, perceived the body to be frozen upright and stiff, and that on the bed lay another body, of a lady slight and young, and very fair. She, too, was dead and frozen; yet her cheeks, albeit white as the pillow against which they rested, had not lost their roundness. Snorri took note also of her dress and of the coverlet reaching from the bed's foot to her waist, that they were of silk for the most part, and richly embroidered, and her shift and the bed-sheets about her of fine linen. The man's dress was poor and coarse by comparison; yet he carried a sword, and was plainly of gentle nurture. The sword Snorri drew from its sheath and brought away; also he took a small box of jewels; but little else could he find on the ship, and no food of any kind.

His design was to leave the ship as he found it, carrying away only these tokens that his story, when he arrived at Brattahlid, might be received with faith; and to direct where the ship might be sought for. But as he quitted the cabin some of his men shouted from the deck, where they had

discovered yet another body frozen in a drift. This was an old man seated with crossed legs and leaning against the mast, having an ink-horn slung about his neck, and almost hidden by his grey beard, and on his knee a book, which he held with a thumb frozen between two pages.

This was the book which Snorri had brought to Brattahlid, and which the Bishop of Garda read aloud to him that same afternoon, translating as he went; the ink being fresh, the writing clerkly, and scarcely a page damaged by the weather. It bore no title; but the Bishop, who afterwards caused his secretary to take a copy of the tale, gave it a very long one, beginning: "God's mercy shown in a Miracle upon certain castaways from Jutland, at the Feast of the Nativity of His Blessed Son, our Lord, in the year MCCCLVII., whereby He made dead trees to put forth in leaf, and comforted desperate men with summer in the midst of the Frozen Sea" . . . with much beside. But all this appears in the tale, which I will head only with the name of the writer.

II.—PETER KURT'S MANUSCRIPT [1]

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Now that our troubles are over, and I sit by the mast of our late unhappy ship, not knowing if I am on earth or in paradise, but full-fed and warm in all my limbs, yea pierced and glowing with the love of Almighty God, I am resolved to take pen and use my unfrozen ink in telling out of what misery His hand hath led us to this present Eden.

I who write this am Peter Kurt, and I was the steward of my master Ebbe while he dwelt in his own castle of Nebbegaard. Poor he was then, and poor, I suppose, he is still in all but love and the favour of God; but in those days the love was but an old servant's (to wit, my own), and the favour of God not evident, but the poverty, on the other hand, bitterly apparent in all our housekeeping. We lived alone, with a handful of servants—sometimes as few as three—in the castle which stands between the sandhills and the woods, as you sail into Veile Fiord. All these woods, as far away as to Rosenvold, had been the good knight his father's, but were lost to us before Ebbe's birth, and leased on pledge to the Knight Borre, of Egeskov, of whom I am to tell; and with them went all the crew of verderers, huntsmen, grooms, prickers, and ostringers that had kept Nebbegaard cheerful the year round. His mother had died at my master's birth, and the knight himself but two years after, so that the lad grew up in his poverty with no heritage but a few barren acres of sand, a tumbling house, and his father's sword, and small prospect of winning the broad lands out of Borre's clutches.

Nevertheless, under my tutoring he grew into a tall lad and a bold, a good swordsman, skilful at the tilt and in handling a boat; but not talkative or free in his address of strangers. The most of his days he spent in fishing, or in the making and mending of gear; and his evenings, after our lesson in sword-play, in the reading of books (of which Nebbegaard had good store), and specially of the Icelanders, skalds and sagamen; also at times in the study of Latin with me, who had been bred to the priesthood, but

left it for love of his father, my foster-brother, and now had no ambition of my own but to serve this lad and make him as good a man.

But there were days when he would have naught to do with fishing or with books; dark days when I forbore and left him to mope by the dunes, or in the great garden which had been his mother's, but was now a wilderness untended. And it was then that he first met with the lady Mette.

