

GOD'S
PUPPETS



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—BOSTON HERALD.

God's Puppets

#7257

God's Puppets

A Story of Old
New York

By
Imogen Clark

"God's puppets, best and worst, are we."
—PIPPA PASSES.



New York
Charles Scribner's Sons
1901

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To
My Dear Father

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I

A LETTER

*FROM CAPTAIN JOHN BELLENDEN TO SIR HARRY
FENWICK, BART.*

AT THE PROVINCE ARMS,
NEW YORK, April 22, 1757.

MY DEAR HAL:

Faith, 'tis no Paradise here, but 'tis not that other Place either and so a Man must needs be content. 'Tis a vast improvement upon Barbadoes anyway, and though I made no Choice in coming hither, since 'twas His Lordship's command, neither did I make a Choice of coming into the World which, after all, is infinitely better than some misanthropical Fellows say they find it. Gad, 'tis but say so on their parts, for when the Time comes for their quitting it they call you in my Doctor this, or t'other, to physick 'em into some show of Health. Plague take it! what won't those same grumbling Fellows do to stay upon this Earth, and not under it? They'll even fall to drinking Asses' milk, like My Lord Hervey at Home, (*vide* Mr Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*) and call it Living too! But that's

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not for Jack Bellenden. A merry Life, not a long one, say I, and a quick Death at the end, like the going-out of a Candle on a gusty Night when Betty, the maid, leaves the Door ajar—one Flare after the steady shining and then—the Dark. 'Tis a Consummation devoutly to be wished,' as that melancholic, mad Prince says in the Play. Lord—Lord! I can hear the sound of little Davy's Voice in the words now, and I can see the tragical Face of him too, and I haven't laid Eyes on him for more than twice a Twelvemonth.

I do protest, Hal, thou art a lucky Dog—Money in thy Purse and London all before thee, London and the Play-houses, London—nay, 'tis a Picture to draw tears from a Jew, and but for an accident of Birth thy Fate might be mine own, and mine thine. How wouldst like standing in my Shoes—a poor Devil of a Captain with a beggarly pay and Debts mountain-high? Wouldst find Fruits then for thy Philosophy and Sweets in this new World to rival those proven Ones in the old? Wouldst wear thy Scarlet Coat with a swagger to beat mine own? For let me tell thee I carry a brave Front and outface the Boldest—as why not? say I. Thou hast fathomed ere this, I warrant, that 'tis not so bad with me after all; 'tis ever the trick of my Pen to write first in a mournful Strain, as your Fiddler will play you a plaintive Measure to set your Senses a-quivering and bespeak your softest Mood.

Sure, New York is not London, but 'tis New York and that means something. 'Tis not so big a Town as Boston, or Philadelphia, but with regard to its Opulence, its Commerce, its fine Buildings, it disputes the Preference with either of 'em. The Streets are

A Letter

not so straight as those of Philadelphia and have sometimes considerable Bendings, however, they are very Spacious and well built, and most of 'em are paved, except in high Places, where it has been found of no avail. There are Trees in the chief Streets, too, which must give 'em a fine appearance in Summer and afford a cooling Shade, for 'tis devilish hot here at that time, they tell me.

Most of the Houses are built of Brick and are strong and neat and several Storeys high; some have, according to the old Architecture, turned their gable ends towards the Street, but the new Houses are altered in this respect. 'Tis a pretty sight to come across the older kind sending up sharp peaks Skywards, their gable-ends notched like Steps and their sides curiously flowered with black Brick in quaint Patterns and dated with the same. These Dwellings belong principally to the Dutch, or those of mixed Dutch ancestry, and are surrounded by trim Gardens or big, or little, as best may suit the Purse of Mynheer the owner.

The English, who represent the People of Fashion, dwell at the Polite end of the Town near the Fort where His Excellency resides. Their Houses are built after our own Models with Gardens often sloping to the Waterside. Queen Street, too, has some fine Mansions and Broad as well. These People have their Country-Seats in the Villages beyond the Town and along the High-road to Boston, great Estates lying in the midst of innumerable Acres. 'Tis a rich Country and a pretty.

I and two of my fellow Officers—Whyte and Nevil—(you remember that sad dog Dick Whyte, I'll wager

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a crown!) rode out beyond the Town on our first coming hither and stopped at a Tavern on a Hill. 'Twas a fine View we commanded, and if I possessed a tithe of Mr. Gray's Genius I might write you an Ode on the distant Prospect, but there's small rhyming in my pate. Still, I'll put down the things as I saw 'em and you can hunt up some Grub Street hack and let him bring forth a Breed of Couplets. Then he can dedicate the same to his noble Patron, get up a Subscription-list and publish 'em, but know, in case a large Fortune accrues, that 'twas I—Jack Bellenden—who fathered 'em.

'Twas near the close of Day when we halted and egad, the Scene was a pleasing one. On our right a great fresh water pond—the Collect it is called,—the delight of all true Anglers—flashed like Metal in the light, beyond stretched marsh-lands where Snipe abound, and gently swelling Hills; there was, too, the glint of a lesser lake—the little Collect (I know not what will rhyme with that!) while to the South lay the Town itself with its Roofs and Spires distinct against the glowing Sky, with here and there a Windmill to tell where some old Burgher lived and, girding all about like a Silver setting, the gleam of the Water on the edge of the Island. At the foot of the Hill at the entrance of the City is a Bridge—hight the Kissing-Bridge—which spans a streamlet (egad, I'm turning to the Muse myself,) dancing its way through the Meadows to—where I care not. But oh, the Bridge—the Bridge! 'Tis not 'by your leave, my Lady,' but no words and all action. Be she in a coming-on disposition, or the reverse, 'tis your right and,

A Letter

though the flout you, she may not deny you. 'Tis kiss and come again, and yet again if she be Sweet-and-Twenty. Truly, a most excellent Custom and one with which I'd never quarrel—not I!

It would seem as if that same Tower of Babel were situate on this Island for the Inhabitants speak many and diverse Tongues. Here, you find your swag-bellied Hollander, your German, and your right, honest Englishman—the Peer of 'em all. Here also are many French, descendants from the Huguenots who came hither when Times were hot for 'em overseas and have prospered mightily ever since, Spanishers a few, dusky Africans—the child of Israel to barter, and sell, and lend out Moneys (at a low Usury, now Heaven be praised!) skulking Copperskins—our Allies for the nonce—and I know not how many other Folk besides. All the nations of the Earth met together, as it were, and all compounded of the same Stuff. It makes no difference whether the Skin be dark, or fair, within 'tis the old Adam, ay, and the old Eve too, and—who shall not say—the old Nick to leaven the whole.

'Tis a bustling, busy Town—a Mart of the World. All day at the Wharves great Ships are loading with Riches from the Provinces and other great Ships are unloading their Cargoes from foreign Lands and from mine own dear England for the advancement of this new Country. Does my Lady go rustling in Brocades in London? Madam Fine-Airs apes her here. You have no Fashion that is not speedily welcomed hither. Why, the very Streets are full of the same Sounds you are hearing at this moment, and they'll cry you as lustily 'Buy my Wash-balls, Gemmen and Ladies'

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'Sevil Oranges and Lemens' as though 'twere Cheap-side or the Fleet. Miss Hoity-toity throws me a disdainful Glance from her Chair as she swings by to the Mantua-maker's, or to the Wharf there to pull over the lading of India muslins, Italian silks, or Dutch linen and did I not know better I might think myself at Home ogling Lady Betty, or Lady Prue. There's more fire though in Hoity-toity's Glance and less of languishment and ease. Faith, she's young at it, just as this new World is young, but marvellous tender and, I doubt not, teachable!

'Tis a Town for junketing. Coffee-houses and Ordinaries a-plenty and young Bloods ready for a Game at any hour with Stakes well worth the playing for; Dinners with the Merchant-Princes fit for Lucullus—aint that the Fellow's name?—and Cards and Routs with the Fair Sex almost nightly. There's an indifferent Play-house too, and a company of Players, not as God made 'em, more's the pity! There are also Concerts of pleasing variety and on the outskirts of the Town is the Tea-water Pump set in the midst of a fair Garden whither People of the first Fashion repair of an Afternoon to drink a dish of Tea and talk a pound of Scandal—The same World, my Hal, or here, or there! The Coffee-house I frequent chiefest, and indeed the one patronized almost exclusively by our Officers is The Province Arms (see per heading) kept by a Mr. Willet—the prince of Bonifaces. He takes in all the Papers both from this Town and Philadelphia with an occasional Sheet from Boston and our own Papers, but two Months old, so I am well advised of the Happenings of the World. Hither daily come

A Letter

many Men of Parts, in whose Society I delight, and besides from this Room I've a goodly View of the Mall where the fashionable Folk walk, and close at hand is Trinity church-yard where the fashionable Folk lie, so there's Food in abundance for my merry or sober Moods.

I waited on my Cousins the Crewes yesterday. They are of the Crewes of Kent, and relatives of mine on the Distaff side as I may have told you. The Progenitor of the family came out to the Colonies with my Lord Cornbury as His Excellency's something, or t'other, to push his Fortune and here he stayed, after my Lord's return, pushing his Fortune so well by Preferment, natural Wit, and Marriage with the only Daughter of a rich Ship-owner that before he departed this Life he—the Son of a poor, out-at-elbows county Squire—was one of the greatest Grandees of the Province. By his Wife he had one Son, the Husband and Father of the present Crewes. That Son stayed with us when I was a little Lad for weeks on end, my Father could not bear to have him from his sight, though I've scant remembrance of him myself. He was educated in England and, at the time I write, though 'twas long since he'd quitted Cambridge he'd no Mind to go back to his own Home. He was seeing the World, he said. Faith, he saw it well before he got through and no mistake! His name is still remembered in London where his Gallantries set the whole Town talking—you've heard my Father tell a hundred times that Story of him and Mrs. Sally L—and the Poem that was writ about 'em at Bath, and then those other Stories—hmm—hmm— They came

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rushing into my Mind as I made my bow to his Widow, and I wondered if she'd see their Wit if I told 'em to her. Women have so small a sense of Humour and my little Lady, for all her Simpers, has none at all, I'll warrant. How Tony must have missed the lack of it in her!

He made ducks and drakes of his Property back in the Thirties, and speedily thereafter returned to his own People like that prodigal Fellow in the story Parson Law is always telling us, and the next we heard he'd married and settled down. Gad, how my Father roared! Then no more Word of him until some years ago a Letter advised us of his Demise. His Fortune, as I've said, had been impaired, but he married Money—he was ever a lucky Dog—and Beauty as well. Trust him for that! Cousin Tony would run from a Squint, or a Hump, as if the Devil was after him. The Widow is a marvellous fine Woman still, though nowadays, what with the paint, powder, and stuffing the dear Creatures use, one can't tell the real from the false. But there's enough of the original Foundation left, else I'm much deceived, to believe she was once the Toast they say. And a Toast she is yet, *sub rosa*, but mainly because of her Money-bags, I'm thinking. She aint old though, still far from fifty I'll wager a crown, and her teeth are her own, or my name's not Jack Bellenden. Gad, her Fortune would be a pretty Plum to my taste!

The Crewes' town-house is situate near the Glacis of the Fort and is built of Stone. It has wide Gardens in the rear which extend to the Water-side and thither was I conducted immediately so I'd but a fleeting

A Letter

Glimpse of the richly appointed Interior. As I descended the stone steps of the Terrace to where my Cousins were taking the air, for the Day was soft like Summer—Spring being come early this Year—it was as pretty a Picture as a Painter could wish. I could almost have sworn I was at Home so familiar were the trim Parterres, where already some early Flowers were blooming, the crisp walls of close-clipped Box, and the Yews cut out in fantastic shapes of Peacocks—the Crewe crest. 'Twas like Castle Crewe in little, and I thought I'd die a-laughing at the Pride of the younger Branch, and my Lord not knowing 'em any more than Savages, as how should he, seeing they're some half dozen times removed?

Through the trunks of the Trees I could catch a view of the Water beyond and, at the foot of the last Terrace, was a little Quay where some Boats lay moored, but I turned aside and followed the servant to some stone Seats around an old Sun-dial where the Family was sitting. At my approach the Widow rose and made me an elegant Curtsey, which I matched with a Bow fit for Versailles, then she gave me her Hand to kiss and scolded me roundly because I'd been a week in Town and had not let 'em know, or her Son would have waited on me. Whereupon she called a slim young Beau of nineteen, or twenty, to bear out her words. He looked more like her Brother, and so I told her, which pleased her monstrously. It's not much, after all, which will pleasure the Women—a few words and a Glance and the dear Creatures are ready to swear they love you, though they'll hate you for a less Cause the next moment.

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'And I've a strapping big Girl too, Cousin Bellen-den,' she cries, 'Time was when my Children had to look up to me, but now I have to look up to both of 'em. This is your Cousin the Captain, child.'

Then Miss, who'd been lounging on the Bench against a red Cushion, as I'd seen from the tail of my Eye, came forward and dropped me an indifferent Curtsey, but when I would have kissed her Hand she drew it away with a Laugh that was like a dash of cold water in my Face. 'Keep your pretty Speeches for those who believe in 'em,' she says quite low and, turning, she went back to her place and leant over the Dial.

'Twas a cold enough Welcome, I warrant you, but the Widow and her Son made up with the warmth of theirs. And so we chatted for the better part of an Hour of Home, and how I liked York Colony, and what People of Fashion I'd seen, and of His Excellency, the Governor, and of our Forces in the North, and more of which I cannot tell you, seeing that my Letter is already so long, but which was vastly diverting. And all the while Miss sat mum, and but for that one remark I'd have thought her too shy to speak.

'Peggy has the Vapours to-day,' cries Larry at last, 'taint often a Stranger can quiet her Tongue which goes faster, as a rule, than my horse Touchstone can run. What's amiss, child? Has our Cousin frightened you?'

''Tis little I know of Fear,' snaps Miss, with a good deal of Vixen wrote large on her lovely Face, 'I'm no Frenchman to tremble at the sight of a Red-coat; besides, a toy Soldier signifies no more to me than a sign-

A Letter

post does to a person born blind' (she meant that because I'm quartered here in Town), 'To tell the truth I'm occupied with weightier Matters.'

'Such as your Lessons doubtless, little Cousin,' says I, rising to take my Leave, 'I see you've been conning your Letters since I sat here.'

She drummed an impatient Hand upon the old Stone and made as if she didn't hear me, but the colour rose in her Cheeks and her Eyes glittered.

'What, have you got as far as Latin?' says I, leaning over her shoulder; her Mother and Brother had gone to meet some Visitors and, for the moment, we were alone.

'Do you know Latin?' says she, with an impudent toss of her Head and not heeding my question otherwise. 'La, if that's the case I ought to have more respect for a Red-coat than I must own I have. I thought they only taught you to bow, and scrape, and say silly things to Women.'

'We know a few other things,' says I, nettled by her tone, 'we know, for instance, that Courtesy is our Due until we've proven ourselves unworthy of it.'

'So,' says she, not a whit disturbed, 'and Latin besides! 'Tis a liberal Education and I cry you pardon.'

'It's a good Legend,' says I, still standing above her and reading it off softly, 'but it lacks a Word that should be between us, Cousin.'

'What Word is that?' she asks, thrown off her guard.

'Let me be your Master and teach you,' says I mon-

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strous gently, 'put your Finger on that second Letter there—come, come, 'twill not bite you.'

She was holding a small Twig and suddenly she flicked it down on the Letter and looked up at me—I had not expected such Obedience, and my Face showed as much.

'You'll find me a ready Scholar,' she laughs.

'Say "a" then,' says I.

'Oh master, "a,"' she drawls with the killingest Sigh imaginable.

'Now this Letter here,' says I, 'not "v," but "m"—say it.'

'"M."'

I put my Hand on hers to guide the little Stick further along to a weather-stained Vowel, but she snatched it quickly away and jumped to her feet.

'What, another Letter, and still another?' she mocks, with a Glance that convinced me she was not ignorant of my Meaning. ''Tis too difficult a Task for my indifferent Parts, Captain Bellenden. I never could learn it in a year of Sundays.'

'It might take time,' says I looking hard at her, 'but I promise to teach you.'

'In faith, sir, you've a pretty Confidence in your Powers,' cries she amazing soft. 'Make me patient! You Gentlemen never suffer from a lack of Modesty. Will you ask my Mamma's permission to be my Instructor in this matter, Cousin Bellenden?' she goes on next coaxingly. 'She has hitherto superintended my Education. And when shall I begin? To-morrow, or the next Day, or the Day thereafter?' Here the Jade broke out laughing in a way that set my blood

A Letter

a-tingling, and she looked so devilish handsome, and defiant, that I didn't know whether I wanted most to kiss her, or to shake her.

'What's the jest, Peggy?' cries her Brother coming up.

'Share it with us, you dear Creature,' puts in one of the Visitors, 'I'm so low in my Mind because my Woman has just broke my gilded Indian fan.'

Miss shot me a Look as she greeted her Friends and named me to them.

'Tis a Latin jest,' she says soberly, though her Eyes danced, 'that truly would suffer from Translation and besides,' here she glanced at me again, 'tis only amusing to Two, isn't it, Cousin? La, Mamma,' she goes on, 'the Captain is prodigiously learned. His Excellency ought to secure him for Instructor at the new College, for his Talents are wasted as a mere Soldier. He'd be of vast Assistance to the young Gentlemen in a most important Branch. Won't you take my word for it, Madam, and persuade His Excellency?'

'La, child, you talk a deal of Nonsense,' interrupts Mamma sharply—she didn't relish the Laugh she didn't understand, 'and we've had enough of your Jests.'

I protest 'twas my own thought, and glad was I to take my Leave soon thereafter, for I don't like being routed by a mere Chit. And there was no fighting her before all the Company. Egad, she kept it up to the very last and called after me and Larry as we walked away (for he offered to accompany me to the Coffee-house).

'Twould be a thousand pities to let your Talents

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rust, Cousin, so if there's no Vacancy at the College you might give me a Lesson in Lul-Lul-Latin sometimes, to keep your Hand in—that is, if my Mamma is willing.'

The little Vixen! 'twill go hard with me if I don't get even with her one Day. Meanwhile, I find I've wrote my Paper out and like enough your Patience; so no more for the Present from your true,

JACK.

N.B. My cousin Peggy is full Eighteen, her Brother says (I'd thought her younger), and on his Authority she's a deuced tender-hearted, merry Minx for all her sharp Tongue. Merry, yes, I'll chime to that, but tender-hearted—no! 'Twere easier talking Sentiment to a Potato than to that young Jade, and Larry himself owns that she laughs at Love and flouts her swains past Endurance, while they—poor Fools!—dance Attendance on her least Whim. Since my coming I've heard the Toast: 'All Glasses to the lovely Peggy!' uttered again and again, but little I thought 'twas Tony Crewe's Daughter. Sink me, but I'll drink that Bumper whenever they give it, though Jack Bellenden is not to be snared by her dark Eyes. I'll pledge my Cousin in Friendship always, but never once in Love.

II

THE GARDEN STREET CHURCH

The bell of the Garden Street church tolled heavily, one beat solemn and slow, then silence—while the air echoed the reverberations moaning, another beat—and still another. Steadily, relentlessly, it pealed, its voice differing widely from the one it used the first day of the week. At that time the mounting chime which sang “come worship here” held a species of sanctified merriment, as it were, in its invitation, but this other clanging boom, though it also indicated the opening of a portal, was resonant with sorrow. And had it not been for that swinging point of darkness against the blue it would have been difficult to believe that the same mouthpiece could give forth such diverse sounds.

If there was one thing the parishioners of the old Dutch church prided themselves upon, aside from their piety, and their own high standing in the community where it had pleased a gracious Providence to call them, it was this bell—the first of its kind upon the island of Manhattan. Had not the Indians in those early times listened, dumb with wonderment, as it rang out its changes, deeming it the voice of the Great Spirit so clarion clear it spoke? What if the bell in the Middle Dutch Church, farther up town in Crown Street,

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claimed—and could substantiate its claim by well-at-tested proofs—that on the occasion of its casting silver coins had been thrown into the other metals by those good citizens of Amsterdam, was it the only bell cast overseas? Was it the only bell to come from the fatherland with silver in its heart and tongue? And, moreover, could it, or any other in York Colony, show so long a record as this one?

Before the rule of the English the bell had swung in the belfry inside the Fort, when the Fort bore a Dutch name and was governed by Dutch officials, and there it remained when, the dominion of Their High Mightinesses the States-General coming to an end, New Amsterdam became New York. Amid the changes it had known no change, but had gone on with its utterances—Dutch for the Dutch in the morning, when the rubicund-faced burghers, with their wives and children, walked solemnly into the little sanctuary—and English for the English in the afternoon when His Excellency, the Governor, with his staff and the members of his household, came clattering into the church for the Episcopal service. Once, for a short space, when New York was New Orange the bell had welcomed its true people with jubilant peals, and then, until the century had almost reached its close, it swung in its place, knowing English rule but keeping its sturdy Dutch heart and doing its duty in shine, or storm, with no accent of churlishness to mar its beauty.

It had come to its own, however, in Garden Alley, the little blossoming lane that diverged from the thoroughfare. There, in the midst of Mrs. Domine Dris-

The Garden Street Church

ius' peach-orchard, it found its home within sight of trim flower-beds where, in their season, lily-cups chimed along their slim, green stems, the foxglove rang its fairy music, and the bluebells sounded a joyful peal to the hearing of the vagrant butterflies frequenting the spot. And high above them all, in its perch against the sky, the bell, as it vibrated to and fro, noted the changes in the lane at its feet which, with the passing of time, became a street and, as it swept out to its limit, caught glimpses of the little world beyond and the alterations written there by the hand of Progress and Fashion.

Flowers still nodded from the gardens of near-by dwelling-houses, as fragrant as those of earlier days. It had seen them come and go, year after year, in the more than half century that it had kept guard in the brick steeple, missing their brightness at one time, cheered by their brightness as speedily again, for winter and summer slip by with wings. It was not jealous of their music, nor of the flutings of birds in neighboring trees and hedges, nor of those other sounds—that came with the years, breaking the noon-day stillness—the shouts and cries of the boys swarming out of the Free Dutch school on the opposite side of the way. Often, too, the jingling note of the pie-man, or the voice of the vender calling: "hot, spiced gingerbread, smoking hot!" increased the jubilation of the darting throng.

But on Sundays the old, brooding calm returned, and between the throbs of the bidding-bell one could hear the solemn tread of the church-goers, fewer in number than formerly, for Death had called to many,

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and others had been lured away by that voice from Amsterdam with its silver cry. Only a comparative few remained to worship in the old place, yet undaunted by this change the bell chimed forth its invitation as cheerily as ever: "Come to pray—to pray—to pray."

Jan Praa, full of years though he was, could make the syllables fairly sing themselves into the ears of the godly, and the ungodly alike. It was only when Evert Fels, strong in the dignity of his office, gripped the rope that the melody changed and, dirge-like and solemn, the words "gone away—away—away" answered to the touch of his resolute hand. Then the bell of the Garden Street church revealed the whole gamut of human suffering—despair, bitterness, loss,—and what seemed farthest from its blithe nature was but part of it after all, as the lightest of characters holds at bottom those deeper feelings which only leap to the surface under the stroke of sorrow.

On this May morning Jan Praa listened to the mournful strains with sentiments which, since all flesh is grass, he was mindful ought to be composed chiefly of resignation, tintured by a mild regret at the decease of a brother, but which were so dominated by discontent as to convict him of the charge of envy. At all other times he was proud of his many-officed position and would not have exchanged it with any man. The coming of Evert Fels within his line of vision, however, dispelled his satisfaction with more rapidity than the snow in the spring-time vanished from Flattenbarrack hill. Of what use was it to be *voorlezer* (that position he had assumed on the death

The Garden Street Church

of the former incumbent some few years back and which represented the height of his ambition), sexton, and bell-ringer, as the exigency of the occasion demanded, when he was not an *aanspreecker*? It had never been his lot to go from house to house with the news of some person's death and invite the attendance of friends and relatives at the funeral. That duty belonged to another! There was no one in town to dispute his supremacy and the additional fact that, only a few days before, the *Weekly Post-Boy* had contained an announcement that Evert Fels—the New York inviter—(Jan felt his neckcloth bind him at the remembrance of the phrase) had changed his residence and could be found next to King's stores, proved that he was willing to serve the English, or those of mixed ancestry, who should leave directions that their funerals be conducted in the old Dutch fashion. And rumor had it that he was growing rich in the monopoly!

Jan glowered wrathfully before him. That cunning hand might toll the bells farther up town and the sombre-apparelled messenger of death might strut through streets and lanes with a queue of wondering children awed into silence at his heels; he might pause at happy homes along the way and by his presence hint at the mortality of all humanity, but Jan Praa, busy over his own tasks, could be oblivious to the triumphal progress. This intrusion of his own premises, however, was wholly different. To have the *aanspreecker* boldly invade the precincts of the church of St. Nicholas, demand its key and turn its rightful sexton and bellringer without, was gall and wormwood to the listening man

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whose curiosity and bitterness kept him chained to the spot.

"I might crawl in through the basement," he muttered desperately, "and I will too—steady, Jan, steady boy!—there's no knowing when he'll stop, and if he should find you peeking he'd have to begin tolling the bell again in no time—he's twice your size! Patience, lad, patience! That would be eighteen shillings in his pockets, you know."

He sighed dismally; the idea of increasing Evert Fels's already considerable store by his demise was so obnoxious as to make him wish on the moment that he belonged to the race of Struldbrugs. "Sacrament," he growled, "I won't die until after he's gone. He sha'n't fatten off my bones."

He seated himself upon the church steps and rocked backward and forward in the sunlight. The street was very still, save for that strident voice in mid-air, but he could see the occupants of the houses across the way peering from doors and windows and he knew that they were wondering, even as he was, and trying to spell out the meaning of the dolorous sounds.

That the deceased belonged to the Garden Street church the voice of its bell testified, but who he was, or of what status in the congregation, the perturbed sexton could not tell. He made a hasty mental review of the parishioners. There was old Mynheer de Hooge, who had not set foot within the church since the new year—such a punctilious, God-fearing man as he was too!—everyone knew he was failing fast, still the creaking door is apt to hang the longest and it might not be he. Then there was Mevrouw Van Giesen—

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she had absented herself from the Lord's house for a month or more, and illness might have been the true cause, though it was whispered about that she was tired of Dutch ways and had been seen at Trinity amid the fashionable folk there—children of Beelzebub!—as gayly attired as the best of them, and Johannes Van Giesen under ground scarce a twelvemonth. The old man's face darkened wrathfully, though it brightened the next moment as a new thought appealed to him. The deceased might be little Petrus Bickers—that young limb of Satan whose early translation would be but the removal of a brand ostensibly marked for the burning. And besides, here Jan rubbed his hands in great glee, it would mean only eight shillings in Evert Fels's pocket.

