sides of his war-ships years before, only more dauntless for opposition; but to-night he sat in silent, gaunt, and non-committal gloom. His great, red beard was roughened round his face like the burning gleam of a dying sunset over a jagged mountain, and his gray eyes twinkled coldly from beneath his brows like stars between the trees in winter. Cold and haughty he sat there on his dais, eating little in this time of banqueting, but drinking deep, as if there were some trouble he would forget. A favored servant, pressing some special delicacy, was repulsed with a gesture that might signify disgust or impatience. The wind that lashed the forest into agony, and swept in gusts through the banquet-hall, undeterred by rudely closed window slits, caused the lord of the castle to turn uneasily in his seat with a foreboding which he could not throw off.

A snatch of song reminded him of the contest that was to decide the fate of his daughter; her hand was to be the guerdon of him who should most excel in minstrelsy. The Dane beckoned to his favorite servant, and said: "Bid thy mistress come hither with my daughter Ethel; bid her appear as doth beseem the wife of Harold of Jutland and of Rising; pause not, but fetch hither the harp with the golden strings."

A partial silence fell upon the crowd of yeomanry, and here and there an aspirant furtively collected himself, and tried to quell the flutter of diffidence that almost made him sick, at thought of standing alone in that company and striving for his lady's hand. A deeper hush fell through the hall when, resplendent in her maidenhood, there entered, leaning upon her mother's shoulder, a fair young girl—the prize to be bestowed upon the sweetest singer. Many a heart beat faster when he saw the shy blush that surmounted those fair cheeks, beneath the gaze of so many who were desirous to possess them; and a gentle murmur of expectation rose, trembled, died, before an old man advanced, and, as his right, took down the noble harp that was this night to serve the muse in fatal contest. For a moment the aged trouba-

dour let his subtle fingers stray over the responsive strings, as if to call to mind once more the time when he, too, might have entered a contest like to-night's; then, half sorrowfully, he gave the instrument into the hands of the ready suitors. Sweet singer followed singer in ever loftier strains, until it seemed a miracle if justice could single from the trial one who should deserve the best. One sang of love, one sang of war, another of the chase; one jester sang the pleasures of the table, and one, more learned than the rest, sang even of the joys of knowledge; each, as his heart prompted, sang; some joyfully, for their hope was high—some in sorrow, for despair lay gloomy in their souls.

And Ethel? She felt her tender heart grow heavy, and a dull ache made her throat throb, for she was fancy-free. Yet she was interested in the contest, and as each new singer grasped the harp, she asked herself, "Is this he?" and her throat throbbed harder when he sang well, for that made it more possible that it was he; still, if he sang a passage poorly, she felt sorry for the poor wretch for whom there was no longer any chance, and her look of anxious pity never failed to spur the lagging minstrel to his most strenuous exertions.

And now the turn of the last contestant had arrived. He was a stranger to the company, and none could tell whence he had come. In silence, and with a commanding dignity, he had made his way forward among the enthusiastic crowd of the Dane's followers, and now stood calmly waiting for the applause awarded to his predecessor to die away. The mighty breadth of his shoulders loomed up before the admiring eyes of men who knew better, perhaps, how to appreciate the magnificent animal than the glorious singer. His harp rested almost carelessly upon his breast, and a hand, powerful, but with exquisitely delicate finger-tips, lay upon strings that seemed to long to respond to their master-touch. All eyes were bent upon his kingly form, and, with a more definite trouble than heretofore, the Dane gazed into the calm, firm countenance of this