For as he walked there one morning, a little before noon, a swift shadow passed overhead between him and the sun, and almost before he could glance upward a body came dropping out of the sky and fell with a thud among the rose-bushes by the eastern wall. It was a heron, and after it swooped the bird which had murdered it; a white ger-falcon of the kind which breeds in Greenland, but a trained bird, as he knew by the sound of the bells on her legs as she plunged through the bushes. Ebbe ran at once to the corner where the birds struggled; but as he picked up the pelt he happened to glance towards the western wall, and in the gateway there stood a maiden with her hand on the bridle of a white palfrey. Her dog came running towards Ebbe as he stood. He beat it off, and carrying the pelt across to its mistress, waited a moment silently, cap in hand, while she called the great falcon back to its lure and leashed it to her wrist, which seemed all too slight for the weight.

Then, as Ebbe held out the dead heron, she shook her head and laughed. "I am not sure, sir, that I have any right to it. We flushed it yonder between the wood and the sandhills, and, though I did not stay to consider, I think it must belong to the owner of the shore-land."

"It is true," said Ebbe, "that I own the shore-land, and the forest, too, if law could enforce right. But for the bird you are welcome to it, and to as many more as you care to kill."

Upon this she knit her brows. "The forest? But I thought that the forest was my father's? My name," said she, "is Mette, and my father is the Knight Borre, of Egeskov."

"I am Ebbe of Nebbegaard, and," said he, perceiving the mirth in her eyes, "you have heard the rhyme upon me—

"'Ebbe from Nebbe, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firing-wood.'"

"I had not meant to be discourteous," said she contritely; "but tell me more of these forest-lands."

"Nay," answered Ebbe, "hither comes riding your father with his men. Ask him for the story, and when he has told it you may know why I cannot make him or his daughter welcome at Nebbegaard."

To this she made no reply, but with her hand on the palfrey's bridle went slowly back to meet her father, who reined up at a little distance and waited, offering Ebbe no salutation. Then a groom helped her to the saddle, and the company rode away towards Egeskov, leaving the lad with the dead bird in his hand.

For weeks after this meeting he moped more than usual. He had known before that Sir Borre would leave no son, and that the lands of Nebbegaard, if ever to be won back, must be wrested from a woman—and this had ever troubled him. It troubled me the less because I hoped there might be another way than force; and even if it should come to that, Sir Borre's past treachery had killed in me all kindness towards his house, male or female.

He and my old master and five other knights of the eastern coast had been heavily oppressed by the Lord of Trelde, Lars Trolle, who owned many ships, and, though no better than a pirate, claimed a right of levying tribute along the shore that faces Funen, upon pretence of protecting it. After enduring many raids and paying toll under threat for years, these seven knights banded together to rid themselves of this robber; but word of their meetings being carried to Trolle, he came secretly one night to Nebbegaard with three ships' crews, broke down the doors, and finding the seven assembled in debate, made them prisoners and held them at ransom. My master, a poor man, could only purchase release by the help of his comrade, Borre, who found the ransom, but took in exchange the lands of Nebbegaard, to hold them until repaid out of their revenues; but of these he could never after be brought to give an account. We on our side had lost the power to enforce it, and behind his own strength he could now threaten us with Lars Trolle's, to whom he had been reconciled.

Therefore I felt no tenderness for Sir Borre's house, if by any means our estates could be recovered. But after this meeting with Sir Borre's daughter, I could see that my young lord went heavily troubled; and I began to think of other means than force.

It may have been six months later that word fame to us of great stir and bustle at Egeskov. Sir Borre, being aged, and anxious to see his daughter married before he died, had proclaimed a Bride-show. Now the custom is, and the rule, that any suitor (so he be of gentle birth) may offer himself in these contests; nor will the parents begin to bargain until he

has approved himself,—a wise plan, since it lessens the disputing, which else might be endless. So when this news reached us I looked at my master, and he, perceiving what I would say, answered it.