The bell tolled slowly, lingering on the eleventh stroke as though about to cease then, to one listener's dismay, it caught up the rhythm with the twelfth boom and rolled forth again—a new agony in its note. It was not little Petrus after all, he was spared to be the torment of the sexton of St. Nicholas's, while incidentally the aanspreecker's fees would be larger. There was just the chance, however, that they might stop short of eighteen shillings and considerably appeased by this prospect Jan counted the measured strokes hoping that each would be the last, but still they went on—nineteen—twenty— Again there came that momentary hesitation then, resistless as fate and grim as the fact it chronicled, the bell climbed up the numbers. What did less or more signify now? Evert Fels had gained his full wage—the fullest the law allowed—but there was no diminution of zeal on his part. He swept the rope with

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his mighty hands without haste, without rest, and all Garden Street throbbed with the sounds that reached through to the Broadway and mingled with the gay strains of the band there, where the soldiers were on parade.

Presently the voice of the bell ceased, ending with a note, part shriek, part sob, like the wail of some lost soul and for a long minute the air quivered with the vibration, then gradually the stillness of the street settled down again—the same but with a difference—for the sonorous tongue had awakened a new train of thoughts in the breasts of all who had listened to its tidings. Jan Praa hardly noted its cessation as he sat nursing his impotent wrath; the age of the departed might be a thousand as far as he was concerned, he had lost all count. Suddenly the door back of him was opened violently and the aanspreecker stepped proudly forth and began to descend the steps. The rusty crape streamer which adorned his hat flapped tantalizingly in Jan's face and the long black cloak whipped against his body; he caught the edge of it between his fingers.

“Who?” he managed to articulate.

The inviter drew his garment away and folded it closer about him. He was a tall, gaunt man whose height was increased by the straight lines of his dress and his large conical hat; he seemed to tower far above the squat figure of the sexton. He wore a full wig of coarse black hair which was left untied and fell, with every motion of his head, in heavy strands across his face and through which his little dark eyes peered as from a screen, with something sinister in their gleam.

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Save for the flabby pallor of his countenance he was like a figure carved out of ebony.

“I’ve some good Brazile here,” Jan said irrelevantly.

For the briefest moment the heavy face lost its lugubrious expression, then the set mask resumed its imperturbability again. But the watchful sexton was as quick to note the change as he was to see the half extended hand, hidden though it was in the folds of the aanspreecker’s cloak. He drew a small box from the pocket of his leather apron and shook some of its contents into the huge palm.

Evert Fels moved a step or two away on the narrow walk, halted there and lifted his staff, waving it solemnly several times in front of Jan’s fascinated eyes. After a short interval he began to speak in Dutch, the language he always used to his compatriots, uttering a medley of phrases which he had woven into a formula of his own, in a gruff, sing-song key.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people saith your God. ’Tis a day when the grasshopper is a burden, when his hops are leaden with sorrow. Man cometh up like a flower and goeth down like the same, and the place that knew him once shall know him from this time henceforth and forever no more—no more— Alack! alas! that what our brother hath garnered must be strewn by another’s hand, but we brought nothing into this world and certain it is we can carry nothing with us when we go——”

“Then it is Mynheer de Hooge,” Jan interrupted in great excitement.

The aanspreecker glowered wrathfully at the speaker and without another word turned his back and strode

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off down the street. After a moment the sexton, his curiosity getting the better of his discomfiture, hastened after him, running a little to keep up with his gigantic strides. The black clad figure paused at the first house like some ugly shadow and Jan, in his turn, came to a sudden halt. Then the great staff smote the door which flew wide on the instant, as if the summons were some ghastly open sesame, and disclosed a group of trembling women and children huddled together in the hall-way. There was no danger of interruption from any of their number and, well assured of this fact, Fels threw back his head pompously and began to declaim his formula in his usual sonorous fashion. As he finished he let his voice sink to a grewsome whisper which seemed to penetrate to the farthest corner of the house and did not escape the listener without.

“Gathered to his fathers is Johannes de Hooge, sleeping in the Lord, *atat* eighty. Life is short, friends, man that is born of woman has but a little day.”

There was a momentary pause, then, in quick staccato tones smacking solely of business, the inviter advised his hearers of the day and hour of the funeral and requested their honorable presence at the late home of the departed. The message delivered, he stalked out into the street again, stopping with the same tidings at each house named in the list which fluttered from his girdle. The air resounded with the noise of those heavy knockings, and the tap-tap of his staff along the walk made a constant comment on his progress.

So he passed at last from the neighborhood to the thoroughfare beyond, and Jan, smarting with the sense

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of his rival's supremacy, followed him in fancy, realizing with the bitterest pang of all that not even Mynheer de Hooge, brought suddenly into prominence by his decease, was of so much importance as he who chronicled the way to dusty death.

III

IN ANNETJE'S GARDEN

The neighbors spoke of it as Domine Ryerssen's garden, whereas in reality it belonged to Annetje his daughter. The birds, and bees, and nodding flowers that made it their home were wiser, for they knew and acknowledged her to be mistress. At first she crowed and blinked at the budding beauties from the vantage ground of Heilke's arms, grasping exultantly at the riches within reach; then, grown a little older, she trotted untiringly after Jan, watching him at work and imitating him in her turn. Here, or there, in some remote sunshiny corner, or even in the midst of the brown paths, she made her posy beds; bits of grass waved their tiny blades in air like so many swords of combatant fairies, short-stemmed flowers, plucked when no one was looking, were planted close to the heart of the great mother and with them all a child's dearest hopes. They never answered to her coaxing, nor rewarded her expectancy; sometimes she would find the bright, pretty things crushed and dirt bedraggled and in the near-by loam the print of an immense foot to mark the passing of the destroyer, or they drooped beneath the pitiless sun or rain; disappointed, she would bedew them with tears and cast them forth in wrath, only to begin her planting the next day with undiminished ardor. Over

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and over the little tragi-comedy was enacted through the spring, and summer and she, knowing no better, suffered the same heart-aches and—miracle of childhood! kept her faith entire.

The years brought wisdom. A little later she swaggered through the garden with a tiny rake of Jan's fashioning slanted over her shoulder and, hanging from her arm, an infinitesimal basket which held small paper cornucopias, grimy and broken from much handling, containing seeds. These latter she filtered through her chubby fingers into a certain heart-shaped bed marked by a low border of box. Oh those days of planting and the mysteries of investigation that followed! Nature must be watched and heartened at her task. The seeds were lonely, or afraid, or cold, or warm, or lazy—and away down there in the earth how could they hear wind and sun calling to them? Excuses multiplied with every passing hour to account for the tireless, exploring fingers. Now and again some wary little seed eluded capture and presently thrust up a curious head to see what the world was like, but the wonder of its coming was so unexpected that it had to be borne off in instant triumph. That summer the heart-shaped bed was a reproachful blot upon the fairness of the surrounding garden—another year it was a little greener and more blessed, and a third it presented a brave front even to Jan's critical eyes and was its own best excuse for being.

Thereafter Annetje became first a disciple of the old man's, then for a time his equal, and then suddenly one day she reached her sovereignty at a bound. It was she who gave directions, she who, when the April

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mornings came, sallied forth to her labors in her trimly pinned-up gown and great calash, with her rake and her little painted basket of seeds, seeking advice from no one. Jan let his authority go without a murmur, recognizing that after the garden was dug in the spring he had no right there save as he was bidden to assist in the weeding, or at other tasks under the girl's orders. The care of plants was regarded as distinctively the woman's province in the Dutch community and Annetje had only come to her own a little earlier than most of her sex.

It was an old garden before the girl became its mistress, one that sprang into being just as the seventeenth century was passing away, when the pastor of the Garden street church set up his household-gods in its midst, and to his wife had fallen the charge of transforming this portion of land in the new world into some semblance of the garden she had loved over-seas. If she and Mother Drisius had continual disputes about their respective territories, the flowers were none the less sweet because of the grudging thoughts they awakened; nor were the herbs less efficacious in the domestic pharmacœia and cuisine. The rivalries came to an end soon enough and only the gardens remained. That of the dominie's wife under the rule of her successor showed a more lavish display of blooming things and a richer array of color. Rivers of tulips and hyacinths streamed along the paths flaunting defiant faces above the barriers of box that kept them in bounds, and in their proper season there were "*paus bloemens* of all hues, laylocks and tall May roses and snowballs, intermixed with choice vegetables and herbs." Then her

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little day reached its close and house and land passed into other hands.

Their new owner was a man who made but few demands on life. If the house had been a hovel, so long as it sheltered him and his beloved books from the stress of the elements he asked nothing more. The stiffly laid out, but beautiful, beds of luxuriant bloom that crept up to his door were barely regarded by him, save when they offered a fitting, though general, figure for his sermons; the names of the different blossoms conveyed no meaning to him.

From the first coming of Domine Ryerssen Jan, who had already served several years at the Garden Street church as sexton and bellringer, added the duties of the minister's garden to his other cares, gladly taking up his abode in the parsonage at the domine's suggestion and identifying himself thenceforth with its interests. He was a passionate horticulturist and resented that the place should go to waste, as would have been the case but for his intervention. The domine had no knowledge of flowers, while Heilke, his housekeeper, was satisfied with the herbs from which she compounded many wholesome and bitter curatives. It was enough for her that her beloved tufts of *Donderbloem* were planted near the house as "a defensative against thunder," and incidentally to furnish her with its leaves which she used for many purposes, boiling them in milk for a pleasant drink to be given in time of fever, mixing their juices with honey for a sure cure-all for sore throats, or simmering them with cream for an emollient application for erysipelas. There was, indeed, no herb in the length and breadth of the garden (and there were

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many) which held so high a place in her esteem, but the flowers in which Jan took so much pride won no praise from her. They were only useful—this grudgingly—in proportion as they yielded their sweets to those domestic marauders the bees, for crowning glory in Heilke's sight were the benches full of bee-skepes and wooden hives set a-row under the quince-trees and the well-filled dove-cote near-by that cast its long shadow almost to their feet. The soft flutter of wings and the stir of busy life were music to her, whereas color and fragrance held no meaning in their message.

There was therefore no one to wrest Jan's sceptre from him for years. Then the domine's wife came, a soft girlish presence, who wandered up and down the paths, pausing to bend over the flowers—a flower herself. Never had Jan's supremacy been securer than in those days when he dreaded to see it snatched from him with every passing moment, but she made no demand during the short three years of her stay. The locust-trees were in flower when she came, their graceful hanging racemes of pink-touched blossoms filling the air with their sensuous perfume; he reached up at her asking and plucked a branch for her and she held it lightly against her cheek as she walked. They were in blossom again when she went away, like some faintly glowing torches to light her going. She left no imprint of ownership on the garden that bore so strongly the tastes of those other owners; as she had found it so she relinquished it, resigning the authority she had neglected to a baby's little hands.

It could never be said of Annetje that she had failed

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in the work entrusted to her. Too distinctly Dutch to make any great alterations in the stiffly laid out beds, as she grew older there yet crept in certain indisputable innovations. Flowers that Jan had seen in the gardens of the English in Queen and Broad Streets suddenly thrust their faces up at him in friendly recognition. How they had found their way thither was the girl's secret; it was only asked of the old man to bid them welcome and note their beauty, which he did ungrudgingly, because the good God had made them after all and not the English who were anathema in Jan's eyes. That the good God had also made the Briton was something which he was not so ready to admit; the inroads their speech was making in the Dutch community seemed to him the work of the Evil one.

The large English immigration and the government of the colony, as well as the constant requirements and influences of commerce and the frequent intermarriages of the English and Dutch, had robbed the language of the latter of its predominance by the middle of the eighteenth century. Despoiled in great measure of its power, though it was, it still held its ground with the pertinacity which has been one of the dominant characteristics of its people. In the more conservative households and in those where the inmates were of pure Dutch origin no other speech was employed, as was also the case in the Dutch Reformed church; there the services were conducted entirely in the beloved tongue, there was given "the gospel undefiled in Holland Dutch," and there also were chanted the hymns of the Fatherland. Though English was recognized, at this period, as the current language of the province it was

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not yet taught in the Dutch schools, nor had it entirely superseded the speech of the earlier settlers of New York at the wharf or in the counting-house.

Jan understood the language perfectly and could speak it when necessity required, but it enraged him to hear what he deemed Annetje's fluency in the tongue he contemned. Dutch had always been good enough for him and for the children of his generation! If he had any fear, however, that the girl, whom he had watched over like a second father since her babyhood, would be taken for one of the hated nationality a single glance at her ought to have convinced him otherwise.

He found her the day after Mynheer de Hooge's funeral at work in the garden. She was singing to herself, but at his approach she broke off in her song and stood erect, clasping her hands behind her neck and drawing a long, deep breath. The face she turned toward him, with the little smile of welcome dancing in her sea-colored eyes, was one of exquisite loveliness. It was still a child's face, sweet and wistful, and holding the promise of greater beauty when the bud should become the flower. She wore a dress of some gray homespun material with a tight-fitting bodice, the skirt opening in front and looped high at the back to show her quilted petticoat of dark blue camblet; her clocked stockings were of a lighter blue and her high-heeled shoes were adorned with little gleaming buckles. Her calash lay disregarded upon the ground, her head uncovered save for a small white cap which did not hide the glinting sheen of her hair which was rolled back from her brow escaping, here and there, in little

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curling tendrils put aside occasionally by an ineffectual hand. Jan, who could no more describe her appearance than he could voyage to the moon, was yet conscious that this was no English maid, nor one aping English ways.

"You have so many flowers like these," he said, emboldened to comment by her smiling aspect.

She looked at him for a moment and then down at the little purple and yellow faces at her feet; she had been working at the heart-shaped bed which was her favorite spot in her whole domain. Beyond her some cherry and pear trees lifted their snowy arms high against the blue, the grass beneath them white with fallen petals; beyond them again, a peach-tree blushed at its own loveliness in the sun and farther away still, the quince orchard—all misty pink and waxy green—flung its perfume like a message upon the air.

"Like what, Jan?"

"T'ese 'noan zo praetty,'" he returned slowly in English, then he added hastily in his own language. "I never meant it."

"V'at, my 'laties' telights'—my little telights—you ton't like t'em?"

"You taught me to say 'noan zo praetty——'"

"Oh! t'at vas yestertay, foolish man. To-tay t'ey are laties' telights, ant to-morrow vill t'ey pe 'yump up ant kiss me,' and t'e next tay 't'ree faces unter a hoot,' ant after t'at 'Herp Trinity' or 'Cuttle unto you,' or——"

"What! all those names for just the one poor flower?"

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She fell in with his humor to speak their common tongue.

“ ’Tis not a poor flower, there is none other so welcome in the spring; ’tis like a little child’s face ever laughing. None of its names, many as they are, will do for me. I shall call it Heart’s own, which is prettier, I think, than ‘Heart’s-ease,’ as they say the English term it.”

“ One plain, sensible name ought to be enough for any flower. We wouldn’t trust a man that was known here by one name and there by another—men would say evil of him.”

“ Look at me, Jan. Who am I? Father calls me Annetje and sometimes Little one, and Heilke says White lamb, that’s when things go well with her, or Child, or Torment—’tis but a toss-up then, before she loses her temper. I don’t fear her though, until she draws the corners of her mouth so, and snaps out Missy, then I know it’s high time to be off. You call me Missy, but I never want to run away from you, do I? Have I too many names? I should like to borrow me one from this flower—it would never miss it.”

“ Noan zo praetty,” he spoke again in English, his old face breaking into a whimsical smile.

“ Flatterer, not that, the one of my own devising.”

His expression changed and she, watching him, had the grace to blush a little.

“ It has a nice sound.” Her voice was a challenge.

“ The home ones are better in my ears.”

“ There you go, Jan—you, and my father, and Heilke would have me always mewed up here, making no excuse for a young maid’s light-heartedness.”

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"Yes, yes, the old forget. Well, these hands will be ringing the joy-bells yonder before long, I doubt not."

"Oh! as to that—I don't really like Adrian de Hooge, Jan, in the way you mean—you'll never ring those bells for me. It was all so terrible yesterday after the funeral. I could see the women watching me as they ate the burial cakes and sipped their sangaree, and I well knew what they were whispering about. And when Mevrouw de Hooge kissed me good-by before them all it made me shiver, she seems so strong and as if she would have her way in all things, no matter how much you sought to oppose it."

"Ay, they do say she wore the breeches and that the gray mare was the best horse—but I don't hold with such gossip."

"Adrian is like her. When I'm with him I can only think of a great boulder—you might batter yourself to death against it, but you could never move it once it obstructed your path."

"He's a nice lad and has a great sufficiency of this world's goods, now that he has stepped into his father's shoes, and he loves you, little Missy."

"Ye-es, because I flouted him when I was a child and because I am pretty—you said so yourself, Jan—and because I don't care overmuch for him; reasons enough to make a man like Adrian de Hooge wish to win a maid and bend her will to his. Sometimes I almost think I could love him and then I remember that day—oh! years ago—when he beat his dog till his arm fell useless, I can see the evil look on his face still—and I grow afraid."

"He's a high-tempered man, a better friend than a

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foe any time, but there is much good in him and he's a power in the church—the people look to his family as they would," Jan stopped and glanced cautiously around, "to the Lord almost. That's what it is to be of the salt of the earth and have lands and moneys. He'd be a bad enemy, remember that Missy! If the domine saw an inch farther than his nose he'd tell you that it's well, sometimes, to make friends unto yourself of Mammon, he would indeed. And besides, Mynheer de Hooge is a true Dutchman and has a proper veneration for the old ways——"

"I know that," Annetje breathed with a sound, half sigh, half laugh.

"We've fallen on evil times, Missy, there is backsliding among us and even a whisper," the old man's voice trembled, "a whisper that is growing steadily that English shall be spoken in our churches. Oh! if that day should come and Jan Praa is in this sinful world, may his right arm wither and fall powerless ere ever it rings the bidding-bell, may these eyes lose their sight before they behold a minister of the Holy Word so forget the dignity of his calling, may these ears be deaf to a voice that would praise the Lord in the accents of those accursed people——"

"There, there, Jan!"

"I tell you Adrian de Hooge is a stanch Dutchman and your father is sure to stay in the church while he has his friendship and the friendship of his followers."

"My father's office does not depend upon the favor of Mynheer de Hooge, or on that of his hangers-on, as you know well, Jan Praa, and there's not the least

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danger of his adopting the English speech, even if the whole congregation demanded it of him. He might preach in Latin, or French, but he has no skill in English," she paused suddenly, her face dimpling and perplexed at the same time. "I wish I knew something about the Englishman," she continued half to herself.

"What Englishman?"

"Why, the one who was here, Tuesday, haven't you heard? Heilke and I had seen a stranger in the candle the night before, and when there sounded a great knock, rat-tat-ta! on the front door we fell a-trembling. And Heilke, who was busy making wonders, bade me answer the summons. So I went and opened the upper half of the door quite softly to see who it was, knowing full well that none but a stranger would come to that entrance, and there stood an English officer as I saw by his dress. He was humming a song beneath his breath and tapping the step with the little cane he carried. He didn't heed me at first, and indeed I was like a mouse, so I was forced to cough. At that he looked up and a little gleam like a star came into his eyes. 'Is Domine Ryerssen within?' he asked slowly. 'Yes sir,' I answered in English, whereat his face brightened, 'he is even now in his study.' 'Tis good news you give me, pretty one,' he laughed, 'and in pleasing fashion, I had not thought to have my tongue spoke here, and so well spoke too—' Those were his very words, Jan! He took off his hat then, and made me a low bow, such as the officers make the ladies in the Mall, and he did not replace it after that, but kept it against his breast looking at me.

"'Will you conduct me to the domine?' he said at

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last, 'or stay, first bear this message to him: "One, Captain Bellenden, a stranger with tidings from a distant land, waits without." Let me hear you say it, child.' I said the words after him two or three times, as was his pleasure, to make sure I would not forget, then he let me go and I hastened to my father and he—just as if the stranger was some every-day visitor—bade me show him in. When I had done that I dared not linger, but as soon as the door was closed I crept back and I heard the Englishman say with all the merriment gone from his voice 'Domine Ryerssen, I bring you a message from the dead——' "

"Na—na—impossible!—and then?"

"I came away. It was too dreadful! Only that morning Evert Fels had been here with his news, and in the afternoon to have this stranger come—It seemed as if death had thrown his shadow in through our very doors. Heilke says it's a bad omen——"

"Heilke doesn't know everything in the world, though she may think so. Has the domine told you aught?"

"Jan," cried the girl sharply, "when does he ever tell me aught? Food, clothing, shelter, he gives me, and sometimes a word, but the book he reads is more to him than I am."

"The old forget the ways of youth."

"Did he ever know them? Was he ever young? You have told me that he was old when my mother was here and she was a girl like me; dead though she is, she is nearer and dearer to me than he can ever be. I wonder much how she could have become his wife."

Jan kicked a stone from the path.

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“The ways of women, who shall discover them?” he asked sententiously, then he raised his head, and went on solemnly. “Missy, you are the child of your father's old age, he loves you, take my word for that! but he hasn't the trick of petting and love-names. We're not the people to show our deepest feelings.”

Annetje laughed and, stooping, gathered a few of the little flowers at her feet and thrust them in her bodice.

“I wonder if the Englishman will ever come again,” she said irrelevantly.

IV

THE DOMINE'S STORY

“Domine Ryerssen, I bring you a message from the dead.”

“Vill you t'e gootness haf to unfolt t'e name of t'e senter tireckly? Ant speak slow, I peseech you, I com-prehent your language, put not much felicity haf I in speaking it. I haf your parton?”

The minister spoke slowly enough himself; his voice was deep and curiously balanced with a marked stress in the intonation which seemed to weigh his words, as if they were golden coins, yet it did not carry far. There were those in the Garden Street church who hinted at a general breaking-up in their pastor and this, they said, was one of the encroachments of age.

He was a little, bent-shouldered man, so frail in appearance that for years it had seemed as if he and the grim shadow were walking hand in hand, and yet his grasp on life was so tenacious that none of the ills of the flesh had plagued his long tenureship. His dress was entirely black, a trifle rusty from wear and rigorously plain, and his powdered wig, of an ancient cut, was so large that the face beneath it appeared at first sight as small as a child's, but it lacked the contour and smoothness of youth as a second glance discovered. Age and study had traced a network of lines across the drawn yellowish skin, like the fine writing

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upon parchment, and the imprint of the graver Sorrow was also there. It was a plain, rugged face, unusually broad in the brows with deep-set eyes, gray as steel—but without the brilliancy of that metal—quiet, steady eyes which seemed to hide more than they revealed, a Roman nose, and a mouth and chin expressive of a strong, dominant will. There was much sternness in his aspect, but it also held a touch of benignity, as a frowning crag will bear a trace of summer to crown it with its freshness and be no anachronism in the ways of nature.

The room, into which Captain Bellenden had been ushered, was a long, rather narrow, apartment lighted by a single window which commanded a view of part of Annetje's garden. The walls were dull of hue and destitute of adornment, the only touch of color being in the tiled facing of mantel and hearth, where coarsely executed drawings of scriptural scenes were represented in lifeless blue, the figures discreetly attired in Dutch costumes; there Daniel, clad as a respectable burgher, dominated the lions as complacently as though they were cows, which they closely resembled, and Miriam, in her bodice and short skirt, clashed her timbrels before the Lord. There was no *valletje*—that chimney-cloth valance so marked an adjunct of all Dutch houses—and the narrow shelf above was bare, save for a pair of pewter candle-sticks and the snuffer and tray at one end; nor were there any curtains at the window.

The whole place was almost puritanical in its simplicity; a few straight-backed, rush-leather chairs and an oak table, black with age, made up the furniture, with

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the addition of the tall cherry secretary which stood between the mantel and the window in just the position where the westering sun could gleam the longest upon the brass handles of the glass-panelled doors of the upper portion, as if they were the golden keys to a mine of riches; and such, indeed, they seemed to the domine for they guarded his precious books.

The small library consisted almost entirely of works on religious topics, principally in Dutch. Cats, Brakel, Sauren's Catechism, Van Thuynen's little volume on the "Faith of the Reformed," Bekker's "World Bewitched," "The Imitation of Christ," and translations of Newton's *Cardiphonia* and of Doddridge's works, together with some theological treatises in stately Latin with, here and there, an earnest French polemic and numerous Calvinistic tracts. On the top shelf, as representing an almost forgotten period in their owner's career, the comedies of Brederôo elbowed the tragedies of his great rival Vondel and there were, besides, some dark, slender little books containing the poems of the Engraver-poet Jan Luiken and the songs of Storter—bold and simple these latter in a breath, bold as the times in which they were written and simple as the hearts of the sturdy folk. Nor was the Dutch Colony in the New World unrepresented; its poets Steendam, Nicasius de Sille, and that gentle Latinist and accomplished scholar Domine Selyns, an early minister of the church of St. Nicholas, found a place with the writers of the Fatherland.

The domine moved a trifle impatiently and looked at the dandified figure of the officer with something like intolerance in his glance. The stranger was taking a

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supercilious survey of his surroundings but, as if conscious of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, he turned his eyes upon his host. For a long minute the two men gazed at each other unwaveringly, as if matching their relative strength, then the elder broke the silence.

"I vait your pleasure, Captain Pellenten," he said coldly. He had an odd trick of protruding his upper lip when he spoke, and his face at that moment was not prepossessing. "You haf a message—" his eyes sought the open book before him, as though to say his time was precious.

The captain uncrossed his long legs and straightened himself with the air of a man who has suddenly determined upon action. As a rule he was careless of giving pleasure and indifferent to giving pain; it was a mere question of moods at any time with him, though more often than not he affected, as did many of the men of fashion at that period, an icily impertinent mode of speech, especially to those whom he regarded as his social inferiors. It was not an age of reverence, or of consideration even. On this occasion, however, it suited him to be almost deferential to his companion.

"'Tis no light task this trust of mine," he returned courteously, "and I ask your patience. Faith, I know not where to begin."

"Name me first t'e name of him t'at sent t'e message. If t'ere pe a tale, t'en you haf your puppets reaty to hant."

"Gad, 'twas no man but a woman."

"A voman!—ant to me? So, how is she calledt?"

"Katrina de Vos."

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"Katrina—some mistake is t'ere—Katrina—say it once again, I—I—ton't hear fery vell."

The young man, his eyes averted, repeated the name slowly, then he rose suddenly and walked to the window, pausing there to look out at the burgeoning garden, but he only saw an old face distorted with grief. After a few moments the domine spoke.

"Vill you continue, sir?"

Bellenden went back to his chair, manifestly ill at ease, the sight of the other's composure did not restore his own; he sat regarding his feet for some time in silence, then, without any preamble, he plunged into his story.

"I had not a long acquaintance with the lady, for lady she was first and last, I could see that though her clothes were mean, and we, of my world, oftenest judge a jewel by its setting. Some two years back I went with my regiment to Barbadoes (I have but recently come thence), and there, shortly after my arrival, I fell a victim to fever and would have died but for her kind offices. She came to me out of charity, hearing of my illness—a wraith of a woman with a slow, sweet smile to charm you, and a low voice to sing as a mother sings lullabies to a tired child, and long, slim hands, that by a touch, seemed to banish the pain that racked your bones and the fever that burned you with the fires of hell. 'Twas said of her that she had nursed many in their need since her coming to the island. I thought she belonged to some religious order, that she was a *Béguine*, for I knew by her speech she was of your country, but when I asked her she said no—she was not fit."

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The domine settled himself back in his chair, but he made neither protest, nor comment.

“ I did not think her that sort, still one can never tell, a sinner may look like a saint ; 'tis only a trick to learn. But this woman was different—there was no passion—nothing. She was a saint. I'd have staked my life on that. I would not believe her testimony against herself and I think she liked me the better because of my faith in her. A strange affection sprang up betwixt us during the slow weeks of my recovery ; she was like a mother to me and I was like a child, unreasonable, gay, petulant, tyrannical and tractable by turns. I made her free enough of my past, i' faith, but hers was ever a sealed book to me, and when once I was able to resume my duties she slipped out of my life and I did not see her for months ; then, one day, a messenger brought me word that she had need of me. I found her in a little, bare room alone, and near to death, and what I could do for her in the hour she let me stay, I did. I had always thought of her as of my mother's age—she looked so old and worn, though she had the figure of a girl, but she told me then that she was still in the thirties—we might even have been playfellows in our childhood. But she was old—she had been old for years—she had lived by heart-beats, not by the passing hour. She told me her story slowly, and painfully, and she said no word in self-justification.

“ Sir, you know that story of the broken home, the wronged husband, the deserted child and the young wife's flight with her lover. There is no need for me to repeat it to you. But what you do not know is this : That that woman's life was one long penitence, that—

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deserted in her turn by the man for whom she had relinquished everything, thrown aside like a broken toy—she suffered grief and penury and yet the remembrance of the little child she had left kept her from further sin and made her the angel of mercy and tenderness I knew. She had gone to Barbadoes with her lover and there she remained after he forsook her, stumbling back into life somehow. Another woman would have made way with herself, once all the glamour was gone. Not she. Was any little child ill? She bent above it and soothed its cries with her singing, cradling it in the arms that were bereft of her own flesh and blood. No distance was too great for her to go to help some little, ailing one and she never tired of the service. Gradually she became nurse to whoever fell ill—to the soldiers especially; she was unwearied in her ministrations, and so Death found her.

“She bade me give you no excuses, save only this. She had loved her betrayer and her love was stronger than her feelings of duty and honor. It took them both in its hands and made light of them. It was too strong for her, but she paid to the full for every moment of happiness; it turned to dead sea fruit and ashes in her grasp. With her dying breath she begged me seek you out as soon as ever I came to the Colonies and tell you of her repentance. She did not ask for your forgiveness, knowing she had wronged you too deeply, but she gave me these pearls that had once been her mother's and from which she had never parted, not even when Want knocked loudest at her door, because she felt that she held them in trust for her child. She bade me bring them to you to give to her one day with

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some word of the mother who had failed her. 'Something tells me,' says she, 'that my child is not dead, she is almost grown now, and a woman's heart understands another woman's; she will think more tolerantly of me perhaps, she will pity and forgive me. For the sake of the love she might have given me had I stayed with her, ask Domine Ryerssen to place this gift in her hands.' That was all. She kissed the pearls and watched me with a smile as I put them away in my breast, then she signed to me to go. And I, not thinking the end so near, but seeing how wan she looked, obeyed her. She died that night."

Bellenden rose a trifle awkwardly and walked over to the table. He had taken a little, flat leather case from some inner pocket while he was speaking and now he placed it within reach of his host.

"So I fulfil my trust, Domine Ryerssen," he said slowly. "Will you do your part?"

The old man's hands flew up suddenly to his face, hiding it from the other's gaze.

"I can't," he cried tremulously, "I can't."

The younger man waited a moment, tapping his leg impatiently with his cane and studying the drooping figure before him.

"Sir, you must, there is no alternative; you cannot refuse the dead and the woman, whatever her sins were, repented long ago. This is a responsibility you may not shirk. If you will not do this thing, if your theology has so steeped you in bitterness that you are deaf to the voice of true repentance, if you will nurse a rancor as narrow as your creed, then tell me where the girl is to be found and by heaven! I will give her

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the pearls myself, if I have to go to the Indies to do it."

"Is it possible t'at you ton't know it is Annetje? Put efen now t'e toor to you she openedt. I cannot haf her tolt, I forpitt it—it shall not pe."

"It shall."

Again the men gazed at each other in an interval of silence, matching each other's strength unwaveringly; then the dark eyes fell before the dim, gray ones.

"It is in your power. Put listen. She ton't know, she t'ink her *moeder*"—the husky voice trembled with indescribable softness over the word—"is tie, oh! so long time ago—so many years. I vill not haf her tolt. I vill not say to her myself 'your *moeder*, she is unvort'y—' I vill not haf her soul t'at is like some pure v'ite flower, whose name I ton't know, contaminatet vis sin. I push sin from her vis my two hants. She is so tear to me, put she ton't know t'at eit'er—I can't tell her, only I feel it here." He stopped a minute, pressing his hand to his heart.

"Psha, she must know about her mother, man. Here in your study you have not heard the gossip, the world is not so kind as you think," the captain broke off with an uneasy laugh. "Faith, you do strange things in this country, still I thought scandal was a plant that throve everywhere."

"You are right. Like t'e pay-tree of t'e Scriptures it flourisheth, put my Annetje she ton't know. Yes, I vill tell you—you a stranger—because of t'at one whose vorts you pring. Sit again. So! I am an olt man, sir, ant t'ese many years haf I hat acquaintance vis grief. Ven I vas a poy at school in Fat'erlant t'ere vas

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a poy t'at my heart vent out to, efen as Tafit's heart vent out to Jonathan's, ant I lofedt him ant his heart vas to me pount likewise. Not'ing is efer come petween our frientship; to t'e ent it lasts. So it vas t'at, ven he is apout to tie, he sent me vort vouldt I look after his taughter for his sake? He t'ink it vouldt pe goot ven I marry her—my home is lonely, he know. Vell t'en, nefer hat I t'ought of t'at marrying for me, I hat my pooks ant t'ey vere enough. Put my frient's little girl is alone in t'e vorlt, ant I write her to come to me, I vant to marry her as her fat'er hat sait. So she is come. You know vat t'at lofe is like, sir, perhaps—nefer hat I known it—ant I vas more t'an fifty years of age t'at time. Put it is come vis t'e little mait from ofer t'e sea. My gart'ner say to me one tay, 'Domine, t'ere is one little flower (I haf forgot how he calledt it!) t'at nefer appears till summer is gone ant frost is in t'e lant, t'en it vakes, pringing peauty ant glatness.' My heart, sir, vas like t'at—t'ere vas a late flower, only one."

The domine was silent a moment.

"If she hat tolt me t'e trut'! If she hat sait 'I cannot marry you, alreaty I lofe some ot'er one,' I vouldt haf let t'e little flower tie in my heart ant gone pack to my stuties again. Put she keep t'at from me, she tells me not'ing. So ve are marriedt, ant t'ere is such sunshine in my house ant in t'e vorlt—nefer so much pefore, I t'ink. I am olt ant ugly—I fint t'at out at t'at time—put I lofe her, only I can't speak of it—it is as holy as Kott! I know t'e church peoples smile to see me vis so young a vife, t'ey ton't know how much I care—how s'ouldt t'ey? Vell, perhaps she isn't

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happy—she ton't say much, put she smiles slow ant sweet ant I t'ink she is pleasedt. T'en, v'en two years are gone, t'e *kleintje* comes ant I tremple vis joy. I am afrait to speak—to mofe! Sometimes, I creep to t'e room ant vatch t'e two toget'er t'rough t'e toor, ant nefer is t'e voman so tear as v'en she sits t'ere singing to t'e little one. You likedt her voice? Put I listenedt to it vis my heart, ant t'e angels vill not sing petter.”

He stopped again and glanced about wearily; the man before him sat with lowered eyes and an impassive face that seemed cut out of stone, but he lost no word of the simple story for all his seeming indifference.

“T'en one tay, v'en Annetje is maype a year olt, I come home. It is in t'e spring ant sickness ant sorrow are in t'e lant, only not in my house, t'ank Kott! I go to fint *moeder* ant chilt, and Heilke has t'e *kleintje* in t'e kitchen, t'e *moeder*, she say, is gone out to t'e country to see a sick frient. I go to my stuty t'en to prepare my sermon ant t'ere I fint a letter ant it say—t'e trut'—t'at is all—t'e trut' ! She is going away—she ton't efer lofe me, put always t'at ot'er one she hat known since chilt-hoot in Fat'erlant—he is young, he is gay, he is v'at I am not. She lofes t'e chilt, put she can't stay, he is going to sail t'at tay to a far country ant she vill go vis him. It is all arrangedt.

“Vell, sir, t'is is most t'e ent; it grow tark all at once. I cannot vork. Py ant py Heilke comes ant she say 'v'ere is Mrs. Ryerssen? t'e chilt cry for her *moeder*.' Ant I say all in a flash, t'at Mrs. Ryerssen comes not home t'at night ant maype not t'e next tay—her frient is so fery sick—she haf left me vort. So Heilke goes

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away ant I hear her singing to t'e little one ant it is so tifferent—*mÿn God!*—so tifferent. Put I must pe pusy, vis teath ant sorrow eferyv'ere t'e peoples neet me. T'ey ton't look at me queer, ant I say to myself t'ey ton't know. In t'eir preoccupation t'ey haf not seen anyt'ing not right. T'at young man he is put shortly come to t'is country, a veek—two maype—ant t'ere is t'e fefer here, as I haf sait—t'ey to not heet him. Sir, I am a prout man, I couldt not haf t'em know my home is tisgracedt—I couldt not haf t'em sneer at her t'at is t'e *moeder* of my chilt. Ant all tay, ant all night, I ask myself 'how long pefore t'ey hear—how long?' Ant eferyv'ere I see t'em pointing t'e finger at me ant crying 'Shame!' to her. I vill not haf it—I am t'e one to plame—I shouldt haf quartet her petter. How can t'e veak rise if t'ey t'at lofe t'em, ant are strong, help t'em not?" His voice broke, after a minute he went on.

"I hat failedt her, efen v'en I lofedt her most ant she vas gone, put she hat left her name vis me ant I tell myself t'at, at least, shall pe pure—I ton't know how—only it shall pe pure! T'en all at once it is easy to me, it is easy, ant it is hart at t'e same time. All my life I hat lofedt Trut' ant followedt her, now to t'e pranching of t'e vays I hat come. Ant along one—like a star—Trut' shone, ant along t'e ot'er vas a little glimmer in t'e dusk v'ere Falsehoot crept. Ant it spoke low to my ear, it tolt me how my wife's name is kept v'ite—how my chilt vill haf a peautiful memory of her *moeder*. Vell, I consiter—I consiter. So t'e time goes, ant always to Heilke I make excuse, her mistress cannot come, her mistress is sick ant finally one tay I

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say: 'Mrs. Ryerssen comes nefer any more—she is teadt.' Heilke cries ant cries, put my eyes holt no tears. T'en I tell t'e same to Jan Praa——"

"Who is Jan Praa?"

"He is my *voorlezer*, t'at is he tunes t'e Psalms ant turns t'e hour-klass on t'e pulpit v'en I preach, he is also pell-ringer ant sexton ant it is he t'at has charge of my garten—he is vis me many years. He is a goot man ant tiscretious. 'She is teadt?' he says slow. 'Yes,' I answer, 'she is teadt to us all.' 'She is teadt from t'e plague,' he says again. So he leafes me ant I creep pack here ant close t'e toor. T'en it is t'at my church peoples hear t'e news—not t'e true news you unterstant, put v'at t'ey t'ink is true—ant some say my wife is tie from t'e small-pox, t'ere is so much of it eferyv'ere, ant I ton't contratict t'em. Ant t'ey praise me, v'ich is hart to pear—pecause I stait vis t'em in t'eir sorrow, v'ile my wife vas sick among strangers. T'ey can nefer forget, t'ey say. Oh! it is a goot peoples—my congregation—ant I haf teceifedt t'em, put I couldt to no ot'ervise, I vouldt haf t'em t'ink no harm of her.

"Vell, t'ey peliefedt she vas really teadt ant t'ey haf put up a taplet, now t'ese many years, in t'e church vis her name engrafedt upon it ant t'e vort '*Gedachtenis*'—as you vouldt say, 'in remembrance.' And t'ere, efer since my Annetje is eight years olt, half peen placedt flowers in t'eir season py her hants. Jan ant Heilke haf tolt her of her *moeder* ant she lofes her; to her mindt t'at *moeder* is young always, ant peautiful, ant pure—I cannot unterceife her."

"'Twould not be necessary, the child would think

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you had kept the gift in trust till she had reached a fitting age to receive it."

"Ah!—so—t'at is goot. Young vits are petter t'an olt ones; I vill gif her t'e pearls one tay."

"And, moreover, I tell you the woman died repentant, her later life was that of a saint's for purity."

"Let Him jutge, I cannot—I am only a proken-heartedt man—put t'e chilt neet nefer know. I haf your vort, sir?"

Bellenden rose and approached the table again with outstretched hand.

"The word of a soldier and a gentleman."

"Goot, I haf no fear. Yet to you, as to no one put my Maker, haf I shown my heart, its shames, its te-ceits, its lofes. I haf taken town all parriers, I am tefenceless. One vort from you vouldt proclaim me, ant my life t'at men teem holy, a lifing lie—a v'itedt sepulchre—put I trust you completely." As he finished speaking he left his place and came slowly to the captain's side. Both men clasped hands in silence. It was the solemn ratification of a vow given and taken; then their hands fell apart. The domine stepped back and looked up at his guest.

"T'e roats of our life may nefer cross after t'is tay, unless it vouldt pe your kintness to come here again. Put if t'at is impossible, rememper t'e olt man stants reaty to help you in your neet as she helpedt you. Great pain haf I known t'is tay, put a great comfort also. A secret is a heafy loat to carry, see! already haf you mate my purten lighter. Ve can't any of us meet ant part in t'is life, ant remain just t'e same—ve color unconsciously each ot'er's existence. Ant you

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stant fery near me forefer. I souldt like it much if you wouldt come again."

Bellenden hesitated. He might promise, that was easy enough, and then forget—that surely was easier. There were too many claims on a man's time, if he were a man of fashion, to make it possible for him to spend an hour or so in this room when no sacred duty called him thither. The trust which had held him faithful in the midst of frivolities had been executed and he was free henceforth to do as he pleased. What pleased him most lay in the world without, and not in this dull place where laughter and merriment never came. Yet the spectacle of that other's naked soul stirred him strangely and, in some unaccountable way, made him conscious that the secret he shared was like a chain which bound him, if lightly, still inextricably, to the old minister. The responsibilities which are thrust upon us without the asking are none the less responsibilities. Something in the domine's attitude toward life thrilled him unspeakably. Unmartial in appearance, little, broken-hearted, old and worn the man had waged his battle single-handed, and the younger soldier stood ready to salute the courage of the elder. He would, at least, say he would come again.

And then, because good and evil lie in close juxtaposition in the human breast, there rose suddenly before Jack Bellenden the vision of a half-open Dutch door and set against the dark wood of the upper portion the flowerlike beauty of a girl's face. He glanced down at the old man and smiled. This time he knew his promise would be kept.

"Yes, I will come again."

V

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

There were two ways of entering Annetje's garden. The path from the street that led up to the front door and, there diverging, crept around the house past the kitchen, in whose spotless depths Heilke—grim as Cerebus—kept guard, and so on to the garden where it was lost among the broader walks; and the other, in the far-away corner below the apple orchard, a little grass-grown track which, for reasons best known to himself, Jan had left unweeded for years. He never used it, though often it would have been more convenient for him and would have saved him many a rating from Heilke's sharp tongue as he trudged by her windows to his work. The distant gate gave upon an unfrequented lane, and anyone passing through it could enter, or leave, the garden without the knowledge of the inhabitants of the sleepy, old parsonage embowered among trees and bushes.

It had not taken Captain Bellenden long to perceive this mode of entrance and to determine to enlist it into his service if chance should offer; for a dash of intrigue, to the men of his time, always lent an additional charm to their affairs of gallantry. His second visit to Domine Ryerssen opened drearily enough. He had been admitted by Heilke and shown immediately to the

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study, but along the way there had been no faintest glimpse of a girl's face—the house fairly reeked of age—then the door had closed upon the servant and the interview began.

There was a little stiff, formal talk on either side which the younger man tried to carry off lightly, though he soon discovered that his host was scarcely attending to his impressions of York colony. The colony meant nothing to Cornelis Ryerssen who was in no sense public-spirited, and neither cared for, nor noticed, the improvements that had taken place during his stay in the busy harbor town. The time that was not spent in the pursuit of his parochial duties he lived to himself, keeping aloof from the happenings of the day. He seldom if ever discussed colonial, or political, situations; it mattered little to him whether affairs at the Fort ran smoothly, or otherwise. Governors might come, and governors might go, there might be wars and rumors of wars all about him, but they concerned him not at all. The only thing he desired passionately was the welfare of his church. If he could make up to his people by strenuous, loving service for the faith they had placed in him, he asked nothing else—and nothing better—of life.

With this end in view he toiled early and late, throwing his whole heart into the composition of his tediously dull sermons and giving the best in his power for the spiritual advancement of his little flock. Some of the older members of his congregation, with the marked conservatism of their race, regarded him with a good-natured tolerance that bordered on affection; but the younger ones, who were beginning to feel the slow

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blood quicken in their veins in response to the rising stress of the world without, listened almost impatiently to his exordiums finding him, as Captain Bellenden found him on this occasion, devoid of all interest.

The domine, however much he lacked the grace to show his pleasure at the English officer's coming, was heartily glad to welcome him again, though aside from the friendly grasped hand and the half awkward proffer of his snuff-box he could do nothing to indicate his feelings. Shyness and shame possessed him to a marked degree; the shyness which was a part of his nature and which always hampered his slow speech, and shame at the remembrance that he had drawn away the covering from his wound and had exposed the festering sore at his heart of life to another's view. Yet, at the same time, in the presence of this man whom earlier, in his intolerance, he would have stigmatized as a fop, he felt an overwhelming sense of relief. Here he was known for what he was and the mere fact that the Englishman had come again—and so soon—was in part proof that he did not despise him for the deceit he had practised. He, who had been debarred from the sympathy of man, woman and child for so long, thrilled a little at the thought of what was comprised in Bellenden's attitude toward him. Pity in part—but he did not revolt from pity—and comprehension. He was very grateful inwardly and the captain would have been flattered had he been able to read the thoughts that were passing beneath that quiet exterior, but, such power being denied him, the young man cursed himself for a fool for having walked a second time, and that with wide open eyes, into so stupid a trap.

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The talk dragged wearily, intermittently on, each man conscious of the growing barrier between them. They might have been on mist-enwrapped islands shouting vainly to each other, their voices dropping sadly into the void between, for all the understanding their speech evoked. They, who for a moment had felt the nearness of their souls, as is often the case, had drifted so far asunder as to be beyond any reach. And then, suddenly, to bridge the distance and bring them into touch again, a girl's voice singing clearly came to them from the garden.

The domine paused in his halting sentence, happiness flickering up through the pallor of his face; and again the visitor had a revelation of the other's inmost being. It was like seeing into a shrine whose purity was dazzling. Even his careless nature was stirred as if an unseen hand had swept the strings and had brought forth some antiphonal note. In that moment, if he had followed his better inclination, he would have taken himself out of the little room and away from the simple home forever. Some such thought touched him, but he let it go quickly.

"Your daughter?" he said tentatively.

"My Annetje, my little v'ite tofe! Among her flowers she sings. Some tay, not yet, I gif her v'at you pring."

"I should like to see her garden."

"So! You take an inter-est in flowers? T'at is vell. For myself, I am an ignorant concerning t'em, ant yet ve are tolt to consiter how t'ey grow visout t'ought, or care. It is no easy lesson for man to learn. Vill you come, sir?"

Together they stepped through the open window, the

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captain following his host a trifle shamefacedly. At the sound of their approaching steps the girl turned and, for a moment, it seemed as if she were about to run; there was something half of fear, half of dismay, in her attitude; then her glance, shy as a bird's, sought Bellenden's face. She had no thought to give to the small, bent figure in rusty black in front of him, she did not even see it; she only saw that other coming toward her, erect and manly in bearing, his beaver beneath his arm, his head bared to the sun and the warmth of his smile engulfing her. Then her heart followed her eyes.

She was slower herself in complying with her father's command and advanced to meet his guest, as timidly as if she were a little child adventuring into the presence of some giant. As she sank before him in an awkward curtsy her distress and, at the same time, her delight were very evident to the young man's practised eye. The soft wild-rose tinge that suffused her cheeks and throat spoke more loudly than she was aware, but aside from the faintest greeting she had no word for him.

Bellenden's eloquence, however, was something to make gods and mortals stare. The stone, that in the domine's study had so effectually barred his conversational powers, had been miraculously rolled away, and he found himself talking with fluent ease to the father and daughter on such subjects as he felt were not remote from their interest. He was absolutely impartial in his attentions, save for the occasional putting-by of vine, or shrub, from the girl's path and she, to whom this bewildering mixture of deference and admiration possessed all the charm of a novelty that set her pulses

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rioting, and not yet mistress of herself, thanked him shyly with her glance.

It was an extensive garden, but only the earlier flowers were in bloom, though everywhere there was promise of beauty and abundance in the summer whose forerunner had come, sweet-scented and light of foot, singing into the land. Its present parsimony, however, could not be eked out into any great show of wealth and Bellenden knew he had no reasonable excuse to linger with his platitudes, despite the fact that it was a pleasant spot wherein to loiter indefinitely with one of his companions at least. He had extolled Dutch gardening with the fervor of a proselyte, not once, but many times, had pointed out the difference between the trim, stiff beds and the models of English taste, awarding the palm to the former with flattering candor; he had claimed an intimate acquaintance with the tulips of Holland and, in almost the same breath, when brought face to face with a mass of their blossoms, lying like some still sea of color held in bounds by edgings of pungent green, he had demanded their name with childish simplicity.

If the domine, who was the most unsuspecting of men, did not discover his guest's ignorance and duplicity, Jack Bellenden made a not displeasing discovery for himself. To wit: that when Annetje smiled a little dimple, the size of a small hazel-nut, played at hide and seek in the soft roundness of the cheek nearest him. But her eyes were persistently lowered, and what lurked beneath their satin-white lids he could not guess; his curiosity was piqued. For the moment all thoughts of departure were summarily dismissed.

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The day was almost done. The sunshine was growing fainter; it seemed woven half of glittering threads of light, and half of green caught from the new leaves of trees and vines that hung delicate and feathery against the pale blue sky. The breeze had fallen in this hour before sundown and the air was full of the silver pipings of frogs in near-by pools and every now and again the bass boom of a bull-frog added a martial sound to the unceasing chorus. From a distance came the merry note of a bobolink, that happiest bird of the spring-time, and closer at hand some sparrows, chattering in the tulip-tree over the last important happenings of the day, made ready for the night.

The little party of three had reached the end of the garden-walk; below them the land dipped a trifle and as they stood on a slight eminence they could see, through the lightly veiled shrubbery, the high wall that girt it round and the gate that led out to the unfrequented lane.

“Do I leave you here?” Bellenden asked.

“No,” Annetje breathed.

“No,” the domine answered. “Nefer usedt is t’at gate—I t’ink it nefer has peen usedt in my tay; vis vects is it grown ofer. Is not t’at so, *kleintje*?”

Annetje murmured something: she had not opened it for years and years, not since she was a child.

“Oh! ho, you openedt it t’en? Put v’ere vas I? Ofer my pooks, eh? Fery like—fery like.”

The father smiled indulgently at the belated confession, the deception mattered nothing to him. As he had bent above his books, he had not heard the clang of the gate when the little fingers had let it slip to

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gently; he had not heard it grate on its hinges in those other days when it had been opened and closed by older hands. Yet the years held both memories, guilty and innocent figures met and clasped for a moment. Bellenden regarded the wicket intently as his companions spoke, he should not err in finding it again, if ever the occasion offered—that disused stretch of land beyond the old wall, and the gate standing there near the black trunk of a lightning-riven tree were unforgettable. He turned with the others and retraced his steps.

When next he sought the parsonage he had a brief, and not altogether enjoyable, interview with the domine alone, which was succeeded by one even more dreary, if that were possible. Another time the domine was abroad and when Bellenden, very timidly because of Heilke's chill demeanor, inquired for his friend's daughter, the keeper of the keys, as if stricken suddenly deaf and dumb, banged the door resolutely to and locked it with dire significance. A similar result coming soon thereafter fanned his feelings into a quicker flame. He was one of those men whom opposition, even if it were but the blind intervention of inanimate things, rendered absolutely intolerant. He would brook no opposition. He meant no harm. If he had seen Annetje every time he visited her father, the chances are he would have tired of her quickly enough. But not to see her—to go to the dull, old place, knowing that somewhere within its four walls, or in the garden without, there was beauty to quicken a man's pulse and make him forget the world—was like the spark to tow. He simply would override circumstances.