"If Holgar will carry me," said he, "we will ride to Egeskov."

This Holgar was a stout roan horse, foaled at Nebbegaard, but now well advanced in years, and the last of that red stock for which our stables had been famous.

"He will carry you thither," said I; "and by God's grace, bring you home with a bride behind you."

Upon this my master hung his head. "Peter," he said, "do not think I attempt this because it is the easier way."

"It comes easier than fighting with a woman," I answered. "But you will find it hard enow when the old man begins to haggle."

I did not know then that the lad's heart was honestly given to this maid; but so it was, and had been from the moment when she stood before him in the gateway.

So to Egeskov we rode, and there found no less than forty suitors assembled, and some with a hundred servants in retinue. Sir Borre received us with no care to hide his scorn, though the hour had not come for putting it into words; and truly my master's arms were old-fashioned, and with the dents they had honourably taken when they cased his father, made a poor battered show, for all my scouring.

Nevertheless, I had no fear when his turn came to ride the ring. Three rides had each wooer under the lady Mette's eyes, and three rings Ebbe carried off and laid on the cushion before her. She stooped and passed about his neck

the gold chain which she held for the prize; but I think they exchanged no looks. Only one other rider brought two rings, and this was a son of Lars Trolle, Olaf by name, a tall young knight, and well-favoured, but disdainful; whom I knew Sir Borre must favour if he could.

I could not see that the maiden favoured him above the rest, yet I kept a close eye upon this youth, and must own that in the jousting which followed he carried himself well. For this the most of the wooers had fresh horses, and I drew a long breath when, at the close of the third course, my master, with two others, remained in the lists. For it had been announced to us that the last courses should be ridden on the morrow. But now Sir Borre behaved very treacherously, for perceiving (as I am sure) that the horse Holgar was overwearied and panting, he gave word that the sport should not be stayed. More by grace of Heaven it was than by force of riding that Ebbe unhorsed his next man, a knight's son from Smalling; but in the last course, which he rode against Olaf of Trolle, who had stood a bye, his good honest beast came to the tilt-cloth with knees trembling, and at a touch rolled over, though between the two lances (I will swear) there was nothing to choose. I was quick to pick up my dear lad; but he would have none of my comfort, and limped away from the lists as one who had borne himself shamefully. Yea, and my own heart was hot as I led Holgar back to stable, without waiting to see the prize claimed by one who, though a fair fighter, had not won it without foul aid.

Having stalled Holgar I had much ado to find his master again, and endless work to persuade him to quit his sulks

and join the other suitors in the hall that night, when each presented his bride-gift. Even when I had won him over, he refused to take the coffer I placed in his hands, though it held his mother's jewels, few but precious. But entering with the last, as became his humble rank of esquire, he laid nothing at the lady's feet save his sword and the chain that she herself had given him.

"You bring little, Squire Ebbe," said the Knight Borre, from his seat beside his daughter.

"I bring what is most precious in the world to me," said Ebbe.

"Your lance is broken, I believe?" said the old knight scornfully.

"My lance is not broken," he answered; "else you should have it to match your word." And rising, without a look at Mette, whose eyes were downcast, he strode back to the door.

I had now given up hope, for the maid showed no sign of kindness, and the old man and the youth were like two dogs—the very sight of the one set the other growling. Yet—since to leave in a huff would have been discourteous—I prevailed on my master to bide over the morrow, and even to mount Holgar and ride forth to the hunt which was to close the Bride-show. He mounted, indeed, but kept apart and well behind Mette and her brisk group of wooers. For, apart from his lack of inclination, his horse was not yet recovered; and by and by, as the prickers started a deer, the hunt swept ahead of him and left him riding alone.

He had a mind to turn aside and ride straight back to Nebbegaard, whither he had sent me on to announce him

(and dismally enough I obeyed), when at the end of a green glade he spied Mette returning alone on her white palfrey.

"For I am tired of this hunting," she told him, as she came near.

"And you? Does it weary you also, that you lag so far behind?"

"It would never weary me," he answered; "but I have a weary horse."

"Then let us exchange," said she. "Though mine is but a palfrey, it would carry you better. Your roan betrayed you yesterday, and it is better to borrow than to miss excelling."

"My house," answered Ebbe, still sulkily, "has had enough borrowing of Egeskov; and my horse may be valueless, but he is one of the few things dear to me, and I must keep him."

"Truly then," said she, "your words were nought, last night, when you professed to offer me the gifts most precious to you in the world."

And before he could reply to this, she had pricked on and was lost in the woodland.

Ebbe sat for a while as she left him, considering, at the crossing of two glades. Then he twitched Holgar's rein and turned back towards Nebbegaard. But at the edge of the wood, spying a shepherd seated below in the plain by his flock, he rode down to the man, and called to him and said —

"Go this evening to Egeskov and greet the lady Mette, and say to her that Ebbe of Nebbegaard could not barter his good horse, the last of his father's stable. But that she may

know he was honest in offering her the thing most precious to him, tell her further what thou hast seen."

So saying, he alighted off Holgar, and, smoothing his neck, whispered a word in his ear. And the old horse turned his muzzle and rubbed it against his master's left palm, whose right gripped a dagger and drove it straight for the heart. This was the end of the roan stock of Nebbegaard.

My master Ebbe reached home that night with the mire thick on his boots. Having fed him, I went to the stables, and finding no Holgar made sure that he had killed the poor beast in wrath for his discomforture at the tilt. The true reason he gave me many days after. I misjudged him, judging him by his father's temper.

On the morrow of the Bride-show the suitors took their leave of Egeskov, under promise to return again at the month's end and hear how the lady Mette had chosen. So they went their ways, none doubting that the fortunate one would be Olaf of Trelde; and, for me, I blamed myself that we had ever gone to Egeskov.

But on the third morning after the Bride-show I changed this advice very suddenly; for going at six of the morning to unlock our postern gate, as my custom was, I found a tall black stallion tethered there and left without a keeper. His harness was of red leather, and each broad crimson rein bore certain words embroidered: on the one "A Straight Quarrel is Soonest Mended "; on the other, "Who Will Dare Learns Swiftness."

Little time I lost in calling my master to admire, and having read what was written, he looked in my eyes and said, "I go back to Egeskov."

"That is well done," said I; "may the Almighty God prosper it!"

"But," said he doubtfully, "if I determine on a strange thing, will you help me, Peter? I may need a dozen men; men without wives to miss them."

"I can yet find a dozen such along the fiord," I answered.

"And we go on a long journey, perhaps never to return to Nebbegaard."

"Dear master," said I, "what matter where my old bones lie after they have done serving you?" He kissed me and rode away to Egeskov.

"I thought that the Squire of Nebbe had done with us," Sir Borre began to sneer, when Ebbe found audience. "But the Bride-show is over, my man, and I give not my answer for a month yet."

"Your word is long to pledge, and longer to redeem," said Ebbe. "I know that, were I to wait a twelvemonth, you would not of free will give me Mette."

"Ah, you know that, do you? Well, then, you are right, Master Lackland, and the greater your impudence in hoping to wile from me through my daughter what you could not take by force."

Ebbe replied, "I was prepared to find it difficult, but let that pass. As touching my lack of land, I have Nebbegaard left; a poor estate and barren, yet I think you would be glad of it, to add to the lands of which you robbed us."

"Well," said Borre, "I would give a certain price for it, but not my daughter, nor anything near so precious to me."

"Give me one long ship," said Ebbe; "the swiftest of your seven which ride in the strait between Egeskov and Stryb.

You shall take Nebbegaard for her, since I am weary of living at home and care little to live at all without Mette."

Borre's eyes shone with greed. "I commend you," said he; "for a stout lad there is nothing like risking his life to win a fortune. Give me the deeds belonging to Nebbegaard, and you shall have my ship *Gold Mary*."