. He saw her again, and in her father's study. She

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came into the room bearing a tray, on which were two high drinking-glasses painted in bright colors, a pitcher of hot water, a slender, fluted glass-bottle containing arrack and a silver bite-and-stir box, holding in its shell-like divisions the different kinds of sugar. He did not know that she had just routed Heilke in the kitchen and it was only owing to her dexterity and subtlety that an old and ugly Hebe was not attending to his wants. Heilke, at that very moment, was in the depths of her vast store-closet whither she had gone to get some little seed-cakes to supplement the punch and where she must remain until her more skilled adversary should turn the key again and set her free. As it was, he attributed the glitter of victory in the girl's eyes and the heightened color in her cheeks to the fact that she was seeing him again. The thought tickled his complacency.

The old minister sweetened his drink to his liking, but the younger man left his cup-bearer to serve him, watching her face, through the steam of the water, grow rosier under his regard. As she stood before him and the domine clattered his spoon in his glass, there came a knock at the door and Jan Praa appeared on the threshold intent upon some errand. Domine Ryerssen set down his punch reluctantly and crossed the room to speak to him.

"No more sugar ; faith, it needed no sweetening when once you'd glanced therein," Bellenden whispered hastily. " We've a song writ by a rare, old fellow and two lines go this way: ' Or leave a kiss but in the cup, and I'll not look for wine.' Not I. I'd seek the kiss instead."

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The girl kept her eyes on the floor, though her dimple showed she had heard him and was not displeased.

"I have been here several times and until to-day not a glimpse have I caught of you. Is it to be always so? That ugly, old woman will have it you're not at home—she's small liking for me and I've done her no ill. May I not come by the little gate down there and trouble no one to let me in?"

The girl trembled, but still she maintained the same silence.

"It's easy finding it and the afternoons are long when one is alone—very long. Tell me that I may come."

"How s'ouldt I know?" she murmured swiftly. She hardly moved her lips, he had to bend his head close to catch the words.

"How? Listen. Was that a bird, mistress Annetje?"

She gave a low laugh and cast a quick, frightened glance over her shoulder. The two men at the door were deeply engrossed, the one in giving, the other in receiving some order; they did not heed the soft succession of rippling notes near at hand.

"A bird was it, child? Some might think it so, but you and I know different."

VI

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

“ You sent for me, madam ? ”

At her daughter's entrance Mrs. Crewe glanced up from her writing-table ; she looked old and jaded in the pitiless sunshine which streamed into the little blue and gold leather closet, where it was her custom to sit before dinner busying herself with her accounts. It being still early morning she had not put on her red, and her face, in comparison with the freshness of the young beauty before her, showed sallow and lined, nor had she apparently devoted either much time or care to her dress. She was one of those women who consider that anything, no matter how shabby, will do for the privacy of the family circle and in consequence her mob-cap was draggled and grimy furnishing a fit accompaniment to her tumbled chintz wrapper. She did not speak for the space of a minute, but continued scribbling on some cards ; when that was done she threw sand on the writing from her caster, shaking it with a vehement hand.

“ I am forced to be my own secretary,” she said with temper.

“ La, mamma, is the poor man indisposed ? ”

“ The third secretary I have had since Michaelmas,” Mrs. Crewe went on fretfully, “ and such a nice-spoken, gentlemanly man and well-connected too—he made an

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appearance at one's table that even the most captious could not quarrel with."

"Indeed yes, you say right, until just lately, until his nose grew peaked and he sighed like some monstrous furnace. He fell off villainously in his appetite, too. I vow it took away what little I possessed to have the fellow sitting opposite fiddling with his food like a girl in the vapors. But there! they all have had the same complaint, I think."

"Think, miss," Mrs. Crewe interrupted, unable to contain herself longer. "You know as well as I."

Peggy tapped her foot reflectively upon the floor.

"A lingering illness," she said after a moment, "symptoms—stuttering speech, hollow eyes darting burning glances, an indifference to work, a tendency to write execrable verses, disinclination for food, pains in the chest—to the left side, that is—a predisposition to melancholy and moonlight—hm!—hm! Patient talks much of early death, with all the probability that he will see three-score and end with gout from high living. Don't distress yourself, madam, they never die of the complaint."

"No, they don't die of it, but it unfits them for their duties," Mrs. Crewe snapped. "I was willing enough to let the other two go, having the promise of this young fellow out of Surrey. Such an excellent penman as he was—and of quick understanding, a word was sufficient for him—a good voice, too, in reading aloud——"

"And in singing also, madam. Did you ever hear his: 'Oh so white! Oh so soft! Oh so sweet—so swee-ee-eet is she'?"

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“Recommended by Sir Charles Hardy himself,” pursued the angry woman, taking no note of the girl’s song, “who assured me that he was a gentleman by birth, a cadet of the family of——”

“Mercy on us! and this paragon has slipped through your fingers. Let’s have the town-crier out to call your loss.”

“If you’re not more respectful, miss, I’ll lock you in your chamber and keep you there for a week on bread and water. I’ll let you know I have some authority in my own house at least.”

“Nay, I meant no harm. I was but offering my condolence in a proper spirit and I see I’ve offended you—I cry your pardon. Has the young gentleman gone to drown himself incontinently off the quay, or will the fish pond suffice? A little cold water will do him infinite good. Why, ma’am, having some faint suspicion of his complaint I did honestly try to overcome it by such measures, but I presume the fever must run its course. Shall you ask for prayers in the church?”

The corners of Mrs. Crewe’s mouth were drawn down ominously.

“One thing you must learn, Margaret: I am not going to suffer impertinence. You’d best have a care.”

“La, I think so, when you forget to call me Peggy. Such a stiff and stately name as that same Margaret is to come from the lips of a girl’s mother, and all because a little scrubby secretary chooses to pout and cry for the moon.” She paused a moment, standing irresolute in the sunlight, her laughing face lengthening into sudden gravity. Then, as if vanquishing her fears, she

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threw back her head and tip-toed across the room to the writing-table. "You don't want him to have the moon?" she demanded softly.

The elder woman twitched her arm away.

"I want you to leave him alone."

"But I did, oh! la, yes, and that's the trouble. If I hadn't he'd be here to-day blotting all this nice paper and drawing pictures of me when you weren't looking, and trying to make 'secretarry' rhyme with 'Peg I marry.' Indeed, I know him. But he'll come round—perhaps."

"I wish you'd remember," her mother returned peevishly, "that those creatures are really men, and if you flatter them by listening to them—as you've a trick of doing, miss, I'm neither a fool, nor blind—they will fall to dreaming. And this was such a nice boy, you might have left him alone."

"Faith I did, I swear it! What pretty little ears you have, madam, and how those garnet rings become them."

"They can't help dreaming and the waking is disagreeable for everyone. Here am I with all these cards for my drum unwritten and that pile of business letters there to be answered, and Mr. Secretary sends me word he's too ill to wait on me this morning. Presumptuous!"

"Presumptuous," echoed Peggy with righteous indignation, though she stifled a yawn the next moment. "Well, let him go! 'Twill not be difficult to replace him. La, mamma, you're never going to make the fellow more conceited than he is by having him suppose he is indispensable to you. There are good secretaries going

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a-begging at this very moment, those who would mind their p's and q's better than he, I warrant."

"'Tis you, miss, who should mind your p's and q's as you call it. I'm tired of your behaviour. When I was a young lady my name was not on every lip——"

"Oh! fie, mamma. I've heard you were the toast of the town—'Gentlemen, I give you the eyes of Nelly Fanshawe——'"

"Hm! I had fine eyes."

"Had, madam?"

"There run away, child. You disturb me and I've double work to do all on account of your nonsense. I suppose you mean no great harm."

"Indeed, no, but what can a poor girl do when those simple creatures swear they love her? It's like my Lady Betty in the play where she says she could no more choose a man by her eye than a shoe. 'We must draw them on a little to see if they are right,' says she, 'and then the poor wretch tells one he'll widen 'em, or do anything, and is so civil and so silly that one doesn't know how to turn such a trifle as a pair of shoes, or a heart, upon a fellow's hands again.' 'Tis very hard," she drew a deep sigh and dropped her head in mock melancholy; the chief charm of her face was its mobility—it could assume at short notice any expression she willed, but at this moment there was a mischievous light in her eyes that gave the lie to her demure lips.

"You must marry, Peggy."

"Not I," she snapped her fingers disdainfully. "What! be chained to one of those tejus creatures for a life-time, to hear, first his vows, then his protestations, then his ratings, then his jealousies, to be at his beck

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and call? Not I. I am in love with no man, I am in love with my own freedom." She moved away from the arm of the chair, where she had been lounging, to the centre of the room and took a few dancing steps, holding up her gown on either side. The sight of her radiant, flippant beauty angered the watching woman.

"But I tell you you must marry," she retorted, bringing her little fist down on the table angrily, her face red with passion. "I'm worried half to death by my affairs. There have been losses—Jameson has mismanaged—and I am hard put to meet all your extravagances and those of your brother. He is in debt half the time and he, wanting two years of full age, forgets that what I give him I give out of my own generosity. As for you, there's not another girl in town who fritters away as much money on fallals, and if they brought any good results, the Lord knows I'd not begrudge it——"

"If they brought any good results?" Peggy interrupted coldly, her head high. "I don't understand you. Faith, do you think that when I don my blue gown it's with the object to draw an offer of marriage from this man, or t'other? Or when I put on my rose-colored taffetas that I say to myself 'this will fetch Tom, Dick and Harry to your feet'? I know they're there, they'd be there if I looked a frump in linsey-woolsey because I'm Peggy Crewe." She shrugged her shoulders, her face dimpling. "No, when I study the fashion-babies at my mantua-maker's 'tis for the reason that I want to go as fine—nay finer—than any Miss of my acquaintance. La, I'm not thinking of the men at all when I dress, 'tis only to be a thorn in the flesh of my sisters." She threw back her head, laughing immoderately. "Oh

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lud! how I prick some of 'em," she added after a moment, wiping her eyes with a little square of lawn edged with lace.

"I don't know what I've done," the widow moaned, "that Heaven should punish me with such undutiful children. I'm sure I was the pattern of docility to my own poor, dear mamma and papa—I never thought of questioning their authority. When they said 'marry' I was willing to accept their word as final, and so I told your father when he came a-wooing. Even if he hadn't adored me to distraction I should have obeyed them unquestioningly."

Peggy's short upper lip curled wickedly. She was not oblivious of the fact that her grandfather's money-bags were largely instrumental in buying the hand and heart of a certain impecunious gentleman, whose old family name had been an object of envy to many of lesser birth in the new colony. She carried the remembrance of numerous heated discussions waged between her parents stowed safely away in the lavender of her memory.

"And when I only have your good at heart," the fretful voice went on, "I don't counsel you to marry everybody——"

"Goodness gracious, I should hope not, mamma!"

"You know very well what I mean, miss," cried Mrs. Crewe shrilly. "I want you to be particular, I am particular for you myself. You've the pick of the town at your feet and the best of all the strangers who come to us. Who are you, I'd like to know, that you should not be thankful of a good match when it is offered? Youth doesn't last forever, let me tell you. You'd best remem-

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ber that! There's young Lofters now, who is travelling over here with his tutor—it's a good title and rich——”

“That little fool?”

The widow drew her breath with a deep gasp of horror.

“I marvel at you for saying so. He is cried up on all sides for his parts. They are remarkable for a lord.”

“I've heard an oyster speak as eloquently fifty times. La, if he's a wit 'tis only by the grace of our women, and not from any gift of nature. One would think he chewed opium, he's so tejus stupid.”

“The alliance would please me vastly, such noble estates—Jameson has made all inquiries—and he adores you, my dear, he does indeed—the whole town talks of his infatuation. Come, think better of it—a title and court, a house in London and several seats in the country—What could a girl ask better? He's not so simple after all, though your cousin laughs horrid at him and counsels me not to press his suit.”

“I'd thank our cousin Bellenden to hold his tongue,” Peggy cried with flaming cheeks as she paced up and down the room, setting by an encroaching chair with a tempestuous hand. “Lofters is—a—a—he's not so bad, really, when you come to think of it. I don't know a man who bows with more grace.”

“Then you will be kind to him?”

“I won't promise, but if my cousin thinks to influence me by what he says I'll show him different. Cousin Bellenden, forsooth! The man has bewitched you all—Larry is his very shadow and you like to have him here, you know you do. A man who, first and last, is in love with himself and thinks every petticoat he meets

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shares the infatuation, one who dawdles about all day and plays cards all night. A pretty fellow, he, to give counsel on any subject! If you're vexed with Larry because he spends too much, forbid him my cousin Bellenden's company then."

"The captain is not one to lead any boy astray. Larry was reckless and extravagant before his coming, as you know. This is not the first time I've spoke to you about him. I've just had an interview with him and I told him that I'll give him no more money until next quarter, and pay no more debts whatever they be, nor to whom incurred—I've let as much get abroad—Do see who's knocking, Peggy."

The girl lounged over to the door and flung it wide, disclosing a servant in the passage without.

"What is it, Hobbes? Never visitors at this unearthly hour?"

"It's Capting Bellenden, miss. He's in the tapestry-room and he presents his compliments to my lady, and he——"

"That will do. Tell the gentleman Mrs. Crewe will be with him shortly." She waited until the flunkey was out of hearing, then she stepped back into the room.

"Your precious captain, madam," she announced pompously, "and I've not denied you to him."

"But I can't see him in this ojiuous dishabille, I'm such a fright! Help me, love, my hair has all come down and this cap is outrageous unbecoming. Do you go to him, dear child, and keep him talking. I promise to join you in five minutes at the most. Oh! you wouldn't have me go looking as I do."

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"He might not come again," Peggy laughed wickedly.

"Then run, there's a pet! and you shall have the garnets you coveted so the other day."

Peggy made a wry face and stood balancing her hand, almost as if she were weighing the jewels in question against her scruples.

"They come pretty high," she mused. "I wonder if they're worth it—Well! I'll close the bargain. But not more than five minutes, remember."

The last words were uttered to empty air, for Mrs. Crewe had beaten a hasty retreat. The girl looked after her flying skirts with some amusement, then, affecting a yawn, she walked carelessly over to the mirror between the windows, twitched the lace at her throat, patted her hair into shape and drew a little patch-box from her pocket and applied a small, black crescent to one cheek, shifting it from one position to another. When it was at last satisfactorily disposed she played the peacock for some moments longer, then she leaned closer to the mirror, with her hands resting on either side of the frame, and studied the reflection there until the mist from her breath blurred the smiling picture; she gave a short laugh as she turned away.

A long acquaintance with her mother had imbued her with the knowledge that to hasten over the mysteries of the toilet is not one of the prerogatives of advancing years, and her manner, therefore, was leisurely and unconcerned as she sauntered along the corridor until the tapestry-room was reached. She paused there a moment, her eyes kindling with mischief, and drew one end of her gauze scarf closer to her cheek,

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then she set the door ajar. Slight as was the noise she made the man, who was studying a picture on the far side of the room, heard it and turned to meet her.

She sank before him in a low curtsey, almost touching the floor with her knee and letting the scarf drop slowly from her mocking face.

“Not your charmer, cousin Bellenden,” she said demurely, “but do not grieve as those without hope. She will come later—very much later, I fear me! For the present I am here to comfort you in your affliction and to divert you, so my mamma hath commanded. Shall I show you my new dancing-steps? My master says I do them with uncommon grace, but la, the poor man dotes on me. Or shall I say a verse to you out of the poets, or my alphabet perhaps? ’Twas only this very morning that my mamma cautioned me to mind my p’s and q’s.”

VII

A CONSPIRACY

Peggy stood at one of the long windows in the chintz-room, gazing disconsolately at the sodden landscape and beating a little monotonous tattoo upon the rain-splashed glass. The day was full of gloom; a gray mist rose from the river to meet the gray sky closing the prospect in, and through the sheets of falling water the trees loomed indistinct shapes, now distant, now near at hand, dripping with moisture; even the flowers, in the trim parterres, had lost their vivid hues and cowered, like so many wraiths of their former beauty, before the driving wind, or lay bent and broken where resistance had proved unavailing.

The girl yawned dismally and glanced back at her brother sitting at the table in the center of the room, ostensibly busy with a book which, her keen eyes told her, he was only making a pretence of reading. He seemed to ignore her presence, though that he was aware of it was evidenced by the fact that, when she was not looking, he cast stealthy glances her way. The silence between them continued for some time unbroken, save for the sound that came from her impatient fingers; then finally, as if it had grown unbearable even to her, she quitted her place at the window and seated herself opposite him, leaning forward and resting her elbows on the polished surface of the table

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and dropping her chin into the little hollow formed by her hands.

“ ‘Why so pale and wan, fond lover, prythee, why so pale?’ ” she mocked.

He pushed the book from him and thrust his legs out to their utmost extent, eying the buckles which adorned his shoes with a sudden keen interest.

“Where’s my mother?” he demanded after a moment.

A smile twitched at the corners of Peggy’s mouth, though she kept her voice demure enough as she answered his question.

“In her office, putting the new secretary through his paces. A chaplain this time—that sounds well, doesn’t it? Mrs. Crewe’s chaplain—so domestic and sedate! I’d have dispensed with the cloth and the squint had I been consulted. It’s good he closes his eyes when he prays, else would he disconcert the Lord in very truth. Well, I shall never be able to tell when he is looking my way which will set my mother’s fears at rest——”

“I should think you might be serious some time,” grumbled her brother.

“Serious, oh, la, yes, as serious as you please,” the girl shrugged her shoulders indifferently. “Why should you doubt me? But you ask too much. Do you remember the brook up at Crewe Park? It chatters and dances over the stones on its way to the sea and even when it passes through the darkest woods it doesn’t stop its laughing, being just a shallow, little brook it keeps its merry voice unaltered. It can’t change. The shadows have reached its heart, we know, and yet the chatter goes on unceasingly, because that’s its nature.

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You don't quarrel with it on that account, do you?" She put her hand on his arm half-caressingly. "What is it—the old trouble?"

He shrugged away from her touch and turned in his chair to cast a cautious glance around the room, which even the cheerless light could not rob of its brilliant coloring; then he leant nearer his companion.

"Clean broke," he whispered.

"I'm so sorry, boy, and I can't help you. My mother was in a pretty tantrum t'other day when she discovered those silly beads were missing. I don't know how she found out. She's taken my jewel-case into her keeping now, and doles me out an occasional trinket as if I was still a child. Here's a locket though, if 'twill be of any use. But faith! things will take a turn, Touchstone will save you——"

"Touchstone!" Larry's voice broke over the syllables. "I tell you what it is, Peggy, I'll go hang myself."

The girl's hands flew up to hide her face turned suddenly ashy gray.

"Don't," she cried from behind their shelter. "Oh! how could you—how could you? Why should you remind me of it every moment? I can't sleep nights for seeing that figure hanging there—it's always before me—every nodding branch makes me think of what they found in the woods——"

"I didn't know you cared——"

"Why? Because I laughed, and teased, and seemed light-hearted? It's the brook's way, I tell you, it's my nature and it helps me to forget. When I am quiet my thoughts are enough to drive me mad. The daylight

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doesn't keep the sight away, though I bless the daylight that is so long in coming. Oh! Larry I think the nights are fifty hours long."

"You might have averted all this," he admonished pompously, perplexed by her vehemence and her unnatural, tremulous voice; her chatter was more to his liking, though he had seen fit to quarrel with it a moment before.

"I never dreamt it would end this way," she said unsteadily. "How could I know he would be so weak? For it was weak in him to take his life because a girl's love was not for him, as if that was all the world had to offer—as if the struggles—the buffetings, the overcoming, amounted to nothing. Love! I hate the silly mawkish word. What does it mean after all? You, who have sighed to this woman and that, tell me—if you can—what you mean by love. A thousand times you've sworn you'd die for her—I'll wager that—then one day she frowns, or her beauty's askew, or—more likely still—your own fancy, which is lighter than this-tledown, blows cold and you go your way forgetting quickly, and all that dies is that little, formless thing you called love. Bah! It's vanity, it's caprice, it's passion perhaps, it's anything but what will endure. I please one man because of my shape, another because his fellow admires me, a third because of the arch of my foot, a fourth because of my mother's gold, and were I not by any other girl would win the same regard. He'd swear to her in just the same fashion, swear to a dozen hers, very like, at the same time, for you men are spendthrifts in your protestations." She stopped out of breath.

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“ I—I thought he was like the others,” she went on after a moment. “ I’d heard it all before so many times, read almost the same verses, met almost the same glances—it was just in the play, you know. And I—I—laughed at him, bade him stick to his desk, go—or come—it mattered not to me. But the end—” her voice dropped to a shuddering whisper, “ here one day—alive and well, and I mocking him—and the next, that ghastly, silent thing they found yonder, upbraiding me with his poor dead lips. His heart meant nothing to me—’twas a mere plaything—but his life— Ah! how different—how different. To give up all the joy of living, the beauty of the earth and sky to become—*that!* ”

“ Lord! Peggy, the fellow had little spirit and so let him go. My mother talked a deal about his breeding, but he was a craven when everything’s said and done. ’Tis only a coward, after all, that will let circumstances get the best of him. A man should be master of his fate, or make a good fight for it, then—conqueror, or conquered—he has proved his mettle.”

A sudden smile broke up the misery on the girl’s face.

“ Hear the parson! ” she jeered. “ A moment ago he was all for hanging himself.”

“ Words are not deeds,” he returned sententiously, “ but if I was, it was for no such trivial thing as a woman’s favor.”

“ No, your head will take care of your heart, past a doubt. We Crewes are like that. I’ve no fear for either of us whatever fate may bring—gay words to the end and no showing of wounds for the pity of others—that’s our creed! But despite my brave speeches I’m

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going to do what no Crewe has ever yet done—I am going to run away.” Her voice grew tremulous again. “I can’t stay here—that’s the truth!—with that dreadful shadow haunting me at every turn of the paths and stepping out to meet me on the stairs, and in the corridors. I hate every soul I see, and as for drums, and cards, and gossip at the Pump, or in the Gardens—why, I’ve no taste for ’em. It’s all so tejus dull—the same stale round, nothing diverting, nothing new! So, the chance offering, I’m going to Albany to visit Nancy Stirling. I’ve my mother’s permission to stay a month at least. My boxes are nearly packed and Bennet and I go by the Speedwell, Captain Lewis, the day after tomorrow. I’d wait for the Runs only my mother won’t have it, the ship must sail Thursday, willy-nilly, she has already been delayed a sennight past her time. But I wish you luck, boy—my prayers go with you.”

“Keep ’em for yourself,” he retorted gruffly. “I’ve no need of ’em.”

She missed the note of confidence from his blustering tones and scanned his face curiously. His eyes—in which anger, disappointment, and stolid resignation struggled and rent one another for supremacy—met hers unflinchingly for a moment; then her lips framed a questioning word, though she did not utter it aloud.

“Sandy got into a brawl with some roughs last night and they did for him,” he cried—“broke his ribs and his head—he’s a mass of pulp. He’ll not ride again this season, curse him!”

“Was it foul play?”

“He swears as much, says they set on him without provocation—but I know him for a swaggerer. What

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does it matter? The mischief's done and he's unfitted for his work. As for me, with this confounded stiffness, I couldn't ride my beauty through any race with the hope to win—and oh God! he's in such prime condition."

Peggy sat and stared open-mouthed, open-eyed; her ready tongue silenced in the presence of her brother's misery.

"And the purse gone!" his voice seemed to come from a great distance, it was so husky. "I'd looked on it as mine—it would have been mine, I tell you—there isn't a horse in the field to be feared, none of 'em are any good compared to Touchstone. The purse was ours, past a doubt! And then the bets out on him—Gad, I meant to wipe out old scores and begin afresh. At the coffee-houses the odds are all in our favor and now I must sneak away and hide myself, or go and grin, and wave my hat when another man's horse streaks past the winning-post while my own beauty is fretting his heart out, useless in his stall."

"There's no one—" Peggy began softly.

"No one—you know the stables as well as I. Sandy was the only one of the lot who could manage Touchstone. There isn't another of the boys but Greene that that horse will stand having near him—and Greene can't ride straight—the sight of a crowd paralyzes him, he has no head! It'd be throwing over the race at the start to put him up."

"I know—I know—poor Touchstone——"

"Don't! I've been through that until I'm half mad."

There was a long silence between the two which was

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broken at last by the girl with a faint scream, as she jumped to her feet and ran around in front of her brother.

“Larry, there is some one else! We were fools to have forgotten.”

“Who? For God’s sake, don’t keep me in suspense.”

She paused half breathless, half laughing. Then with a sudden stiffening of her figure, so that on the moment it seemed to grow awkward and wooden before his eyes, she put her hand to her head and pulled an imaginary forelock, scraping her foot behind her as a country lout might have done.

“Your sarvint, Mester Larry.”

A wave of crimson flooded the young fellow’s face and the muscles in his throat throbbed visibly with the strain he put upon himself to keep from striking her. He stared at her a moment without a word, contempt growing in his glance, then: “You little cat!” he cried in smothered accents as he flung himself out of his chair and made as though to leave the room. She caught him by the arm, unheeding the fury in his eyes.

“Larry, listen! I mean every word. I can ride Touchstone. What’s to prevent my riding him the day of the race? Hush! let me speak. You want the money, Touchstone wants the glory and I—I want the excitement. Oh the novelty of the thing—the crowd—the start—the run—the finish—the victory! Why shouldn’t I do it? Because I am a girl? Well, see! you are in a great strait, crippled with debts and our mother is obdurate, or so she says, and the solution is very simple. This race, the purse, and the money from

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your bets are all yours if you will let me help you. Won't you?"

Their faces were very close; the one flushed with recklessness, the other white and wavering, touched with hope, incredulity and despair.

"You couldn't do it, Peggy," he said hoarsely after a moment.

"Couldn't do it—couldn't it. Do you remember what cousin Bellenden told us of the Woffington masquerading in private life as a young gallant to avenge herself on that faithless Irish lover of hers? How she frequented the garden—never mind which one—dressed as a fop and met the titled lady for whom he had deserted her; how she, still in her disguise, paid court to that lady and when she had won her liking denounced that other's deceit and treachery? What Peggy Woffington could do to punish a lover, Peggy Crewe can do to help her brother. Lud, Larry, don't frown on the scheme—'tis not so difficult, once you look sensibly at it. I'll wager my mocus set nobody would recognize me, and think of the rare sport I'd have, passing them by on the run—me and Touchstone—beating them—beating them—and a girl at that!"