"By your leave," said Ebbe, "I have spent some time in watching your ships upon the fiord; and the ship in my mind was the *White Wolf*."

Sir Borre laughed to find himself outwitted, for the *White Wolf* could outsail all his fleet. But in any case he had the better of the bargain and could afford to show some good-humour. Moreover, though he knew not that Mette had any tenderness for this youth, his spirits rose at the prospect of getting him out of the way.

So the bargain was struck, and as Nebbe rode homewards to his castle for the last time, he met the shepherd who had taken his former message. The man was waiting for him, and (as you guess) by Mette's orders.

"Tell the lady Mette," said Ebbe, "that I have sold Nebbegaard for the *White Wolf*, and that two nights from now my men will be aboard of her; also that I sup with her father that evening before the boat takes me off from the Bent Ness."

So it was that two nights later Ebbe supped at Egeskov, and was kept drinking by the old knight for an hour maybe after the lady Mette had risen and left the hall for her own room.

And at the end, after the last speeding-cup, needs must Sir Borre (who had grown friendly beyond all belief) see him

to the gate and stand there bare-headed among his torch-bearers while my master mounted the black stallion that was to bear him to Bent Ness, three miles away, where I waited with the boat.

But as Ebbe shook his rein, and moved out of the torchlight, came the damsel Mette stealing out of the shadow upon the far side of the horse. He reached down a hand, and she took it, and sprang up behind him.

"For this bout, Sir Borre, I came with a fresh horse!" called my master blithely; and so, striking spur, galloped off into the dark.

Little chance had Sir Borre to overtake them. The stallion was swift, our boat waiting in the lee of the Ness, the wind southerly and fresh, the *White Wolf* ready for sea, with sail hoisted and but one small anchor to get on board or cut away if need were. But there was no need. Before the men of Egeskov reached the Ness and found there the black stallion roaming, its riders were sailing out of the Strait with a merry breeze. So began our voyage.

My master was minded to sail for Norway and take service under the king. But first, coming to the island of Laeso, he must put ashore and seek a priest, by whom he and the lady Mette were safely made man and wife. Two days he spent at the island, and then, with fresh store of provisions, we headed northward again.

It was past Skagen that our troubles began, with a furious wind from the north-east against which there was no contending, so that we ran from it and were driven for two days and a night into the wide sea. Even when it lessened, the wind held in the east; and we, who could handle the

ship, but knew little of reckoning, crept northward again in the hope to sight the coast of Norway. For two days we held on at this, lying close by the wind, and in good spirits, although our progress was not much; but on the third blew another gale—this time from the south-east—and for a week gale followed gale, and we went in deadly peril, yet never losing hope. The worst was the darkness, for the year was now drawing towards Yule, and as we pressed farther north we lost almost all sight of the sun.

At length, with the darkness and the bitter cold and our stores running low, we resolved to let the wind take us with what swiftness it might to whatsoever land it listed; and so ran westward, with darkness closing upon us, and famine and a great despair.

But the lady Mette did not lose heart, and the worst of all (our failing cupboard) we kept from her, so that she never lacked for plenty. Truly her cheerfulness paid us back, and her love for my master, the like of which I had not seen in this world; no, nor dreamed of. Hand in hand this pair would sit, watching the ice which was our prison and the great North Lights, she close against Ebbe's side for warmth, and (I believe) as happy us a bird; he trembling for the end. The worst was to see her at table, pressing food to his mouth and wondering at his little hunger; while his whole body cried out for the meat, only it could not be spared.

Though she must know soon, none of us had the heart to tell her; and not out of pity alone, but because with her must die out the last spark by which we warmed ourselves.