"You couldn't do it, Peggy." The words were the same but the indecision in his voice filled her with rapture; she clung to his coat with both hands.

"So simple, Larry," she went on eagerly. "Sandy is about my height and you've got a fire-new racing suit for him—let me have it and I'll manage the rest and do you no discredit. That part is easy of arrangement and sure, there's no question of my horsemanship. I'm as much a part of my horse, once I'm on his back, as

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one of those thingumighigs in the history books. Since the time I was five until I was fifteen I rode astride both in saddle, or bareback, up at Crewe. In all our rides together you never had to stop to remember I was a girl and make allowances for me, did you? I rode abreast with you across country, took the same leaps, faced the same dangers—oh! a cause loses when you have to patch it up with boasts—but you know what I say is true.”

“Every word is true, except that instead of riding abreast with me you led and I followed, and thought it no shame to be beaten by a girl when that girl was Peggy. And ’tis the same to-day.”

Her eyes danced with delight, her hands went up and met about his neck.

“And Touchstone,” she cried with a little break in her voice that was half sob, half laugh, “he’s my slave. Skill and subtlety have made him obedient to you and Sandy, but love has won him to me. You’ve not forgot ’twas I that tamed him. I go into his stall without a fear and he whinnies with joy at the sound of my step. He will follow me in the paddock like a dog close at heel—a word from me and his muzzle is thrust into my hand and his eyes look deep into mine until we both read each other’s heart. He stands motionless under my caress, where he starts and trembles at the approach of yours. Is not that so? Think how often I’ve rode him up at Crewe and of that first time when I saddled him with my own hands and not a man in the stables daring so much as touch him and he was as gentle—as gentle as a kitten to me.” She stopped breathless and shook her brother slightly, releasing

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him the next moment. "Oh! you don't trust me," she wailed.

"I'd trust you anywhere," he answered hotly, "but this is different. The crowd—the race—it takes a steady head to disregard all the tumult—and then there's the disguise. What if you were recognized?"

"Only let me ride, that's all I ask. If you trust me so far, sure you can safely trust me for the rest. I suppose the news of Sandy's disaster has got abroad by now, and the talk everywhere is about who'll ride your horse. Well, you can say an under-groom—a lad from England."

"But all this will interfere with your visit."

"Not a whit. I shall still go the day after to-morrow." She paused and laughed outright at the expression which blotted out the awakening joy in his face.

He stiffened at the sound of her mirth. In a moment the thought that had tortured him earlier appealed to him again; she was simply playing with him. All her pleadings and little enthusiasms were but puppets which she had marshalled forth, and dandled one after the other, to relieve the tedium of a rainy day and to help her forget what it would be well for her to remember always. She read his thoughts, even as they were passing through his mind, and stopped him with a gesture before he could denounce her.

"You silly boy to doubt me," her voice was a caress. "Can't you see that I must go away so people won't suspect anything? If I am here in town and not at the races, though you should swear never so that I'd a headache at home, some wise person would put two and two together and by nightfall the whole place would

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know the answer to the sum. And then, there's my mother, she must not dream of it—she least of all! No, I must be out of every one's mind, so I'll set sail with my woman as we've arranged. You must bring a vast company to the wharf to bid me God-speed and that's the last of Peggy for a month. Meanwhile, I'll only go as far as Yonkers. There, for some excellent reason, I'll have Captain Lewis set us ashore—oh! believe me, he won't refuse anything I ask—and you'll have horses and coach awaiting us, and we'll post back to Greenwich and stay at our cottage. The rest is simple—you'll come and fetch me away the morning of the race——”

“The prettiest little groom in Christendom.”

“Indeed, not so, the ugliest if you will, or only so far ugly as to escape comment of any kind. I must avert attention, not court it. Greene may recognize me, but he'll swear black's white on my saying so—we need not fear him. And Larry, as soon as it stops raining, go you to Rosemary Lane to that old peruke-maker—hm! how is he called? The one, you know, who says he might have worked for the King if His Majesty would have employed him. Lord! what is his name? Oh, John Sill—that's it! Go you to him and bring back some wigs—tell him you want the shock head of a country boy—fetch them yourself, trust no one.”

He caught her hands and swung them jubilantly together, his face kindled with the confidence of hers, his joy at white heat.

“I'm discretion itself, don't doubt me. Oh! my girl, three cheers for the Crewe colors—three cheers for the purple——”

She put her hand on his lips.

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“Hush! not beforehand—it's bad luck. What horses are to be feared?”

“Morris's and De Lancey's. Touchstone can walk away from the rest of the field, but American Childers is no mean rival, and Lath presses him hard. If you should fail——”

“I won't fail. A woman's hand is light and her will is firm, and, moreover, the gods are kind. I won't fail!”

VIII

AT GREENWICH

From the earliest morning the various ways leading to the course on Sir Peter Warren's estate in Greenwich village were thronged with people, and especially was that true of the road from the south that lay along the water-side and crossed Lispenard's Meadows and Manetta brook on a raised causeway. The river, blue as the sky above, flowed tranquilly seawards; one would almost have declared it slept, for the still air scarcely rippled its surface—and the trees, motionless too, drowsed in the brilliant sunlight, dreaming those lazy dreams of summer.

Everywhere, as far as eye could see, the land was full of fairness, with the flash of little streams looping back and forth amid the lush green, like marvellous silver embroidery, jewelled with the gleam of flowers that brimmed field and thicket with beauty. The air was sweet with their manifold perfumes, and with the delicious scent of the blossoming wild-grape. Also from the grass, from the banks of the brooks, from the shade of the woods, luring children and grown-folk alike, the strawberry flashed its ripeness in the sun—that berry which God has never bettered—flavor, hue, fragrance forming the trinity of excellence.

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The field, at the approach to the course, hummed with life. It was a tumult of sound, a vast unceasing medley—laughter, chatter, the pounding of tomtoms, the blowing of horns, the jangle of the pïeman's bell, the calls of chapmen passing hither and thither with their wares—'A new love-song only half a penny,' 'Fans a-plenty for sweet-and-twenty'—and, mingling with these, the strident voice declaiming: 'Memorandum books a penny a-piece of the poor blind—pity the blind!' and from a distant corner, like the buzzing of angry bees, the cries of the bookmen calling out bets on the run. On every side, booths had been erected for the day where all the diversions of the times were offered to the public, the attention of the passer attracted thereto by shrill noises; while mountebanks, tumblers, fortune-tellers, vagrants and darting children added to the general hurly-burly.

Every minute saw the arrival of different vehicles, and parties of pleasure-seeking on horseback, consisting of men and women of fashion, with here and there a scarlet-coated officer; grave farmers jogging along, with their wives, or daughters, seated on pillions behind them, made their entrance to the enclosure and the humbler folk, who had tramped it all the way, came blithely forward. It was a shifting motley. The people of wealth dressed in the prevailing court styles with the gleam of many a jewel and buckle to outdazzle the sun, the soberer garb of the merchants, the homespun of the farmer, the mechanics and artisans in their leather-breeches and aprons, with baize vests of red, or green, the multi-hued gowns of the poorer women and children, and the livery of servants offered a new point

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of color at every turn. Fashion, beauty, respectability, poverty, vice and crime elbowed one another everywhere; all strands in the great web of life, bright and dun, pure and stained, they crossed and recrossed making up the day's work.

By far the greater number of those who had ridden descended from coach, or chair, to stretch their limbs after the long ride, and strolled about exchanging greetings with friends and acquaintances; some few, however, sought the course immediately where, if they so wished, they might remain in their conveyances, or find places on the benches that were raised at one side of the race-track. As for the poorer folk—the older and wiser among them separated into little groups and betook themselves to some eminence overlooking the grounds that would enable them to view the quarter-dashes and the more important races, without the expenditure of the sixpence which constituted the entrance fee for every one save the riders, or owners of the running horses. But the majority of the humbler class lingered to gaze openmouthed at the fashion of the quality.

As they stood gaping, the sound of horses' hoofs on the road broke in upon the bustle and, turning, rich and poor alike recognized Robert Murray's "leathern conveniency," as the shrewd Quaker called his coach to avoid scandal of pride and vain-glory. Following quickly after came other coaches—the De Peysters', with their outriders and postilions in blue and yellow, and the gilded chariot of the Livingstons, with the armorial ship emblazoned on its doors, drawn by four snow-white horses, the servants in gorgeous livery.

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The crowd, with its ready knowledge, whispered the names of the newcomers so that the murmurs sounded almost like the announcements made by an usher at some function of state. In that way was heralded the coming of Madam Alexander 'the Queen of Petticoat Lane,' and also the owners of the succeeding coaches—the people guessing by the burning castle of Morris and the lance of the De Lanceys to whom each belonged.

His Excellency the Governor—Sir Charles Hardy—arriving with his suite hard upon these latter, was greeted with hand-clappings and cheers. It was one of his last public appearances, but his hold on the public attention at this time was brief, as his chariot had scarcely rolled away when four strong, ugly geldings drawing a cumbersome coach came to a standstill for its occupants to alight. The vehicle was hung on great straps, with a hammercloth covering the coachman's seat, and its doors were emblazoned with the family arms—a peacock in his pride. The livery of the outriders and postilions was a rich purple laced with silver, with triangular cocked hats trimmed with silver lace. The foot-boy, hanging by the tassels behind, was clad in similar fashion, save that he wore a jockey cap of Turkey leather with silver seams and bands. The lady within lowered her black velvet riding-mask and showed a peevish, pretty face to the crowd, who looked in vain for a younger, merrier one at her side, to whom every man and woman of them all would willingly have done homage. The persons in the coach were three in number, an elderly *dame de compagnie*, Mrs. Crewe and her chaplain-secretary—a sleek, rotund little man with

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a cast in his shifting gray eyes and an unctuous expression on his coarse, purplish lips.

As the steps were let down by the eager foot-boy, running almost to the point of self-annihilation in his efforts to serve his lady, with whom celerity alone found favor, Captain Bellenden detached himself from a group of mounted fellow-officers and, leaving his horse with a groom, hastened forward. Quick as his movements were, however, several gentlemen had anticipated him and the widow alighted without his aid. It was perhaps because of his dilatoriness that she chose to greet him coldly, or, he told himself as he moved back, the presence of Lord Lofters might well account for any fall in the barometer of a woman's liking. For Peggy being absent, the young nobleman was prepared to pay court to her mother, not as 'the mother' as Mrs. Crewe took excellent care to avoid, but to a woman whose ripened charms made her very evident appreciation of his society doubly alluring.

Secretly relieved at being thus exempt from dangling attendance on this occasion, when his inclinations were all with the racers, Bellenden turned quickly and, before he could be recalled to her side by any reproachful glances, screened himself behind some bushes. Nor did he know any bitterness because other men were preferred to himself. He was glad to be free from what had become an irksome duty to him—the constant waiting upon a vain, silly woman who presumed upon their relationship to demand all sorts of services from him, and who kept him at her beck and call. The real lode-star in all his visits to the Crewes' home—little as mother and daughter suspected it—little as he had suspected

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it himself until just a short time back, was the girl herself. Peggy, laughing, radiant, now this, now that; the trickiest compound of fun, mischief, good-humor and quick temper that ever bothered a man and filled his waking and dreaming hours with a fascinating idolon.

He waited until Mrs. Crewe with her train of admirers had turned to the course, then he stepped forth warily and, making a wide circuit to avoid detection, sought the paddock. His way thither was beset by many hindrances, chief among them being the excitement occasioned by the discovery of a stolen horse with an ill-looking jockey up, who had entered the steed according to requirements and who, possession being nine points of the law, refused to return her to the rightful owner until after the runs. Such crooked proceedings to recruit the field and to keep up the interest in racing were not infrequent and similar instances had occurred at Hempstead and also on the Church Farm course the previous year.

“ ‘E aint proved the ’oss is ’is,” the jockey maintained in aggrieved tones as Bellenden paused on the outskirts of the crowd. “ Jes’ becos she looks like ’is mare aint no reel proof. My brother an’ me are breathin’ himages of heach other, but we aint the same men. Lord love ye, gemmen, I’ve entered this ’oss fair an’ square an’ ride ’er I will. Mebbe when the party gets back to Rose ’ill to-night ’is propuppy ’ll be there before ’im, an’ then ’e’ll take shame to ’isself for haccusin’ one as hin-nercent as the babe unborn——”

Bellenden passed on leaving the altercation to work out its own end. Before he sought the course he want-

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ed to have a look at Touchstone and, if possible, a word with Larry whom he had not seen for several days as he, himself, had but just returned from a short stay in Philadelphia. On his arrival in town he had found that the bets on Touchstone, that had been unusually high when he left, were going begging. He had quickly put himself in possession of all the details of the change. The news of Sandy's accident had spread like wildfire everywhere and there had followed a thousand contradictions hard upon. Touchstone would not run, Touchstone would run, the backers of the horse were in a state bordering upon frenzy; then came the assurance that Crewe had no intention of withdrawal and that an under-groom would take Sandy's place. After that the excitement had subsided somewhat, but, as if the jockey's ill-luck had spread to the horse, people looked askance at the whilom favorite and many of the former bets on him were cried off.

Bellenden ground his teeth in rage as he threaded his way in and out among men and horses, looking appreciatively at the latter and taking in good and bad points at a glance. He paused for a moment near American Childers and studied him with regretful eyes. In him he thought he saw the winner and yet, as he had watched Touchstone day after day in his cousin's paddock under Sandy's manœuvres, he had felt with a thrill that the splendid creature well deserved Larry's encomiums and no other horse in York Colony—if anywhere—was his equal. He prided himself upon his knowledge of horseflesh and knew that partiality had not led him astray in his estimate of the chestnut's qualities. Touchstone with Sandy up, Sandy who had rid-

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den him twice to victory in the only races the horse had ever run, was sure to win, but Touchstone at the mercy of a strange rider, one who did not know and appreciate his manifold vagaries, was defeated almost at the outset. It was impossible to think otherwise—a man would be a fool to imperil any money on such a chance.

A prey to these thoughts Bellenden continued his search for Larry and finally discovered him in the centre of a noisy group of beaux and officers. The young fellow, usually so fastidious in his dress, had apparently paid but scant attention to it this day, his laced ruffles were tumbled, his coat unbrushed, and the only evidence—which marked the occasion from the ordinary—was the enormous bunch of purple ribbons on his left breast. He stood with his feet far apart swaying back and forwards and, as he talked in high, boisterous tones, he whipped the air with a small cane guided by an unsteady hand.

“Drunk, the young fool!” Bellenden muttered disdainfully to himself, as he noted all this from a distance.

But Larry was not drunk, as the older man was speedily convinced. He was simply unstrung with excitement; his face was haggard and drawn—he looked double his age—and his eyes were feverishly bright. He was betting at fearful odds as his cousin joined the group, and his wagers were snapped up eagerly amid shouts and roars of laughter; some of his companions, taking advantage of his reckless frame of mind, egged him on shamelessly.

“Larry, a word with you,” Bellenden said shortly. Then, when the two had withdrawn to a little distance,

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he put his hand on the young fellow's shoulder. "Man alive," he exclaimed, "you don't know what you're about and that's the truth. If victory is yours it's all right, but if it's defeat—what then?"

"Oh! I'll go break stones or—or—something," the other groaned. "But Touchstone will beat 'em yet," he added fatuously.

"I believe in a man's backing his own of course; 'tis the only thing to do. But you've made an infernal mess of it. When you found it was all up with Sandy you should have withdrawn from the race and given us the chance to put our money elsewhere——"

"I'll take up whatever bets you have out on Touchstone, Captain Bellenden," Larry interposed magnificently. "'Twas not to favor me that you backed my horse."

"No, you young gaby, it was to favor myself, I well know that. I don't bet on a man's horse because the man happens to be my cousin. There's no thought of kinship in racing. It's the best horse, or the one I consider the best, that carries my money. I'd have staked ten thousand, if I'd had it, on Touchstone when Sandy was there to put him through, but now a shilling is too much to venture with this other fellow up, I don't care how well he rides. Touchstone's no common hack to be taken in hand by any new-comer—a groom, you've picked up from the Lord knows where."

"He's a good groom, let me tell you that, sir. I'd back his riding against the best; I've known him all my life——"

"They told me he was just out from England."

"Yes—yes—so he is—a lad from England, that's

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true enough," Larry stammered. "'Sdeath! aint we all English when you come to think of it?" he finished with an unsteady laugh.

Bellenden shot an angry glance at the excited face and turned away with an oath. He was up to his ears in debts and this last extravagance was like to cost him dear. He had hoped—as Larry had hoped—to recoup himself on this race, and now the only thing left for him would be to leave the army and join his cousin in breaking stones. He walked quickly over to the furthest corner of the paddock where his roving eyes had discovered Touchstone, apart from the other racers, in company with two grooms, Greene at the bridle and the jockey in the saddle.

Despite himself, he could hardly suppress a groan as he neared the group and noted afresh the splendid pose of the animal with force and energy manifest in every line of his body, in the expression of his countenance and the lofty toss of his head. A chestnut horse with a white blaze up his face, and his off-leg white from the hock downwards. In stature he was a fraction over fifteen hands, of a neat, elegant appearance; the head light, lean and well set on, the forehead broad and flat, the eyes luminous, the nostrils large and dilating, the muzzle fine and the limbs supple and perfect. The blood of Arab stock was expressed in the thin, high crest of the glossy neck with its prominent veins; the mane and tail fell full and silky. And this gorgeous creature was bestrid by a slouchy looking lad bunched forward in his saddle, his shoulders drooping dejectedly, his chin fallen in the manner of an idiot's. A boy, as Bellenden discovered on a closer approach, with a

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tanned, sullen face that showed small beneath a shock of yellowish hair, a face devoid alike of fear, or confidence, with indifferent, half-opened eyes gazing stolidly before him. Never had the Crewe colors been seen to such disadvantage! The jockey cap was pulled far down over the boy's brows and the peak cast a deep shadow over his countenance; for the rest, he was dressed in a loose, purple shirt with full trousers and high leather boots.

Bellenden surveyed him disdainfully, but the boy did not turn his eyes nor seem to notice the new-comer, though a tinge of red deepened in his face as if, in his dull fashion, he resented the disparaging scrutiny to which he was subjected. He was holding the reins loosely, for Greene was at the horse's head, but suddenly his fingers tightened upon them and, with the unexpected strain, Touchstone began to curvet wildly.

"Best let 'im go," Greene cried, suiting the action to the word and scrambling to one side. "Look lively there, Capting Bellenden."

The captain started back, then, with a quick turn of his wrist, he caught the bridle dexterously; he was absolutely without fear and, in this instance, it infuriated him to see Touchstone mismanaged as he thought. The horse chafed and reared at the touch of his hand and cast it off impatiently, but the jockey, apparently unconcerned and thoroughly master of his mount, brought the frightened creature into quick subjection.

"Where's your whip, sir?" Bellenden demanded sternly when the horse came to a standstill, quivering in every nerve but conquered by that slight, impassive figure.

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"Lord love ye, sir, no one aint ever used a whip on Touchstone," Greene interposed.

"Do you carry no whip with you into this race?" Bellenden repeated the question twice.

"No-a," the jockey drawled, without turning his head.

"Have you ever raced before?"

"Nigh abaout fifty toimes, mester."

"Fifty times—you young liar! What part of England do you come from?"

"From Yorkshire."

"Do they breed anything else there besides fools?"

"All t' fools 'at coome out o' England baint bred in oor plaice, though theer be soam theer too, soa's when they start out into t' warld they won't feel lonesome-like lackin' coompany."

Bellenden glanced sharply at the stolid face above him to see if there was aught of design in its owner's speech. Save for the persistent flush beneath the heavy coat of tan the countenance was unchanged, dull and spiritless and averted somewhat from his gaze. The boy seemed utterly indifferent; but again there was that nervous twitching on the reins, as if the only life he felt was centred in his finger-tips. Bellenden, smarting with a sense of helpless rage—which included all mankind and especially the jockey before him—and suspicious of, he knew not what, looked angrily at the shaking hands, then with sharpened vision he looked again. Such hands as they were! Small, brown, delicately formed with long slender fingers, flexible and firmly grasping, that bespoke both refinement and force. Hands darker in color, but in shape the same that the

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old painters loved to put into their pictures of high-born dames, and not of stable-boys. He moved nearer, trembling on the brink of discovery.

“By heavens! you shall not ride,” he cried between his closed teeth.

For a moment the jockey's eyes met his, were forced to his by his will and held there as, in a lightning's flash, he read the defiance, the shame, the pleading, in their brown depths. He was more than sure.

“You shall not——”

A hoarse cry went up all over the paddock. The hour had come. Touchstone, quivering like a dog held in leash, pawed the ground impatiently; then, in response to the touch on the reins, he bounded forward and joined the throng.

IX

A LITTLE LAD FROM HOME

Two heats had been run with Touchstone winner of the first, and American Childers of the second; the third and most important was still to run. The best of two out of three heats was to be the winner, provided the said horse was not distanced in the third heat—the distance-post being a furlong beyond the winning-post. Such were the conditions of the race.

Forward they charged in a great bunch; the cry “They’re off!” beating up from the enclosure and echoing on every side. The thunder of many hoofs pounded on the turf, and the different colors—blue, green, red, purple, orange, flashed in the sun like brilliant-hued birds as horses and riders swept by.

The crucial moment had arrived. It was now or never with Touchstone, so Peggy felt, as, quivering with fatigue and excitement, she flew onward with the rest. The blood tingled in her veins; her heart was like a smith’s hammer—thump—thump—thump—Could she do it?—her lips were a line of scarlet—could she do it? One by one the lesser rivals gave way, dropping behind. Pouf! let them go. Vanity stumbled and went down, horse and rider an inextricable mass; but surging past them—unimpeded in their mad rush—Lath, American Childers and Touchstone raced,

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eager for the supremacy. So for a few minutes they ran abreast with never a hair-breadth of advantage to choose among them, then Lath, covered with clots of foam that whitened his knots of blue and silver, wavered perceptibly and fell to the rear. The distance between him and the other two increased momentarily. The beginning of the end was at hand.

The crowd shouted madly as the two horses went thundering past on the long reach of the home-stretch, Touchstone a neck to the fore. The sound was music in the girl's ears, she was drunk with it; her head swayed, her eyes swam. She had outdistanced the field, outdistanced them all, Vanity, Lath, Childers—the others didn't count. She relaxed her vigilance for a moment and lost command of herself, her mouth curving into a smile; content wrapped her round dulling her senses. She had outdistanced the field! The thought beat in her breast, throbbed in her pulses and found vent in the shouts of the onlookers and the dumb echoes in her own heart.

Steadily, surely, the nozzle of the bay crept up past the mottled head of the chestnut, and a whip flashed, like a streak of light, in the blue as the jockey cut at Childers' quivering flank—Peggy could hear it singing—singing— The horse leapt forward, his rider a blur of red and gold, and instantly a roar went up—a great, sickening roar! The air was rent with cheers and hand-clappings, a wild tossing aloft of hats, the flutter of innumerable handkerchiefs, laughter, screams—a tumult of noise.

“Childers! Childers! Childers!”

The course grew dark then before the girl's eyes.

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She could not see the winning-post in the near distance, she could see nothing but the great bay forging unwaveringly ahead, his form looming, like some huge monster, between her and success, blotting out even the sky itself. Her courage flickered. For one moment—it seemed like an eternity—despair touched her. Helpless, beaten, Larry's cause lost, her own name dragged deep in the mire, the scorn and laughter of her cousin—these thoughts passed like wildfire through her mind, the last a lash to rouse her drooping spirits. She would not fail—would not! Her will was iron again. The mist cleared from before her vision.

“Touchstone,” she cried imperiously, “run—run for my sake! run as you've never done before.”

The short, pricked ears were thrown backward for an instant at the sound of the beloved voice sharp with its affection and entreaty, then eyes, ears, nose forward the horse, in response to the command laid upon him, redoubled his energies. She gave him the rein.

“So—so!” she crooned. “Well done, old fellow, well done! Hark! 'tis Peggy speaking—the Crewe colors and victory, lad—the purple for success! It shall not bite the dust.”

She seemed to flash her will along the rein; the thrill of her confident spirit passed into his frame like new life. She touched his neck, where the big veins swelled, with a caressing hand for the fleetest of moments.

“For my sake—for my sake—” she implored.

Steadily, surely, inch by inch they gained on the flying steed in front. Up to him—even—shoulder to shoulder! Peggy sat perfectly motionless, crouched low over the withers of her horse; she knew that

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Touchstone had understood her and was making his last, his best effort. She hardly breathed.

Again there came the swift singing of the whip and the maddened, forward leap of the animal at her side. An instant the advantage was his, then she felt his breath hot upon her cheek as she flew past. On—on—a neck's length ahead, now another, now a full length—on—past the winning-post—past the distance-post—

“Huzza! Huzza! Touchstone wins—Crewe has it—Crewe has it!”

The paddock was a-roar with a mob of shrieking men and boys; she let the reins slip through her fingers at sight of Greene hurrying up. His glowing face, with its expression of mingled ecstasy and reverence, loomed large and almost comical to her through the mist that seemed to envelop earth and sky. The game was not yet played out, but she was so tired—she must have a care!—he had no right to look so—so—abjectly humble—he seemed to forget, she told herself querulously. And everything was racing past; as if men and boys and horses were engaged in some vast trial of speed. Her hands shook, twitching at the reins and Touchstone swerved sharply to one side; as sure-footed, usually, as the antelope in rocky defiles, he stumbled over a fallen log that lay in his path and unseated the jockey already trembling in the saddle. The horse was on his feet in a trice, but the rider lay motionless.

Greene was at the bridle almost instantly with reassuring words to soothe the frightened, high-strung animal, while the surging crowd, that a minute before

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had been crowding around the victors, fell back; each man actuated by a deep respect for Touchstone's heels. Larry, who had been hurrying up to congratulate his successful jockey, had witnessed the scene from a short distance and stood transfixed with horror to the spot; his face blanched to a ghastly hue.

"My God!" he cried in shaking syllables.

"Have a care, you don't want the world to know." The whisper steadied him. "Come on," Bellenden commanded.

The next minute the two men were bending over the prostrate form and the crowd, appeased by the sight of Touchstone being led away, pressed close upon them.

"My God! Jack," Larry cried tremulously, "she's dead."

"Be still, or spoil all for a fool! She's not dead, she's swooned—that's all," Bellenden answered between his teeth. "We must get her away from this. Damn those curs for their curiosity, the game's up! Give back, gentlemen," he called authoritatively, "the boy is coming to."

He raised the limp figure partially in his arms as he spoke, intercepting his own form between it and the onlookers. The dark eyes flew open.

"Well done, Diccory, well done, boy! 'Twill be a proud day at home when they hear how the little lad rode to victory."

His bluff voice steadied her, and the expression of his face warned her to keep guard over herself. She had a dim perception of a sea of people staring at her over his shoulder.

"Oh!—mester—Jack—" It was only a whisper, but

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it convinced him that she still had control of the situation.

“Are you hurt much, lad?”

“Nowt but a stiff arm, I’m thinkin’. Is that Mester Larry? Doan’t be a fool, sir, I bain’t killed,” the voice was weak, but it carried. “Larry,” she went on viciously, though so low that only her brother and cousin heard, “if you look like that I’ll—I’ll—I don’t know what I’ll do—scream, or play the woman to my undoing.”

“Naught but a sprained arm, Dick lad,” Bellenden continued in a loud, cheerful tone, “come, come, the pain will soon be over. Has any gentleman a chaise we can hire,” he called over his shoulder, “so we can get the boy back to town and have his bruises dressed?”

Several proffers were made, and, at the same time, a case bottle of rum was passed from hand to hand until it reached Bellenden. He took it gratefully.

“Take a pull at this, lad,” he said, stooping down.

She turned her head close against his arm, mutiny in her eyes.

“Drink it,” he commanded sternly, and held the flask to her lips until she was forced to swallow some of its contents, then she took refuge once more against his sleeve.

“So, that’s good. Now the question is, can you walk? Or stay, I’d best carry you; ’tis but a step. What? Rather walk—eh? Well, try your mettle then.”

He lifted her gently to her feet, but he did not let her stand alone, and she was glad enough to feel the support of his arm around her shoulders as they moved

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slowly off, with Larry walking close on her other side and part of the crowd following curiously. After a few steps she murmured something and Bellenden stooped to catch the words.

“Is my wig straight?”

“It’s all awry, but no one will mark that. Best put your head closer against my arm to make sure. That’s right! Keep up courage, Diccon boy.”

As they neared the chaise he saw, by the moving of her lips, that she wished to say something further. He bent again.

“Larry’s such a fool! and I—I can’t think—you must decide for us,” the proud eyes were persistently lowered. “The cottage here is out of the question, my woman’s as true as steel, but Mrs. Masher—the house-keeper—clatters outrageously. I can’t go home—you know—my mother, and besides the servants would talk. And the doctor—not Evans, remember! he’s such a gossip, and Dr. Bard’s as bad—he’d tell for the sake of the jest. I won’t go home. Oh! help me, do.”

He felt the blood quicken in his veins. She was suing to him, in her weakness it was true, but he knew that she felt there was no one on whose presence of mind she would so readily rely. He kept his voice steady.

“Don’t worry, but trust me,” he said reassuringly, and a sudden thrill of elation passed through him as she submitted, without a further word, to his will.

The confidence of a creature like that was something to win—and the love? He put the thought by for a less strenuous hour. His wits must serve her now. Then the remembrance of Domine Ryerssen’s placid

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home came unevoked to his mind. The little gate, that had swung open so many times of late, should afford her entrance in this extremity and Annetje would be there to minister to her needs. It was a safe asylum well removed from the gossip of the fashionable world, and he was sure it would not be denied to them. Their course was crystal clear.

With Larry's aid he lifted the girl into the carriage and busied himself with efforts to make her comfortable. Her eyes were still lowered, but the quick flush that mounted to her face at his touch was like a little light to show him her awakening consciousness of the changed relations between them.

She glanced up momentarily as her brother took his place by her side, glanced beyond him to Bellenden standing without, whispering some final instructions.

"You—" her voice was very faint.

"I'll be waiting for you at the end of your journey. Keep up courage."

Her eyes fell before the look in his; she made a little clutch for her waning sovereignty.

"And mamma?" she murmured.

"Drive on, Larry," Bellenden said shortly.

X

A FRIENDLY ASYLUM

What Cotton Mather called "the angelical conjunction" of piety and physic was occasionally found in the person of the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, and though New York, at this period, was said to boast the honor of above forty gentlemen of the medical faculty (many of them being set down as mere pretenders to a profession of which they were entirely ignorant), Domine Ryerssen had often been called upon to assist his parishioners in other than their spiritual needs. The law protecting the community from irregular practitioners—quacks and charlatans, who abounded like the locusts in Egypt—had not yet come into being, but even had it been in force the domine would not have been restricted from practising. He would easily have passed the examination to which, a few years later, the candidates were subjected to prove their learning and skill in physic or surgery, as in his youth he had studied medicine, considering it a necessary supplement to his theological career, especially in the new world whither he was bound.

As a younger man he had found this knowledge invaluable particularly among the poor of his own tongue, who could not meet the fees of the established physicians, and the needy of other nationalities whom dis-

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tress brought to his door. That his skill was not deemed insufficient it is enough to say that Dr. Van Buren always spoke of him in terms of the highest consideration, an opinion which Dr. Du Bois shared also; nor would those gentlemen have felt it beneath their dignity to act in conjunction with him had occasion demanded. Their sphere of usefulness, however, was not encroached upon by his humbler efforts. As he said of himself he only helped when better and wiser men were busy elsewhere; when they took the helm he slipped quietly back to his books. Of those other, and poorer, sufferers whose thanks were the only payment offered to him—whether they were few, or many, the outside world did not know. But the Garden Street church had this to say of him, that the summer of his wife's death there was no more tireless physician in the length and breadth of the town; despite the grief that lay black upon his own hearthstone he carried comfort into many households, the comfort of religion and the alleviation of physical pain. Of late years it was only in the capacity of minister that he visited his parishioners, his age exempted him from other demands; though they knew that, in times of great stress, he would be ready to serve them again.

Jack Bellenden's one thought in sending Peggy to the parsonage had been that it would prove a safe hiding-place for her, until she could return to her own home without awakening the suspicions of her friends and acquaintances. He had expected to find some physician to attend her there, but as he galloped down the Broadway the remembrance of the old domine's medical ability flashed through his mind. The whole mat-

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ter seemed instantly simplified as by a providential intervention, and the danger he dreaded might therefore be averted. He was not sure that the girl's disguise had passed muster everywhere; Larry's barely concealed anxiety was a damaging factor and if it should creep out through the doctor's gossip, or be known that she was in hiding, or had returned to her mother's house so shortly after her departure for Albany, the whole town would be agog with her mad prank. It had been worse than mad. She had carried her design to a successful issue, but it had been at fearful risks.

Bellenden bit his lips as he passed in mental review his own feelings when the race was on. He had been sick with suspense from start to finish. It had meant nothing to him whether he should lose, or win the money he had on Touchstone; he would willingly have lost a hundred fortunes had they been his to prevent Peggy from riding. When the horses had streaked by, though the crowd saw but an indifferent-looking jockey on Crewe's mount, he was able to penetrate through the disguise; the tanned face, under the purple cap and the coarse shock of hair, which the spectators greeted with deafening cheers, was an arch, sparkling one to him. And a misstep on Touchstone's part, a swerve aside, would reduce that beauty to nothingness. His rider would be crushed, killed, perhaps, in the stampede of rushing horses, or maimed so cruelly that her stay in the world which she loved so keenly would be a mockery and a constant pain. It was a girl's life held swaying in the balance—a little, soft life, something to be protected—cherished—and yet it was placed on the

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mercy of a hazard with no thought of its great value. Above the roar of the crowd he could hear the sound of her merry voice ringing in his ears, now twitting him, now singing, now flouting him, and any moment it might be silenced forever!

He hardly heeded the fact when the Crewe colors were victorious; victory, or defeat, meant nothing to him; he only desired her safety. While the others shouted frantically around him he remained silent, stilled, by gratitude, into the momentary mood of prayer. Then he hurried to the paddock to guard her from the enthusiasm of the crowd; he doubted her power to meet it in the right spirit without exposing her sex and he had been just in time to save her, though in a different fashion from what he had purposed. Larry, reduced to shuddering uselessness, had been the most ineffectual shield between her and the gaping public, but *he* had been able to protect her from carping tongues. He had held calumny, reproach, and ridicule at bay, and he had no intention of relaxing his hold.

Almost within sight of the parsonage Bellenden reined in his horse, perplexed by a new difficulty. He had sufficient acquaintance with Cornelis Ryerssen's character to know that any hospitality accorded to Peggy would be granted solely on his account and not for her sake, or because of her graces—winning and irresistible though other men found them. The pseudo-jockey would meet with scant favor from the old man, who reprobated horse-racing and betting with the sternest invectives; nor would the rigid moralist find any excuse for the girl's disregard of her sex—that would be unpardonable to him. These thoughts

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took but a moment to pass through the captain's mind, but they were powerful enough to make him change his plan. He would save Peggy, at least, from the domine's scorn. It was marvellous, indeed, this sudden wish on his part to serve his cousin so scrupulously that the good, or bad, opinion of an old man, utterly unknown to her and at whom she would probably laugh when once she had recovered, should be of such consequence to him. He cantered on through several by-ways until he reached the unfrequented lane where he had arranged to meet the others, revising his plans as he rode. Annetje, so he determined, should help him with her woman's wit. It would not be necessary to tell the domine anything about the race, for Peggy's sufferings would be sufficient to enlist his attentions in her behalf and Annetje could probably so manage that the obnoxious jockey suit should not offend his eye.

Bellenden dismounted and secured his horse to the old gate, then he let himself into the lush grass and advanced cautiously, whistling those soft, sweet notes which always heralded his coming. He waited several moments in the hush that seemed to spread everywhere before he repeated the signal; waited again, whistled again—with impatience sharpening his call. Then he dragged out his watch and consulted it feverishly. In a short time, at most, his cousins would be at the place of rendezvous and should he fail Peggy in this instance he did not see his way to help her further. And she trusted him! Eyes, voice, manner had told him that much. He could not fail her; besides, she was probably suffering from lack of proper attention to her hurt—poor, little brave Peggy—proud and strong

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in her very weakness! The thought made him rage the more at his incompetency.

He must help her. Again he whistled, this time shriller and with greater insistence, yet he dared not delay longer. The fact that Annetje did not come proved that she was absent and the only thing left for him was to go boldly to the front door, confront the grim portress who kept watch and ward there and lay the matter before the domine without reserve. But if he were not at home, and with Annetje away also, Peggy's chances for succor in this place were vain. There was little to hope for from the tender mercies of Heilke. Bellenden ground his teeth, gave a quick, backward look at the lane then turned to make his way up through the garden to the house. As he did so, there was a faint rustle in the grass, a sound of hurrying steps, and Annetje came running toward him. He gave an eager cry of welcome that sent the red up to her soft, fair hair and made her eyes dance with delight; her heart misinterpreting the gladness and relief in his face. He sprang to meet her half-way, catching her hands in his and drawing her quickly to him.

"I thought you would never come."

"Great haste I mate, oh! yes. Apofe I vas in my champer sewing, ant Heilke vas vis me, so t'at I knew not how to come. Like a cat she vatch me efer."

"What did the little mouse do?"

"I—how to you say?—I mate one sacrifice of t'e trut'—most wrong vas t'at, visout toubt."

"A little white lie, child. Let it go. You ought to put Heilke to sleep these afternoons."

"Sir, unpossiple is t'at! Of herself, she say, vis one

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eye open she always sleeps, ant t'at is most true. If she put nots ofer her knitting, creak! t'e poarts go, ant in one moment is she avake. Ant her neetles stop not—no once—click—click—click—forefer! I sait,” his face was turned from her and, despite the joy manifested in his voice, she thought that he was displeased with her, “I sait ‘Heilke vill you for me a favor to? Some rippon must I haf to bint t'e slippers for my fat'er ant t'at v'ich I pought have I lost, eferyv'ere I seek for it in vain. Go you, tear Heilke, ant puy me some ot'er.’ Ant she say ‘no,’ at first, ant t'en she vill haf it t'at I also go, put I tell her my headt it aches—ant it aches not, sir—I sait t'at pecause—oh! pecause— In t'e ent Heilke vent, put so long she took to get reaty ant I helping her—Gracious Powers!—I t'ought you wouldt go away. Vait, t'at is not all.”

She freed one hand from his hold and drew a little roll from her bodice and shook it out before his eyes; the dark strip of silk uncurled and fell to the ground, waving lightly to and fro with the movement of her fingers.

“Peholt t'e rippon! I—I—hit it.”

“Bravo strategy!” He caught her hand again and patted it softly; he would have kissed it but for his preoccupation. “So that's your trouble—I grant you absolution. Is the sky clear now, little one?”

“If you say so.”

“If I— Faith, I've a trouble of my own that none but you can straighten out. Listen.” He poured forth his story rapidly, watching her intently the meanwhile so as not to outdistance her understanding. Her eyes shone. Peggy riding to save her brother in his trouble

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was a magnificent creature, her daring atoned for everything. And hurt? The fair face grew tender on the moment. The rapid voice went on persuasive, masterful, explanatory; she was like wax to take the impression he wished.

“Put of course, sir, Captain Pellenten—my fat'er vill glatness haf to serfe you ant your cousin also. I speak for him. T'e half of v'at I haf is hers for always—” She paused visibly distressed.

“What is it, child?”

“T'ose fine laties—oh! you ton't know—t'ey look at one ofer t'eir noses t'is vay. Ant t'e plood purns! I—I vouldt like not t'at treatment, not efen from your cousin.”

“Gad, you needn't fear Peggy.” The confident voice faltered. How could he or any man predict what Peggy would, or would not, do? Far easier was it to forecast the uncertain glory of an April day from dawn to dusk, than to account for her wayward moods in an hour's space. He hastened on.

“You will be kind to her because I ask it? Just at first she may be—may be—ahem!—a little—She has been under great excitement to-day, and her fall has injured her probably,” he finished lamely.

“I know. I vill pe goot to her—so goot like a sister efen—you vill like t'at? Is she fery peautiful?”

“Not so beautiful as someone I know.”

“Put you—you—lof her maype?” It was the merest whisper.

“She has given me scant cause, egad. I don't stand very high in my lady's good books, let me tell you. Hark! here comes the chaise. I have your word.”

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"Yes, yes, I vill help you ant I vill keep secret here v'at you haf sait—you may trust me. T'e all t'at I haf is lait at her feet, because you ask it."

He let her hand go with a slight pressure and hurried to meet the advancing carriage, running up to its side with an anxious question as it stopped. Larry sprang out quickly and, with Bellenden's aid, helped the young jockey to alight. Annetje's heart beat tumultuously at the sound of a querulous voice; then as the two men, with the boy between them, came slowly through the gate she took a step forward to meet them. She paused in her errand of mercy half-frightened at the low whistle of surprise that Larry let fall, the color mounting in her face under his bold stare.

"Sink me, Jack, but she's a beauty!"

The weary little jockey stopped short at her brother's whispered ejaculation and looked up to see the girl standing a trifle removed from them in the glow of the afternoon sunlight, with the tangle of green bushes and spreading trees that cut the sky into blue fragments above and behind her. The dark eyes, heavy with pain, flashed ominously.

"Is this your doctor, Captain Bellenden?"

"The doctor's daughter and your nurse, madam."

His voice was not conciliatory and before the sternness in his face the passion in hers abated somewhat.

"I protest I will go home."

"That you cannot do; you must abide by my decision. Besides," he spoke more gently, "you said you would trust me, and these friends of mine are very willing to help you——"

"Friends!" She shrugged scornfully away from his

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supporting arm and took a step forward, making an imperious gesture to the girl. Annetje advanced to meet her shyly and dropped a stiff, frightened little curtsey.

“What is your name, child?” asked Beauty in her most disdainful tones, totally unmindful of the incongruity between her attire and her assumption of town airs.”

“Annetje.”

“Bless us! it sounds like a sneeze. I shall have to sit in a draught before I can catch it. Well, madam, it seems that, willy-nilly, I am forced to accept your hospitality for this night.”

“For t’is night, or for so long as it may unto you pe a pleasure. I make you fery velcome to my home, ant my heart likevise. V’at I haf is yours——”

“Faith, then, I’d like a petticoat immejately. I’d not care to meet your father in this guise. Larry stop gaping. This is my brother, Miss— I told you I couldn’t say it!—he’s like the rest of his sex, forgetful of his manners when Beauty is abroad. But la! you know the captain, so why should I excuse his fellows? Must I sneeze also when I address your father and mother?”

“Domine Ryerssen is my fat’er calledt, Miss Crewe. To say t’at is not hart, ant I haf not any mot’er. Since I vas a little chilt is she teadt; not’ing of her I know only v’at Heilke ant Jan haf tolt me—put she vas of a peauty like a flower ant goot!—oh! one of t’e antgels of Kott. V’at I know of her vill I tell you one tay, if it is your pleasure to hear. Put now you must not tarry—great pain visout toubt is yours. Captain Pel-

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lenten has tolt me apout t'e nopleness of your toing—ant how grant t'e rite! My headt it goes t'is vay vis t'e t'ought. Ant you hat not any fear? For me t'e shoutings ant t'e peoples—t'ey wouldt haf mate me like one crrazy. See, now you suffer—fery v'ite are your lips—Gentlemens, help me I pray——”

“Just gidddy, I protest, and your bushes dance——”

“T'at is right. Oh! fery careful carry her, tear sirs, ant step soft. My fat'er is in his pook-room put I vish not t'at he hear us, for first vill I make her look—tiffer-ent—like herself, you unterstant. He is—how you say?—t'e soul of trut'—he is trut' in t'e poty—t'at is it!—ant it wouldt pain him to know your sister hat a lie actet efen for you, Mr. Crewe. I t'ink he wouldt not pe toleratet of t'e same. So everyt'ing in my power vill I for Miss Crewe to ant t'en vill ve call him. T'ank Kott! Heilke is from home—a long, long hour vill it take her, she has efer a voman's eye ant a voman's heart for a pargain. Ah! gentlemens, t'e step—t'at is it—ant now t'e stairs. Hush! hush! t'is vay to my champer—I vill go pefore. Put her gently on t'e bet town—so, yes—now t'e toor close. V'en reaty I vill call.”

XI

THE IMMEDIATE JEWEL OF HER SOUL

It was with the frankest manner imaginable that Captain Bellenden presented himself at the study-door and told his simple story. Miss Crewe had been thrown from her horse and he had taken the liberty of bringing her to the domine for aid, her mother being from home and the town-house closed. Her brother—here Larry stepped forward—was prostrated with alarm and had looked to him for guidance in the matter. And his thought had been the domine and Miss Ryerssen. He had felt sure of their assistance and already Miss Ryerssen was doing the work of an angel—she had taken his cousin to her room and her care.

The old man's face brightened—the little one was a woman and mercy dwelt with her. He rose hurriedly to his feet.

“Put yes, my serfices are yours, of course. Propably no cause is t'ere for alarm, young sir. I vill see. Holt yourself firm ant apprehent no tanger.”

He left them then to their own devices and their not unjustifiable fears; after the lapse of an hour, which to each of them seemed double its length, he returned. The young men sprang forward eagerly.

“So—so—she vill not tie—a proken arm only! Fearfully ant vonterfully are ve mate, says t'e Holy

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Pook, fearfully ant vonterfully! Put a proken arm is easier to recofer from t'an a proken heart—for t'e one t'ere is not any cure. Your sister is to pe congratulatet, sir, at t'is time."

"Faith, sir, for all time. You don't know Peggy," the boy laughed unsteadily. "Her heart's not the sort to be broke. And as to that, whose is? 'Tis but a phrase."

"A phrase?—Hmm!—perhaps—nowatays. Vell, she vill recofer, t'ere is no toubt. For t'e present, howefer, she is veak like a little chilt ant t'ere is some fefer pesites. Haf no fear! A cooling traught I haf gifen her ant soon she sleeps. No—no—she must not pe tisturpt now. Your anxiety is most natural, sir; I comprehent it, put you must tepent on me. T'ere is not any tanger—not any. My taughter to your sister is so like a sister, she vill care for her ant likewise vill I—I promise you. Alreaty in t'e morning vill t'ere pe great improfements, put for many tays—veeks maype—quite useless is t'e arm. Nature must take her own time, ve cannot hurry her."

"And I may come?"

"V'en you vill; my house is yours v'ilst your sister continues here. Ve are not of your peoples, sir; ve speak not t'e same tongue, t'ink not t'e same t'oughts—for you t'ere is stir ant fashion, for us quiet—quiet—Our vays are not your vays; put t'e same Kott mate us ant you are fery velcome to v'at I can gif."

"Then I will take my leave now, sir, and return hither in the morning. Faith, words are but words after all," the young fellow went on brokenly, "ill

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things at best to pay one's debts with, but I thank you heartily. You've done more for my sister than I can tell you, you've saved——”

“ 'Tis even as my cousin says,” Bellenden interrupted quickly, for Larry vibrating with the sudden relief that had come to his anxiety was clearly not to be trusted to voice his gratitude——“ what we feel deepest can find small vent in our speech. Still we thank you, though the comfort you give us can't be put into words. 'Twas enough to make a man's blood run cold to see the girl pitch headlong—we knew not what to think! And now to know the truth, to feel that she will be abroad again, singing, laughing, alive, unhurt— 'Tis too much——”

“ Ah!” The domine glanced up at the shaken face, then with an impulse foreign to his slow, undemonstrative nature he put out his hand and touched the captain's arm.

“ I unterstant,” he said simply. “ Comfort yourself! For her sake—t'at young girl's—I vill to my pest, ant for your sake, ant for t'e sake of one whom you once knew, yes, I vill to my possiple. Not any vort of t'anks. Sir, I am a human man put here to to my tuty. My tuty—v'at is it? I know a little medicine—goot! t'at knowletge is not for myself alone; I know a little t'eology—goot! t'at is not for me alone eit'er. V'ere I can serfe I must serfe, ot'ervise I am ontrue to a trust. Ant v'ere I can serfe one who not only is in neet, put who has my respect ant has tone me great serfice in t'e past, t'en it is I—Cornelis Ryerssen—t'at am t'e grateful one. T'ank me not any t'anks, t'erefore. Come again in t'e morning—you ant you—per-

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haps you see t'e little mait ; I to not promise, only perhaps."

He accompanied his guests to the door and watched them for a moment as they stepped out into the street, unusual figures for that part of town, the captain in his brilliant uniform, and the young fop in fashionable attire. A window-curtain across the way stirred faintly and then was drawn back by a frankly curious hand, but the domine, being short of sight, did not perceive the action. His mind was more busy with the past than with thoughts of his neighbors, or even with the stranger within his gates and what the possible outcome of her stay might be. As he had said he was here to do his duty. After a little he went within and closed the door.

Meanwhile the cousins walked away, the younger man hanging upon the elder's arm. For the moment they were silent, then Larry's tongue began to wag.

"You're a sly dog, Jack, and she's a beauty, with an ankle fit to be a toast! Sink me, if I've seen her equal anywhere. Peggy can't hold a candle to her, and Peggy has looks, or the town lies. Gad, I couldn't tell when she was most distracting—when she looked at a man and fired him with her glance, or when she cast her eyes down and her lashes lay like a heavy, silken fringe upon her cheeks. And such divine red and white! But she aint so unsophisticated after all—she was painted by God!——"

"And by God alone, where's your discrimination? She's none of your fine ladies with their paints and powders. Come, come, a simple, little lass."

"A Venus, sir," Larry cried striking an attitude, "a

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Venus—or stay—what did they call that other? Hmm! the *Post-Boy* had lines t'other day— The charms of He—faith, I'll swear they meant She—the charms of He—He—Hebe—Hebe—that's it!

'The tender charms of Hebe fair
The roseate flesh, the sunny hair.'

Whoever writ that must have seen the domine's daughter, but the domine— Lud! she didn't get her looks from her sire. Where are you taking me, Jack? I protest, this is a world of your discovering— 'Tis all new to me and a Paradise to boot. What fresh surprises have you in store—what other beauties? Where are we going?"

"We are going after our horses and thence to the Province Arms, or where you will so that it be back to our world where they are talking of Touchstone's victory and wondering why you've gone to so much pother about a mere groom."

"'Slife! I'd clean forgot. We must throw 'em off the scent, man; swear black's white if need be. They mustn't dream 'twas Peggy."

"You were a fool to let her ride."

"A fool!" The young fellow came to a standstill and withdrew his hand from his companion's arm. "Captain Bellenden, I take such words from no man! Our relationship does not protect you, sir——"

"I don't fight with boys; you needn't finger your sword. Your sister's name has got to be saved from scandal—it shall not be the jest of every low-mouthed cur in the taverns and the slur of every sleek Tabby over her dish of tea. Whether you like it, sir, or not,

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I say you were a fool to let her ride. The risks were too great."

"Didn't I point 'em out to her?" Larry interrupted hotly, "I'm not a child. I counted the costs beforehand, I did everything in my power to withhold her, and in the end she had her own way. You might stop the river there from running to the sea by building a dam of feathers, easier than you could stop Peggy once she'd started out to do any thing. But see what we've gained, man. Isn't that worth the risk?"

"She might have been killed."

"Might have been, but wasn't. Might have beens are as useless to think on as the shadows on the grass. Touchstone might have been beaten, but he wasn't—and that means some pretty chinking yellow-pieces to me. When I've got 'em I aint going to think of what I'd been doing if he hadn't won the run. Time enough to cry over spilt milk when the pitcher's broke and the ground's wet; but when you can drink your fill—though not of milk, thank you!—it doesn't sweeten the draught to bother yourself with possibilities. I've got a pretty turn for philosophy in my make up, even if I am called a fool and I've thought considerable, sir, considerable—the brains of the family are happily not confined to but one branch. Come, let's go drown worry in a bumper and drink to this day's luck."

"Where's your proper feeling for your sister's sufferings, you young brute?"

"Have a care, Captain Bellenden! I don't want to fight you, for you've done us a pretty service this day and I and my sister are beholden to you thus far; but I swear I'll be called names by no man, no matter what

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he has done for me and mine. Pesites," Larry drew his mouth down and mimicked the domine, "she von't tie—it's only a proken arm."

"You——"

"A proken arm ant pruises perhaps. Egad, Peggy was willing to pay the piper though I warned her at the outset. So she gets well—and the old fellow said there was no such great ill—it has turned out for the best. If she had not fallen, the crowd would have got her off the horse and carried her about the course on their shoulders——"

"And you would have subjected her to that?"