But there came a morning—I write it as of a time long ago, and yet it was but yesterday, praise be unto God!—

there came a morning when I awoke and found that two of our men had died in the plight, of frost and famine. They must be hidden before my mistress discovered aught; and so before her hour of waking we weighted and dropped the bodies overside into deep water; for the ice had not yet wholly closed about us. Now as I stooped, I suppose that my legs gave way beneath me. At any rate, I fell; and in falling struck my head against the bulwarks, and opened my eyes in that unending dusk to find the lady Mette stooping over me.

Then somehow I was aware that she had called for wine to force down my throat, and had been told that there was no wine; and also that with this answer had come to her the knowledge, full and sudden, of our case. Better had we done to trust her than to hide it all this while, for she turned to Ebbe, who stood at her shoulder, and "Is not this the feast of Yule?" she asked. My master bent his head, but without answering.

"Ah!" she cried to him. "Now I know what I have longed to know, that your love is less than mine, for you can love yet be doubtful of miracles; while to me, now that I have loved, no miracle can be aught but small." She bowed herself over me. "Art dying, old friend? Look up and learn that God, being Love, deserts not lovers."

Then she stooped and gathered, as I thought, a handful of snow from the deck; but lo! when she pressed it to my lips, and I tasted, it was heavenly manna.

And looking up past her face I saw the ribbons of the North Lights fade in a great and wide sunlight, bathing the deck and my frozen limbs. Nor did they feel it only, but on

the wind came the noise of bergs rending, springs breaking, birds singing, many and curious. And with that, as I am a sinful man, I gazed up into green leaves; for either we had sailed into Paradise or the timbers of the *White Wolf* were swelling with sap and pushing forth bough upon bough. Yea, and there were roses at the mast's foot, and my fingers, as I stretched them, dabbled in mosses. While I lay there, breathing softly, as one who dreams and fears to awake, I heard her voice talking among the noises of birds and brooks, and by the scent it seemed to be in a garden; but whether it spake to me or to Ebbe I knew not, nor cared. "The Lord is my Shepherd, and guides me," it said, "wherefore I lack nothing. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me by comfortable streams: He reviveth my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no harm: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." But, a little after, I knew that the voice spake to my master, for it said: "Let us go forth into the field, O beloved: let us lodge in the villages: let us get up betimes to the vineyard and see if the vine have budded, if its blossom be open, the pomegranates in flower. Even there will I give thee my love." Then looking again I saw that the two had gone from me and left me alone.

But, blessed be God, they took not away the vision, and now I know certainly that it is no cheat. For here sit I, dipping my pen into the unfrozen ink, and, when a word will not come, looking up into the broad branches and listening to the birds till I forget my story. It is long since they left me; but I am full fed, and the ship floats pleasantly. After so

much misery I am as one rocked on the bosom of God; and the pine resin has a pleasant smell.

[1] The courtship of Ebbe, the poor esquire of Nebbegaard, and the maiden Mette is a traditional tale of West Jutland. A version of it was Englished by Thorpe from Carit Etlar's "*Eventyr og Folkesagen fra Jylland*": but this, while it tells of Ebbe's adventures at the "Bride-show," and afterwards at the hunting-party, contains no account of the lovers' escape and voyage, or of the miracle which brought them comfort at the last. Indeed, Master Kurt contradicts the common tale in many ways, but above all in his ending, wherein (although he narrates a miracle) I find him worthy of belief.

SINDBAD ON BURRATOR.

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I heard this story in a farmhouse upon Dartmoor, and I give it in the words of the local doctor who told it. We were a reading-party of three undergraduates and a Christ Church don. The don had slipped on a boulder, two days before, while fishing the river Meavy, and sprained his ankle; hence Dr. Miles's visit. The two had made friends over the don's fly-book and the discovery that what the doctor did not know about Dartmoor trout was not worth knowing; hence an invitation to extend his visit over dinner. At dinner the

talk diverged from sport to the ancient tin-works, stone circles, camps and cromlechs on the tors about us, and from there to touch speculatively on the darker side of the old religions: hence at length the doctor's story, which he told over the pipes and whisky, leaning his arms upon the table and gazing at it rather than at us, as though drawing his memories out of depths below its polished surface.