"On my word I never thought of it, nor did she; yet 'tis ever a custom here, the crowd goes mad over the lucky jockey. It came upon me, on a sudden, when Touchstone ran past the distance-post and I meant to save her from it if I could and then—oh! Jack, Jack—I thought she was killed——" He drew a long, shuddering breath. "Well, it's only a broken arm," he laughed unsteadily after a moment.

"I thought to see her neck smashed, her beauty gone. Discovery seemed inevitable to me."

"How did you know her?"

"I guessed."

"Slife! then if you did, the others might——"

"That's the point, but I don't know. I was near her before the start and something about her hands—so little, so unlike a boy's—set me thinking and then I knew."

"Gad, Jack, my mother and the rest—it was a fearful risk! It means—what? Peggy would laugh, but if the town knew she'd be praised for her pluck and

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victory, but oh! the lampoons and the scurrilous verse that would be writ about her. A woman has no right to forget she's a woman—that's what they'd say—to go breeched like a boy in a public sport. Were she not Peggy I'd be quick to sneer at such doing, and so would you. We'd think it deuced brave in a girl, but we'd hold her light ever after—as light as we hold those others. Jack you're right, I was a fool—a damned fool—to let her ride, when I was older than she and knew the world. She's a very madcap with no thought beyond the hour and she felt she'd much at stake—not money, I don't think she'd a shilling on—but she thought of me and my debts and the daring of the thing carried her away— She did it for my sake! I couldn't stop her. Perhaps I didn't try hard enough, but I swear I'd lose every stiver of what Touchstone has brought me this day to undo what has been done."

"We must be wary now, that's all there's left to us. Wrap your secret up in frankness, but have a care what information you give about your groom; too much openness—when 'tis a mask—is as damaging as secretiveness, best take the middle course. Your mother's ignorance is a good card, one groom is like another to her. Sandy disabled, she would think it but natural that you would put another jockey up and servants are so continually coming out to you from home that she wouldn't question the advent of this fellow. Where she goes there will be no likelihood of suspicion. It's among the men where it will crop up first and Peggy's name—her good name— We mustn't quarrel, Larry boy, my sword's to be kept bright for her cause."

"Faith, I was an addle-pated fellow to doubt you, and

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here's my hand. But where are we going—to the world's end? And you know time's gold. Why didn't we go back through the garden instead of coming all this way round?"

Bellenden laughed shortly.

"The domine never questioned how we came, and 'tis no wisdom to tell more than you're asked."

"You mean the gate's unused? But how the deuce did you know about it to give us the directions so clearly? I marvelled at the time—you, who have been in town so short time. How? And he has great respect for you—oh! lud, lud—won't Peggy laugh to hear this? Well, you're a man of taste, sir—egad, a man of taste! I never doubted it, but selfishness is a deadly vice. I took you here and there, made you acquainted with this Beauty and t'other, and here you've kept the queen of 'em all to yourself. How did you compass it? What was the service you rendered his fustiness the domine?"

"He chooses to magnify the deed. A packet was entrusted to my care at Barbadoes which I promised to place in his hands. Now you know the truth, though I see no reason why you should be enlightened. He gave me the hospitality of his house in consequence. As for the gate—'tis apparent to anyone who walks in the lower part of the garden and to-day it has served us well. Said I not true that the lane is unfrequented. I doubt if it is ever travelled."

They had turned into the grass-grown alley as he spoke. It was a narrow strip of land bounded on one side by Domine Ryerssen's garden whence it dipped and straggled away, losing itself at the far end in a

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tangle of bushes and quagmire. The whole place had a deserted, inhospitable air, though the green of summer clothed it with a lavish hand, spreading her mantle upon ground, and shrubs, and arching trees. Little wayside flowers peered curiously from the rank grass, or glanced—with inquisitive faces—from the thicket beyond, and somewhere an unseen thrush tinkled out its vesper hymn. The silence was unbroken, save by that sound and by the restless pawing of the captain's horse where he fretted at his restraint near the gate. The horse in the shafts, being of a philosophic turn of mind and finding the weeds to his taste, had long since given over any signs of rebellion.

The day had worn to its close and in the primrose-colored west Hesperus, like some rare, jewelled lamp, hung low; the air was cool as it crept up from the bay with a trace of the ocean in its breath, bringing its savor of strength into the little, neglected lane where peace and safety lay as securely as though the hand of man had builded high walls to keep all danger without.

"I'm for the Province Arms," Bellenden cried. "Join me there over a bottle of Madeira?"

"With all my heart, after I've seen about the disposal of this chaise. It belongs to one Mr. Josiah Storrs of Fair Street and I promised to deliver it in good case. I'll drive home now and get one of the boys to take it back. I'll be with you in half an hour."

"Good, then. I'll wait, but hasten if you love me."

Bellenden rode forward almost noiselessly, the grasses bending down before his horse's tread and

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keeping the secret of his passing to themselves on this, as on many another, occasion. The chaise lumbered after, lurching over the uneven ground and creaking in protest, as the philosophic horse set about obeying his borrowed master's will with an alacrity which the thought of his evening meal might have accounted for, or which might have been the result of the lash that sung its message in his ears and spelled it on his back.

The lane was quiet after a moment ; the sharp cry of the whip, the revolutions of the wheels and the straining of the carriage gear were sounds forgotten speedily by the little spot. Nor did it notice those other sounds that were part and parcel of its being. A bird, whirring up from the thicket, was no disturber of its peace, though the swift wings clove the air with a strident rush, and a squirrel, scurrying through the underbrush where twigs and leaves made instant comment on its going, seemed shod with silence. One by one, and then in a swelling chorus, all those little, innumerable noises, that, paradoxically, make the hush of a summer night more complete, began to thrill the stillness.

From far away a whippoorwill uttered its melancholy note and suddenly, near at hand in Domine Ryerssen's garden, there was a stir among the clump of bushes just beyond the old gate. A scamper of tiny feet told of fright among those little brothers of the ground, and the feeble cries of half-awakened birds seeking a securer haven heralded some instant danger. The hardy, leaf-laden branches of the laburnums were bent back and, from their shelter, eyes that belonged to neither beast, nor bird, glanced keenly around. Af-

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ter a moment, with no trace of caution in his bearing, a man stepped out into the softly gleaming dusk. He stood quite still looking up and down the little lane that men said led nowhither then, in his turn, he left it to its dreams.

XII

AN ONLY CHILD

When three and twenty years before Mevrouw de Hooge was delivered of a man-child, her first question was not an unusual one. In that respect she did not differ from the average woman in a similar situation.

Tryntje Jansen hesitated. During her career of "sworn and approved midwife" which had lasted a good score of years, she had become familiar with the words and had never been at a loss for an answer before. Invariably her own syllables were those of affirmation—whatever the real truth might be—and, with the loquacity of her profession, she would draw comparisons between the tiny features before her and those larger ones of the sire in question until the mother, lulled by her soothing garrulity, would sink into profound slumber. If Tryntje had a conscience—and one doubts it—she silenced it with the assurance that babies change and if, by the time the mother was up and about, the desired resemblance had faded, *she* could not be held accountable for the vagaries of nature. On this occasion, however, doubt assailed her and a furtive glance at the determined face among the high pillows further convinced her that she must be wary in her speech.

"Does he favor his father?"

Tryntje gasped. Should she say, as only the month

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before she had said to the wife of Councillor Wendell, "Never have these eyes of mine beheld such a resemblance. After this very fashion must your worthy husband have looked when he first came into this world of storms and sighs"? Before she had finished her asseverations the little lady, settling down among the pillows with a murmur of satisfaction, had fallen asleep. The sentences had worked like a charm. Should she use them again?

"Does he favor his father?"

The voice had grown sharper, not fainter; there was a pucker, but not of pain, between the heavy eyebrows that dominated the large, shapely nose. The perturbed midwife glanced at the resolute features, at the haughty, imperious eyes turned questioningly upon her, then her look strayed to the little atom of humanity in her arms. The tiny, red face offered no solution to the dilemma, though on the instant the old woman recalled the anxious countenance Mynheer de Hooge had turned upon her only that morning in the passage-way without, where he had waited since dawn a prey to not unnatural fears, the usual shiny pink of his full moon face deepened to an almost cardinal hue and his uncertain mouth tremulous with excitement. Poor gentleman! great drops of moisture had stood out like beads upon his brow over which his wig was set at a rakish angle and his blue eyes—mere slits like a pig's—had shone but dimly through the water which filled them. Poor gentleman! nervous over this his first born coming after a period of ten years' married life, this heir to the ships, and lands, and money of the great merchant De Hooge. There was a resemblance—un-

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doubtedly! She opened her mouth to speak the words which had gladdened so many women's hearts and then before she knew it, and for no discoverable reason, she altered the formula.

"I cannot say," she faltered, feeling her way cautiously, "the light is so dim—hush thee, my lamb-kin!—But a fine bit of flesh and blood, and a man-child, mevrouw."

"I wouldn't have had a woman-child," snapped the voice from the bed. "I've no patience with women and blind ones especially are not to my taste. If I'd known, Tryntje Jansen, that your eyes were failing you I would have had Lysbert Riemer to help me in this hour——"

"That old maid!—what does she know about bringing children into the world? And blind? Who says I'm blind? This very moment from where I stand I can see Mevrouw Opdyck across the street all agog to discover if the cushion on your knocker is blue, or white. There's sight for you!"

"It's blue, I never had any doubts in my mind about the color, and all of hers have been white—poor thing! How many times, Tryntje?"

"Eleven. Eleven girls—God save us! Three to oncet once, two to oncet twice, and one to oncet all the other times."

"I could almost find it in my heart to forgive her her peevish, meddling tongue since the Lord hath afflicted her so grievously."

"Well, well, mevrouw, that is as it is. Doubtless a great affliction, who shall say? If they all comb St. Catharine's hair then the world is no better for the trouble of bringing them into it, even if they live to the

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age of Methusalamus. But if, in His mercy and disposition, He hath husbands for them all, though eleven for one family would be hard to seek even for Providence!—then they may do their share for the next generation—who knows? But sigh! I can see the very expression of her face, and you can be sure if she knew I was watching her she'd not show her feelings so plainly, and green with envy has it become. What will it be when this precious babekin takes the air for the first time? A proper child as you could wish to see—none properer—and beautiful as the summer's sun——”

“Then Heaven be praised, he bears no resemblance to his father!”

“Not for a moment, mevrouw; he is like you and like your late-lamented father. Such a resemblance these eyes of mine have never beheld—never—never—It is wonderful. Your nose in little, and your eyes, and the commandingful turn to his very chin—like yours at this blessed minute—and pale even like you—but that will mend with both mother and child. And now to sleep, dear lady, to sleep. But stay, will you have any speech with your husband? He is without——”

“’Twas he then, fiddling with that knob—I might have known as much. Yes, yes, call him in. If you don't he'll wait there till midnight. But remember, it's only for a moment.”

Tryntje raised her voice authoritatively, and in answer to the summons the door was pushed open cautiously inch by inch, until the aperture was wide enough to admit the appearance of a head which was with-

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drawn immediately, only to be thrust forward again after an instant's absence. This performance was repeated several times, the head remaining stationary for a longer period on each successive occasion.

"Come, come sir, one side of the door, or the other, and make up your mind quick about it! I can't have this new-born infant exposed to the blasts from the passage-way! to say nothing of his mother. The inconsideration of mankind is enough to try a saint!"

Thus admonished, the rest of the figure belonging to the head appeared within the room, and the door was closed with trembling fingers which yet executed their task with utmost gentleness. For another moment the little man, still a prey to his timidity, stood clinging to the knob as if it were his only friend, for notwithstanding the very generous bit of gold which had found its way from his pocket to Tryntje Jansen's capacious bosom a few hours before, she glowered at him with malevolent eyes in which he read no sympathy, and her strident tones struck terror to his heart. He was many years the senior of his wife whom he held in great awe, and he had a very deep love and adoration for little children, though a shyness also that had always kept him aloof from them. But this was different. This son who was his, who would love him and look to him for help, and be a help to him in his declining years! Yet the realization of this dearest of all dreams left Mynheer de Hooge dumb.

"Come, come, sir."

He dared not hesitate a second longer. He forsook his material support, stood erect after some fashion then, with knocking knees, he sidled up to the great

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four-poster where his wife lay regarding him through half-closed lids.

"Thanks be to God, my—my dear," he stammered, "that a son is born to us this day. Had it—ah!—had he been a daughter, he—I should say she—would have been welcome, but because the Lord in His kindness to us has seen fit to send a son to comfort our old age, my cup is overflowing——"

"Cup? Cup? I hope you have not been drinking so early in the morning, Mynheer de Hooge."

"No, my—my dear—a figure of speech merely. But with your permission I will drink your health, and the health of our son later in the day."

Something like a deep gasp of relief escaped him and he turned quickly from the bed to meet those other, piercing glances.

"Is this—is this the little fellow, Vrouw Jansen?" he asked in an awestruck whisper. She looked at him without speaking, and in the interval of silence he put out a shaking, cautious finger toward the mass of clothes in her arms—which was surmounted by the puckered, old-young face of his child. The next moment he withdrew it hastily as though he had been burned.

"Ky-ems!" he chuckled, "ky-ems!"

"Tryntje, send that man away! My son is not a fool."

"Of course not, of course not, my—my dear. 'Twas a figure of speech merely. I—ah! I naturally doubted if he would understand any set phrase in our more studied vernacular. I——"

"There, there, sir," Tryntje interrupted, reading the

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stormy face on the pillows aright, "go you must now. Sakes alive! but irritating isn't the word for it, and well-intentioned too. Well, the Lord help us! This is the way out, sir. Drat the man! has he gone blind all of a sudden? Mind how you step—there's a board that creaks outrageous, and crying wood is the aggravatingest sound to a just-delivered woman that there is. Have a care!"

"And don't fiddle with the knob once you are out, Mynheer de Hooge, but shut the door and go away instantly—instantly, do you hear me?"

"Yes, yes, my dear, I will go directly. I will go and drink Baby's health——"

"Don't say 'baby' again—I will not have it. My son's name is Adrian after my father. Thank God! he already bears a strong resemblance to him, Tryntje says, a marvellous resemblance. Close the door tight."

The hinges did not creak, it being a perfectly appointed and well-ordered house as anyone, who knew Mevrouw de Hooge, would have felt sure would be the case, but the latch clicked gently as it fell into place. Both women heard it and the receding footsteps tip-toeing along the hall; when all was silent again they glanced at each other. Tryntje rolled up her eyes piously.

"God save us, but what fools even the best of husbands be! Lacking in sense, lacking in sense, I always say—and one man presentical with another for dearth of wisdom—peas in the pod are not so similar. Now praise be to Heaven that women have been created into this world to keep it from the utter darkness of ignorance. Take heart, good lady. Never have I seen

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such a resemblance betwixt mother and child, not once in all these years! And if that be true of the outer skin which is but surface-deep and changesome, what can be spoke of the mind within that changes not? The counterpart, I swear, very like—very like.”

Time proved that Tryntje's words—uttered with deep conviction, whatever their hit and miss quality might have been—held an indisputable truth. Not only did Adrian de Hooge outwardly resemble his mother and her late-lamented, often-referred-to father, but those inner graces of mind, and temper, were so similar to the ones possessed by his maternal parent that Mynheer de Hooge—husband and father—secretly trembled beneath their sway and uncomplainingly bent his patient shoulders to the double lash of tyranny.

More and more, as his son waxed in stature, did the little old man withdraw to his counting-house there to spend his waking hours over his affairs, which increased greatly as the years passed. In his own home he was treated as a nonentity and allowed no word in the direction of house, or son, but where the management of his wealth was concerned he reigned absolute lord. That domain was indisputably his. He possessed the easy business success which sometimes seems the native element of otherwise stupid men and unquestioned, unhampered, he wielded his authority with a foresight and discretion that won him ungrudging respect from his compeers.

So at last, working early and late in the interests of a wife and son whose affections he had never known, Death and he came quietly to terms and Evert Fels, as has been related elsewhere, chronicled the event with

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fitting pomp and precision. And speedily thereafter that portion of the town, where he had lived and labored through a long lifetime, forgot him as completely as though he had never been.

Adrian de Hooge was three-and-twenty when he succeeded to the sole management of the great business house of De Hooge and De Hooge, for thus the sign had read since the anniversary of his twenty-first birthday, when he had been admitted as equal partner into the firm. In the future, he intended, it should bear his name alone, but for the immediate present, out of deference to the widow's conservatism, he refrained from making any change and inwardly prided himself upon his own fine feelings in thus honoring his father's memory. As a rule he seldom regarded any one's wishes, unless they were in accordance with his own, and his mother had long since discovered that her authority was but a straw where he was concerned. Proud, obstinate, implacable, he was everything she was and more, for she had learned to give way to him, her great love making such sacrifice possible, while he made no concession.

He had been spoiled from his cradle both at home and abroad; even his masters at school had treated him with a partiality never shown to the other pupils. As a boy he had been in some sense a favorite among his mates for, when he was not crossed, he was a good fellow enough, eager for any sport as long as he might be leader, full of fun and high animal spirits; there had always been, therefore, plenty of children to run at his beck and call, hosts of little sycophants ready to swear black was white at his dictation. The conditions had

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not changed by the time he reached manhood and among the young men in the circle in which he moved he held indisputably first place. Aside from the tangible fact that Prosperity and Plenty smiled upon him the gods had also seen fit to give him a pleasing exterior, so that even to his detractors he possessed the appearance of a not inconsiderable Adonis. Added to his personal beauty he dressed in the height of Dutch fashion, aping, to some extent, the airs of the English, whom he cordially hated, and certainly wearing his clothes with as much grace as the greatest dandy of them all who lounged on a Sunday morning at the doors of Trinity.

There was no beauty discernible in his scowling face, however, that summer night as he strode away from Domine Ryerssen's garden. He moved slowly with the air of a man whose mind halts at every turn. The easy confidence, with which he had swung through the little lane hours before, had vanished from his bearing, but he carried his head proudly and his eyes, looking moodily before him, were as full of dominant fire as ever.

XIII

THE WEAVING OF FATE

It was not until his thirteenth year that Adrian de Hooge became really conscious of Annetje's existence. Up to that date, from the superior altitude accorded to him by his five years' seniority, he had simply disregarded her. Then the influence which she was to wield over his future life made itself evident, faintly at first but no more to be thwarted than the call of the fresh spring winds is to be ignored by the sleeping buds and grasses. As the time comes for them to follow blindly the law of their own growth so these two—mere children as yet—were drawn irresistibly together.

He found her one January day standing, a forlornly pathetic, much-bundled-up little figure, at the foot of Flattenbarrack Hill, looking longingly at its summit. The place was deserted, though the twinkling snow flashed a thousand invitations in the sun and the pathway worn by the passing of the children's sleds gleamed like a silver road to bliss. He himself should have been at school busy with his Latin, as his mother fondly imagined, while Heilke, if questioned, would have declared that the domine's little daughter was working her sampler in the sunny corner of the attic like the good, obedient child she was. Adrian passed with an

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indifferent glance, dragging his sled after him, then, from the depths of the innumerable wrappings, there came a sigh so faint, that it must have escaped the boy's hearing had it not been among the written things which he could not avoid.

"Do you want a ride?" he demanded gruffly, wondering at himself.

The yes of ecstasy mollified him a trifle, his sight grew clearer; young as he was her fairness even then appealed strongly to him. He lessened his stride in order that her quickly pattering, little feet need not hurry so much to keep step with him; he was lordly, magnificent, and shy, in a breath. When they had climbed the hill he placed the sled in position and the next instant they were skimming over the dazzling surface, her laughter, like a peal of bells, mingling with his whoops of delight; as far as eye could see the white world held only them and their joy.

The sport continued a good hour or so, the two companions growing better acquainted with every passing moment. He found he could not tell her much about himself which she did not already know from Heilke and the gossip of the neighborhood. He swelled with his importance. In her turn, her tongue once loosened, she told him everything concerning her little life, and even whispered a confession about the neglected sampler in the garret and how she had stolen away through the garden out of a gate, far beyond Heilke's supervision, which nobody supposed was ever opened. He took her back to it when she was ready to go home and, in the years that followed, he used it frequently when it suited his pleasure, or convenience, though

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there was no bar to that other entrance, which all the world might see, for the heir of the rich De Hooge.

His liking for his child-friend increased as time went on—he domineered over her, teased her, adored her as the mood impelled him, and never doubted but that one day he should win her. To him, whose least wish had always been accomplished, she was already won. Sometimes, when she teased him with her caprices, he realized with a pleasing sense of security that she was only struggling as the bird struggles when the net closes about it, making the last futile attempts for a freedom that is vanishing.

Mevrouw de Hooge, it is true, had other plans in view; she had several candidates for the position of her son's wife, inestimable, docile girls, good house-keepers, passing fair to look upon with the additional fairness of a not inconsiderable dowry. It was an open secret, moreover, that these candidates—and others less desirable in the maternal eye—were only too eager to secure the biggest plum in the matrimonial market; and innumerable were the snares laid to entrap his affections. He had thus far been delivered from them, owing to a watchful Providence, a jealous mother and—not the least important factor to be considered—his own calculating nature. There were times, however, when he had seriously weighed the advantages of a marriage with money and had even allowed his attentions to become marked in certain directions, yet always before the fatal step was taken inclination—he called it love—swung him back Annetje's way. And love it undoubtedly was—the deep-

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est he could feel—though the girl, despite her worth and beauty, would never occupy the chief place in his thoughts since that was completely filled by his own image.

By degrees, and as the first step toward the attainment of his desire, he vanquished his mother's opposition, wringing a grudging consent from her, though he did not deem it necessary to the furtherance of his plans. He welcomed it gladly, however, as another proof of his power. If he could bend her strong will to his, there was little to worry about in the ultimate disposal of so slight a thing as a girl's heart.

Solely to please him during the winter preceding his father's death Annetje was bidden, not once but many times, to the great house—the house which Adrian meant should be hers one day. On several occasions she accompanied her father, making one at the sumptuously laden table where there were long intervals of silence between the two old men, domine and host, lighted by rare flashes of speech, reminiscent in quality on either side. And all through the meal Adrian talked in his boastful voice of what he had done and would do, while his mother sat magisterially silent behind the massive tea-equipage letting nothing escape her. To the girl, sitting shy and frightened near that awful presence, the time passed like a nightmare; she did not know whether it was harder to meet her lover's eyes irritating in their boldness, or his mother's glance of chilling disparagement.

But there were other evenings at the De Hooge mansion that held only pleasant memories for Annetje. Waffle-frolics and simple diversions, when the young

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folk danced to the music of fiddles played by negro slaves, or romped through kissing-games, or sang rounds. Her beauty made her easily the queen of these little assemblies, though her gown was always the same simple India silk fashioned by Heilke's fingers, but many were the appreciative glances cast her way and Mevrouw de Hooge, looking on from her corner, regarded the girl with more tolerance. A thing gained or lost in her esteem according to the value placed upon it by the world, and being a wise woman she trimmed her sails to the wind. So it was, that with matters at this pass, Annetje was singled out by the chief feminine mourner at the time of Mynheer de Hooge's obsequies, and showered with attentions which gave food to the gossips and set them speculating about the nearness of the wedding.

Domine Ryerssen, going a few days later to offer spiritual consolation to the widow in her affliction (and he ought to have known better!) was considerably surprised at the interview which followed. She cut short his words of sympathy, and also his directions as to where she could find peace of mind and resignation, the latter with considerable warmth of manner, (she needed no one to point out her Christian duty, thank Heaven!) and plunged immediately into a declaration of her son's passion and a formal demand for Annetje's hand. The old minister fell back in his chair, his face working piteously. At first his hostess, possessed by the belief that the splendor of the offer had dazzled the unworldly eyes turned upon her, was more kindly inclined toward her visitor, for whom she had for many years entertained only a feeling of contemptu-

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ous toleration; but, as he stammeringly found his tongue and she learned that he was not overwhelmed by the honor done him and his, her sentiments changed with the velocity of a whirlwind. His simple iteration that Annetje was too young filled her with rage.

“Young—young? She isn't any younger than her mother was when you made a laughing-stock of yourself, Domine Ryerssen, and set her up among us as the pastor's lady. It was a mercy she died when she did, for I doubt if she would have filled the position satisfactorily to the parish if she'd been spared. Well, wisdom lies with God, as I've said to myself a thousand times since Mynheer de Hooze was taken,” she paused out of breath.

“Consider this affair as definitely settled, sir,” she continued with flashing eyes, “and let us thank the Lord for the benefits He has seen fit to shower upon your child. Truly, as hath been said of another, she is blessed among women——”

“Mevrouw!”

“I said it, sir. Is it worse to say, than think it? When it is noised abroad that your daughter weds my son will not that be the thought everywhere? If you place no high estimate upon his attainments and his standing in the community, let me assure you that the world has a different opinion. It is an honor, sir, which he bestows upon your child, an honor I trust she will appreciate—but she is not blind, if you have been. I wish her to come to me day after to-morrow—without fail, remember—Adrian is forced to go to Virginia then, on business which will keep him from

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home for a month or more. When he returns we will speak more precisely of the wedding."

Then he was summarily dismissed and half-dazed by this sudden turn of affairs, which swept aside all thought of his other parochial duties, he sought his home, not quite sure in his own mind as to what had really happened. Annetje was spinning in the kitchen and listened to his news without a word, though Heilke kept up a running comment of delighted cries, like a little joyful tune which offered a marked contrast to his grave voice. In the light of her appreciation, however, the mists lifted somewhat from the old man's heart and he reproached himself for the selfishness that had made him cry out against the good fortune that had come to his child. He had hoped to keep her with him till the end; yet her happiness, doubtless, lay elsewhere.

He touched the rosy, downcast face timidly, raising it a little toward his dim eyes that he might read the joy it held. But it was like a book in a strange tongue to him, he did not understand it—perhaps it was because he was too old to understand. Age is so far away from youth that one forgets the way back oftentimes. There were such mixed thoughts in the girl's breast, however, that it would have taken a person of keener insight than Domine Ryerssen to read them; even she was puzzled herself, she could not tell whether she was glad, or otherwise. She was dazzled a little by the fact that she had been asked in marriage by the most eligible young man in Dutch circles—she was only too conscious of Adrian's position, as Mevrouw de Hooge had surmised—and her liking for him dated from her child-

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hood; though, already, other thoughts were beginning to stir within her.