It must be thirty—yes, thirty—years ago (he said) since I met the man, on a bright November morning, when the Dartmoor hounds were drawing Burrator Wood. Burrator House in those days belonged to the Rajah Brooke—Brooke of Sarawak—who had bought it from Harry Terrell; or rather it had been bought for him by the Baroness Burdett Coutts and other admirers in England. Harry Terrell—a great sportsman in his day—had been loth enough to part with it, and when the bargain was first proposed, had named at random a price which was about double what he had given for the place. The Rajah closed with the sum at once, asked him to make a list of everything in the house, and put a price on whatever he cared to sell. Terrell made a full list, putting what seemed to him fair prices on most of the furniture, and high ones— prohibitive he thought—on the sticks he had a fancy to keep. The Rajah glanced over the paper in his grand manner, and says he, "I'll take it all." "Stop! stop!" cried Terrell, "I bain't going to let you have the bed I was married in!" "As you please; we'll strike out the bed, then," the Rajah answered. That is how he took possession.

Burrator House, as I daresay you know, faces across the Meavy upon Burrator Wood; and the wood, thanks to Terrell, had always been a sure draw for a fox. I had tramped over from Tavistock on this particular morning,—for I was new to the country, a young man looking around me for a practice, and did not yet possess a horse,—and I sat on the slope above the house, at the foot of the tor, watching the scene on the opposite bank. The fixture, always a favourite one, and the Rajah's hospitality—which was noble, like everything about him—had brought out a large and brightly-dressed field; and among them, in his black coat, moved Terrell on a horse twice as good as it looked. He had ridden over from his new home, and I daresay in the rush of old associations had forgotten for the while that the familiar place was no longer his.

The Rajah, a statue of a man, sat on a tall grey at the covert's edge, directly below me; and from time to time I watched him through my field-glass. He had lately recovered from a stroke of paralysis, and was (I am told) the wreck of his old self; but the old fire lived in the ashes. He sat there, tall, lean, upright as a ramrod, with his eyes turned from the covert and gazing straight in front, over his horse's ears, on the rushing Meavy. He had forgotten the hounds; his care for his guests was at an end; and I wondered what thoughts, what memories of the East, possessed him. There is always a loneliness about a great man, don't you think? But I have never felt one to be so terribly—yes, terribly—alone as the Rajah was that morning among his guests and the Devonshire tors.

"Every inch a king," said a voice at my elbow, and a little man settled himself down on the turf beside me. I set down my glasses with a start. He was a spare dry fellow of about fifty, dressed in what I took for the working suit of a mechanic. Certainly he did not belong to the moor. He wore no collar, but a dingy yellow handkerchief knotted about his throat, and both throat and face were seamed with wrinkles —so thickly seamed that at first glance you might take them for tattoo-marks; but I had time for a second, for without troubling to meet my eyes he nodded towards the Rajah.

"I've cut a day's work and travelled out from Plymouth to get a sight of him; and I've a wife will pull my hair out when I get home and she finds I haven't been to the docks to-day; and I've had no breakfast but thirty grains of opium; but he's worth it."

"Thirty grains of opium!" I stared at him, incredulous. He did not turn, but, still with his eyes on the valley below us, stretched out a hand. It's fingers were gnarled, and hooked like a bird's claw, and on the little finger a ruby flashed in the morning sunlight—not a large ruby, but of the purest pigeon's-blood shade, and in any case a stone of price.

"You see this? My wife thinks it a sham one, but it's not. And some day, when I'm drunk or in low water, I shall part with it—but not yet. You've an eye for it, I see,"—and yet he was not looking towards me,— "but the Rajah, yonder, and I are the only two within a hundred miles that can read what's in the heart of it."

He gazed for a second or two at the stone, lifted it to his ear as if listening, and lowering his hand to the turf, bent over it and gazed again. "Ay, *he* could understand and see