“Does it make you happy, little one?”

She hung her head. If she said no—what would that mean? Just the dull stagnation of home with Heilke for companion and the garden for amusement, with perhaps an occasional invitation ‘to take tea out’ at some stately house. All through her life, save for Adrian’s friendship, she had been singularly alone; there had been no other intimacy and scarcely any other young companionship. And now a little word of hers would put an end to everything—dances, games, songs—there would be nothing left but quiet from morning to night. It was in the early days of her acquaintance with Bellenden and, though her dreams were full of him, she clung childishly to the slight hold she had upon the world of delight as represented by Mevrouw de Hooge’s parties. She wavered slightly.

“Do you love him?”

“I—I love you, father, and Heilke and Jan—I will stay here, if you please.”

“The child is mad—mad—don’t listen to her Domine. The best match in town and—‘I will stay here, if you please.’ *Owee! Owee!* another would snap at the chance. Another? Twenty others! You can’t deceive me, I’m not blind; there’s not a girl of marriageable age in the parish but would thank God fasting for such a piece of good fortune, and all you say is ‘I will stay here, if you please.’ Where’s your gratitude? That fat Bertha would burst her sides with envy if she knew this. Think of the mevrouw’s laces and jewels, child. She can’t take them with her and they’d all be

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yours some day. And such a fine, strapping fellow——”

“The child shall say no if she wishes, Heilke.”

“You’ll live to rue this day, sir, if you uphold such doings—it’s flying in the face of Providence! Oh! my dear—dear—dead mistress, when you used to kiss your baby daughter and make plans about her growing up to womanhood, little did you think she’d ruin her prospects for a ninny’s whim. Oh! if you were here to counsel—you, a woman, knowing more of such things than a holy man steeped in book learning and not having his child’s welfare at heart——”

“Heilke—Heilke—what can I do?”

“Rule her, sir, rule her! ’Tis written children obey your parents, and again, honor thy father and mother, and honoring means obeying. Command her. Remember Solomon, a man wise in his day and generation and mindful of a parent’s duty.”

“But her happiness?”

“Her happiness?” Heilke exchanged a glance with Heaven. “We ain’t going to live forever, Domine Ryerssen, and when we’ve gone who’ll look out for her happiness? Who better than a husband? Can she take care of herself? A weak, backboneless creature—good, yes, but without managing qualities—helpless as a babe, you can take my word for it! And Adrian de Hooge offers her houses, carriages, money—she mustn’t say no— It’s the best match in town, I tell you. And child, think of all the women in the Garden Street church and what their feelings would be whenever you went past them in your rich robes——”

“Peace woman!”

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“Nay, there’s nothing like being on a pinnacle and looking down on others,” Heilke cried, disregardless of reproof. “It’s the sauce to the pudding every day, and generally speaking folks have to take their pudding plain and pretend they like it best so, thankful enough to get it at all, for the most of the world goes without. Happy?” she broke off to laugh. “I’d stake my chances for Eternity upon it!—or she isn’t like the rest of us.”

“Heilke, you pain me.”

“There, there, sir—let be. ’Tis but the froth on top, cast it aside as of little worth. Who am I, do you ask, who lifts her voice to counsel one old in wisdom? A humble handmaiden serving in the house of a man of God, and knowing her duty too. Oh! listen to me, Domine, I must speak. Ever since my dear, departed mistress changed her mortality for shining robes of bliss I have looked after this child, thought of her good, worked my fingers to the bone for her day and night. And I can’t see her throw away this wonderful piece of luck—this assurance of happiness for her future. I stand in a mother’s place, I speak as a mother would—Be guided, sir.”

“My little maid, I think Heilke is right, I think—perhaps—were your mother here, she would say the same—I—I cannot tell—I live so much with my books and I grow old—very old. But Adrian de Hooge comes of God-fearing parents and he is also a good man. He loves you very deeply, little one, he has loved you since you were a child, his mother says, and he is near your own age, too, as should be—as should be—between man and wife. Can you not find a different

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answer? Come! Mevrouw de Hooge would see you this week."

Annetje shivered a little.

"Well then, I will not go to her—no, Heilke, I will not. Let Adrian come to me if he wishes to marry me and let her likewise——"

"God help us! 'tis flat and open rebellion. Go away, Domine, and leave me to wrestle with the girl alone; she used to have some sense. What! Mevrouw de Hooge come here and the grass not sprouted yet on her husband's grave—and such good growing weather as it has been for the past few days. *Owee! Owee!* To come here, as if my lady there had all to give and nothing to receive. *Owee! Owee!*"

The mutiny was soon quelled. It never occurred to Annetje that she could do otherwise than follow her father's wishes, for, imbued by Heilke's unceasing arguments, he speedily laid his commands upon the girl and then, having once definitely expressed himself, he returned to his books and regarded the matter as settled. To obey had been the key-note of Annetje's life, though whenever she had been able to evade authority she had been quick to do so. In this instance, however, there was but one alternative. She must obey, or tell—what? Little foolish, lovely dreams that her father and Heilke would not understand, because such as they had never dreamed them—little floating fancies that made the blood rise and rise again to her cheeks.

In the end she went, as Heilke knew well would be the case, to pay the desired visit. At which time Mevrouw de Hooge, with a show of kindness which took off the edge of her condescension, received the girl al-

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most cordially and made her feel more thoroughly at ease than she had ever been in the older woman's society, while Adrian's undisguised delight helped the interview to a satisfactory close. Annetje returned to her home considerably lighter-hearted than she had been for many days, and not a little flattered by her lover's protestations and his mother's graciousness. The satisfaction of an accomplished duty gratified her and there was comfort in the reflection that the autumn, with the hinted-at wedding, was months away. When Adrian returned from Virginia, she told herself, she would never think of anyone else, though for the present there could be no harm—not the least harm in the world!—in dreaming those happy dreams.

The races were being run on Sir Peter Warren's estate up at Greenwich the day of Adrian de Hooge's arrival in New York. The information was given him at the wharf and later at the deserted coffee-house whither he went for his mail, but the young Dutchman, pleasant as the sport usually was to him, had no intention of making one of the on-lookers. Instead, he hastened to his home and held a short interview with his mother, who was secretly tremulous with the joy of his coming, and then, after a prolonged toilet, he set forth to seek Annetje. He would have hesitated to say how many times he had dreamed of this first meeting, going over each detail in his fancy with a rapture hitherto unknown to him. He had a hundred things to tell her and many pretty trinkets with which to delight her eyes. He had planned that she should pay for them all in kisses, and he told himself again and again, chuckling

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at the thought, that he would have the best of the bargain.

He made his way rapidly to the lane, resolving to go up through the garden and surprise her among her flowers, or spinning at the kitchen door. In his impatience he did not wait to unfasten the gate, but vaulted over it, missed his footing and fell headlong. It was the accident of a moment; he was on his feet almost instantly again with a muttered imprecation, and paused to arrange his disordered dress. The last crease smoothed out, and his temper somewhat restored, he looked up casually just in time to see an English officer on horseback riding rapidly forward. The unusual sight shook De Hooze more than his fall had done. He felt the pain of it in every nerve, then a quick glance convinced him that the new-comer, preoccupied with his own thoughts, had not perceived him and, following an inexplicable impulse, he secreted himself hastily among the laburnum bushes. There, a prey to rage and jealousy, he remained to see all his golden plans of home and happiness crumble and fall into nothingness.

Away off at the edge of the world, where they say the Fates sit spinning the skein of human destiny, the threads of certain lives became entangled that afternoon. Such diverse threads, so remote from one another that, at first sight, their meeting seemed of all improbabilities the most improbable. Such diverse threads and yet, one by one, the inexorable spinner crossed them in her weaving—the worn, gray thread of age, the rich, strong thread of manhood, the lighter quality of youth, the glancing gold where a girl's way-

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wardness ran side by side with the little, white thread of a sister soul, and the darker strand where jealousy, thwarted desire, and revenge spread over the whole.

Away off there Fate chuckled grimly, then, with those strange, inexplicable eyes—sad with the mystery of life—she looked down at the work as it slipped through her fingers.

XIV

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT

To seek out the different coffee-houses and there make public the story of the Beauty's escapade seemed to Adrian de Hooge the first step toward securing his vengeance. But that plan was speedily dismissed. His quarrel was not with the brother and sister, who would be the chief sufferers by the disclosure, but with the man who had supplanted him in Annetje's favor, and primarily with the girl herself, who had held her betrothal in so slight a fashion. For her secret was no secret to his jealous eyes, and in the moment when he read the joy in her upraised face every good and tender feeling within him knew its death. There was no bottom to the hatred he suddenly felt for her, and no scheme too hellish that he would not seek to devise it for her undoing, and in compassing it he cared not how many others would be included likewise. Absolutely merciless at all times, when blinded by anger he had a supreme lust for inflicting pain; he was one of those men whose spirit of revenge demands a wide orbit—it must sweep everybody, guilty and innocent alike, in the circle of its wrath. To have Annetje suffer alone would not satisfy him, those bound to her in kinship must suffer also—throb for throb, ache for ache. If the girl had been one of a large family, he would not have rested until he had brought sorrow and

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disgrace to each member; having only her father, it was but the most natural thing that Adrian de Hooge should instantly conceive an unreasoning and brutal dislike for the domine, which could only terminate to the old man's disadvantage.

As he revolved scheme after scheme in his mind, the thought occurred to him that it would injure Annetje's standing with her new friends, and deprive her of their liking, if Miss Crewe's secret were to remain inviolate until after her departure from the parsonage; when its disclosure would seem prompted by feminine jealousy, or disregard of honor. Who would believe Annetje's protestations of innocence? Who, but she, was supposed to know of the English girl's disguise? What were the suspicions of a few spectators, if any had been quick enough to discover the jockey's identity, compared to Annetje's own knowledge? And who would be the first to repudiate her, if not her lover—the captain? That would be one way in which to inflict pain, exquisite in quality, upon her, and others would not be wanting. With this end in view the young Dutchman determined, for the present at least, to give no hint of what he had heard and witnessed in the garden and, as he passed cautiously by back streets and lanes to his home in Gold Street, he smiled cruelly to himself in the dark. He would watch and wait—wait an eternity, if need be—for power lay in his hands.

In the week that followed, despite this resolution on the part of Adrian de Hooge, the whole parish of the Garden Street church quivered with curiosity. The daily visits of the two young men to the domine's house were viewed with suspicion and dismay by the neigh-

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bors living along the route. The women speculated over their work and especially, when, after the custom of the times, they congregated in little groups on the stoops of the houses in the cool dusk the air was rife with their surmises; while the men, sitting by, smoked their long-stemmed pipes and pondered over the scandal in their turn. Secret as Peggy's coming had been, the fact of her being in their midst was something that could not long remain unknown, though the chintz curtains at Annetje's window, persistently veiled the mystery of her presence from inquisitive glances. It was Heilke who was chiefly responsible for the first impetus to the ball of gossip, though she would have strenuously denied any such charge; yet, waylaid in the street whenever she made her appearance and assailed with questions, she fanned the excitement into a flame with the audacity of her unreserve. She was smarting with a strong sense of disapproval and her condemnation of her master's guest was as unguarded as her hearers could well wish; what her own lack of knowledge withheld, they pieced out with surprising ingenuity and did not spoil the story in so doing.

Strangers coming at any time into their placid lives would have caused some sort of ferment, but when the unknown represented the world of fashion and another nationality than theirs, manifest danger stalked abroad. It was a danger that threatened to undermine everything—home, society, church. The domine was old and, as Heilke truly said, had the heart of a child for seeing guile, still he held the highest, most responsible position in the community and if he entertained worldliness and vice (the two seemed inseparable in the

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minds of his accusers), to whom could they turn? How could they follow his teachings? Vague rumors of ill buzzed throughout the parish, gaining in bulk over many a Delft-ware tea-cup; they were even carried to the doors of St. Nicholas's where on Sunday the people lingered, after listening to Domine Ryerssen expound the Heidelberg catechism, to compare notes on the distressing situation.

The clamor did not reach the old man at his books and Annetje, unwearied in her attendance on their guest, was equally unconscious of the storm of detraction and disapproval that was gathering about them.

Heilke, swelling with importance, threw wide the study-door without the preliminaries of a knock, and Jan Praa, immediately behind her, peered over her shoulder, lowering and breathless. His person was partially enveloped in a leather-apron spotted with earth stains, his coarse wig—above his hot, streaming face—was stuck full of bits of twigs and stray leaves which gave him the effect of an ancient satyr returning from some orgy, while for a thyrsus he carried a spade to which blades of grass were still clinging.

“Their most gracious High-Mightinesses——”

“*Foei*, woman, *foei*! Sinful mortals, such as we all be——”

“God's elect, I tell you.”

“I stand as good a chance as they—I, a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord since ever I reached man's estate——”

“'Tis with the Lord to judge; He knoweth the properer heart.”

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“He'll not need your promptings, creature of pots and pans.”

The domine turned a bewildered face toward the two disturbers of his peace.

“Cease wrangling,” he commanded sternly. “Jan, Jan, how often must I tell you that the house is Heilke's province?”

“But consider, sir, if the consistory holds a meeting do not I open the door to them? Do not I arrange the places?”

“Surely—surely.”

“I told the woman so and she usurped my office; she opened to them, bobbing like a cork upon the waters——”

“You—you lover of untruth! Sir, to liken me to a cork—was there ever such infamy? I am no cork, thank God!—I am no light-headed, light-heeled thing such as he consorts with at the ale-houses. A cork indeed! Hear me, sir, I did but make my duty to their High-Mightinesses——”

“Elders and deacons, woman.”

“Their High-Mightinesses! I did but say ‘good-day Mynheer Kip, good-day Mynheer Roelofsen—I rejoice to see your honor so well, Mynheer Van der Grist, Mynheer Van Corlear you are welcome——’”

“You should have held your clack, *praatster*, what did they care for your greetings?”

“When was this Heilke? I do not understand.”

“Even now, sir At this very minute their High-Mightinesses sit in the parlor—God be praised! I cleaned it yesterday.”

“The elders—and here? I do not understand. Is aught amiss with the chamber in the church, Jan?”

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“Naught, sir, spick and span is it, as these two hands could make it—and yet cheated of this meeting. Riddle me why? Besides the elders, the woman has named, have come Mynheer Kiersted, Mynheer Jacob Kay and Mynheer Van Cortlandt; Mynheer Tiemen alone is absent, but he'd not leave his shop on so bright a business day—not he!”

“The consistory—and here? Was there a meeting called? I—I—my memory is treacherous sometimes. Did they go to the church and find us unprepared?”

“Jan Praa is never unprepared, sir. I should have reminded you had there been any necessity.”

Domine Ryerssen fumbled hurriedly through the notes on the table, bringing them up to his near-sighted eyes and scanning them closely; he put them down with a shaking hand.

“You say true, Jan, you are a zealous servant, you do not forget. But to come here—it must be a matter of great importance—some, some—personal matter perhaps,” he stopped, visibly disturbed, his face growing suddenly pinched and gray. He caught his breath.

“My sermon was overlong last Sunday,” he said almost apologetically after a moment, “but those minor prophets are of stupendous interest—I—I could not seem to let them go. I was angered when you rapped thrice on the pulpit, Jan.”

“I did not exceed my duty, sir; twice had the hour-glass run its course.”

“Yes, yes, but a little longer—a half hour perhaps, would have seen the end. You are sure you wait till the last drop has run out before you turn the glass?”

An Unexpected Visit

“The last trickle, sir. In these times of change I must be careful, we must all have a care, minister and voorleezer alike. We are serving, sir, serving. That very morning Mevrouw de Hooze yawned out loud twice, and old Mynheer Opdyck gaped also, and that so prodigiously the whole church would have echoed it in another moment. There’s nothing so catching as your real, down-right, come-from-your-heels yawn. It tickles a man’s jaws whether he will or no, pops them open, and sends the water flying to his eyes——”

“Their High-Mightinesses sit in the parlor and the sun is streaming in where I have drawn the curtain. Let the domine attend to his guests, Jan Praa. It’s yawns enough, we all know, once you begin your prattling. Hurry, sir, hurry, I beseech you. ’Tis the time of day when the sun must shine on the red velvet chair and red fades—red fades! Do not keep their honors waiting any longer, sir, and mind, when once you’re in the room, that you move the chair, or let the curtain fall—you don’t need much light.”

The chiding voice aroused the old minister from a painful reverie and brought back very forcibly the sense of the present and its duties. He looked up helplessly, staring first at one and then at the other of his old servants, as if he would read some encouragement in their faces, but neither showed any comprehension for him at that moment. He moved away from the table and walked slowly, almost uncertainly, to the door; on a sudden his years seemed to weigh like a burden upon him. Jan put out a kindly hand and steadied him by the arm.

“Remember the chair and the curtain,” Heilke

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cautioned shrilly, as the two men turned into the passage. "The sun will creep in by and by as far as the table. Be sure you keep it out. And come you back, Jan Praa, once you've opened the door for the domine. The meeting can get along without you well enough. The consistory's here to talk about matters above your wool-gathering wits."

While she was still speaking, from the upper part of the house there came the sound of a girl's voice singing gayly, every word clipped clear and distinct :

" 'Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into, Hey nonny-nonny.' "

As Jan threw the door open the rippling music floated into the parlor with something like a challenge in its merry note. The men sitting there, each one rigid and erect, seemed suddenly to stiffen under its spell into figures of stone, their faces lengthening into preternatural gravity. Mynheer Roelofsen, who was a trifle hard of hearing, was the only one to alter his position, he bent forward with his hand to his ear in order not to lose a single word, his little gimlet-like eyes rolled into the corners. For the moment, though the domine had entered the room, not one of his guests appeared to see him. He stood hesitating near the threshold, scanning the faces before him—a touch of longing in his glance—but he, too, was mute.

Jan Praa nudged his arm.

"Say something, bid them welcome," he whispered.

An Unexpected Visit

Domine Ryerssen advanced a few steps, and still through the open door behind him came the song:

“ ‘ Sing no more ditties, sing no mo
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all—— ’ ”

“ Voorleezer,” commanded Mynheer Kip in stentorian tones, “ close—that—door ! ”

Jan Praa obeyed the order with surprising alacrity, shutting himself out, greatly to his discomfiture. But, despite his endeavors, it was not possible to silence that happy, audacious voice; like a little, mocking echo the words floated in through the keyhole with something malicious in their utterance:

“ ‘ Into, Hey nonny-nonny.’ ”

XV

THE CONSISTORY

The room, with its mingled odors of calamus and myrrh and its air of disuse, seemed to hold a strange chill to the domine, though the brilliant afternoon sun was streaming in through the flowered-tabby curtains making a great, golden patch on the chair just as Heilke had predicted would be the case. He shivered slightly and his imploring glance wandered almost pitiously from one guest to the other and then away from them all to the little alabaster image in the centre of the mantel, as if its familiar shape alone embodied the spirit of friendliness. There was nothing else on the shelf except the brass *blekker*, hanging at one end, with its green bay-berry wax candle ready for a usefulness that was never demanded of it. The only other ornament the room contained was a jar of pot-pourri upon the near-by table, but its cover—guarded by a coiled dragon—was seldom raised and the little heap of rose-leaves within lay undisturbed, dreaming of past summers, with not a hint of their sweetness to relieve the half-musty atmosphere.

The embellishments that constituted the chief pride of the homes of the well-to-do-Dutch in the parish were singularly lacking here, and, no matter how Annetje might sigh for them, Heilke was well content with their

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absence. Others might have carved furniture and admire it—mere traps for dirt, she averred—rare China monsters to grin at one from the chimney-place, give her, instead, the old *valletje* with its bit of silver lace garnishing. Let others keep their tapestries and their pictures; just the little one of the *Zuyder Zee*, in its frame of Dutch wood scalloped and painted black, with touches of gold here and there, was enough for her. Let others have their ivories from the Orient, their sweet-smelling woods carved into fans and boxes, their Venetian mirrors—what were they, after all, but inventions of the Evil One to catch the dust and hold it, and be the housekeeper's bane?

She could show substantiality and order. Two fine red velvet chairs, a black oak settle, a table ditto, and three high-backed, leather chairs. What could heart of woman desire more? In accordance with the custom of the times the stately room was but seldom used; to admit a visitor to the contemplation of such treasures, Heilke considered a boon to be granted only to the most worthy, as on this particular occasion. It had been one of the greatest crosses she had ever known that the beloved spot had been profaned—there was no other word—during the preceding week by the presence of Captain Bellenden and his cousin.

The former gentleman had grown tolerably familiar with his surroundings and their lack of entertainment during those visits, when he was forced to cool his heels there while Larry spent the time above-stairs; for Peggy, long after it was necessary, kept her room whenever the captain appeared and insisted upon Annetje's society. The three merry voices invaded the sacred

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stillness of the parlor and often piqued the waiting man into losing his temper, especially that little gay, mocking laugh which was fast growing into the dearest sound in all the world to him. A thousand times he swore to himself that he would come no more—he was a fool!—but as regularly as Larry sought out the domine's home, just so regularly did Bellenden accompany him; though his anxiety concerning his cousin's welfare was never appeased by a direct message from the sufferer herself. Mynheer Van Corlear would never have rested so complacently against his chair, had he known that its unyielding back had supported the captain during those periods of vexation; but the old velvet told no tales of the scarlet coat to the elder's silk camlet.

Domine Ryerssen leaned a trifle heavily against the table; what seats the room afforded were occupied and he was, therefore, obliged to stand. It was no physical fatigue, however, that caused him to droop before the little assembly of stern-faced men, but rather an overpowering fear that the secret, which he had guarded for years, was at last laid bare. The thought made everything swim before him. He fastened his gaze resolutely upon Mynheer Kiersted's large, rubicund countenance, squinting somewhat as if it were indeed a fiery sun.

"Gentlemen," he began slowly, almost painfully, "I am at your service. I trust no great need of church, or home, has given occasion for this visit, I—I—" he stopped, glancing helplessly around.

"It is not a matter concerning our beloved church," Mynheer Kip asseverated pompously, "else would the

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consistory have met as usual within the sacred precincts——”

“ But ’tis of crying importance, sir——” the interruption was winged with heat; the new speaker—a small, fussy-looking man—wore an habitually bellicose expression on his sharp, prominent features as if he were at odds with the whole world—“ it is useless to disregard that.”

“ Slowly—slowly—neighbor Van Cortlandt. Moderation is a jewel whose price is esteemed far above rubies. As I have said, Domine Ryerssen, the matter does not pertain to the church, nor is it a subject for discussion in a house of prayer. Knowing this, sir, we have presumed to invade your solitude——”

“ Solitude, Mynheer Kip? I object to the phrase—it is injudicious, ill-advised—I appeal to the others. What solitude did we find? We have heard this afternoon a ribald song, one only fit to be voiced in the taverns by those light denizens of perdition——”

“ An English song,” interrupted Mynheer Roelofsen, sitting well away from the back of his chair and fairly quivering with the enormity of the offence. “ In the atmosphere of sanctity we have listened to the lutings of a female——”

“ The lady, gentlemen, is my guest.”

“ A female,” sputtered Roelofsen, his little pale, blue eyes snapping vindictively, “ an English female. The whole parish knows the truth of what I speak. It is scandalous—scandalous! Domine Ryerssen, you are harboring a serpent in your bosom, have a care that you be not stung.”

A flush of annoyance crept into the lined, gray face;

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relieved as the old minister was to discover that his secret was still safe with him, he was yet visibly distressed to have his hospitality arraigned. He was not a man, despite his feeble aspect, to brook interference of any sort. He drew himself up to his full height.

"You are right, gentlemen, in saying this matter is not a subject for discussion in church, but I will go farther than that and tell you it is not a subject for discussion anywhere. I have heard that the English have a saying that an Englishman's house is his castle; sirs, a Dutchman's house is his castle no less. It is his to say who shall enter, who shall dwell therein, and no other individual can arrogate that right unto himself."

"Friends, friends, is not this condemnation enough? Out of his own mouth has he convicted himself. To quote the English to us, to take their ways for his standard—what can you ask more? Verily, I say unto you, like Jeroboam of old hath he followed after strange gods. Oh Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory is departed from Israel!"

"Slowly, slowly, neighbor Van Cortlandt. Let not your zeal after righteousness consume you. Gentlemen, bear in mind, I beseech you, that by previous arrangement it has fallen to me to be the mouthpiece of this assembly. I must insist, therefore, that there be no further interruptions until I have made plain to Domine Ryerssen the reason of our coming."

Mynheer Kip eyed his colleagues wrathfully, but the most of them evaded his glance of outraged authority and studied the elaborate pattern traced upon the sanded floor. After a brief interval of reproachful silence he turned again to his host.

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“Sir,” he continued, his lagging syllables tuned to sadness and reproof, “we felt that a matter so domestic, so—ah!—personal, was without the jurisdiction of the Classis at Amsterdam. And, moreover, it was a question in our minds whether we could afford to let so dangerous an action wait until we should obtain directions from over-sea. Cautious as we are, and loath to judge, it seemed wrong to wait. Nor did it seem feasible to convene a Classis here, as has been done in times past, before pointing out to you the error you have committed. It would be possible—quite possible—to have the domines from the Middle Church and from Breucklyn, Esopus, and Albany sit upon this case and by their distinguished counsel throw light upon our troubled way. But think, sir, of the valuable time that must elapse before even such a meeting could be convened. In the meanwhile our wives and daughters are exposed to the licentious glances of the British soldiery and the oglings and grimacings of a simple fop, for such idlers—God save the mark!—have of late frequented this neighborhood and entered this very house. Our little children are daily witnesses of this unthrift of the hours, this shameful disregard of the golden minutes, this——”

Mynheer Van der Grist uncrossed his ponderous legs with the air of a man who has taken a sudden resolution, and cleared his throat significantly.

“And above-stairs,” Mynheer Kip spoke more quickly than was his custom, though the acceleration of his speech diminished almost immediately into its placid dog-trot, “there is a female—a young woman—admitted to the society of your daughter—a true Dutch

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maiden, as we have rejoiced to think. Do you not tremble at the danger that encompasses your child? She stands upon the brink of an abyss; below her yawns the deadly pit of fashion and vice—of perdition to her soul. How long before she, too, will sing 'Hey nonny, nonny?' Words, sir, that no self-respecting female would ever utter, words of such dread significance that in our tongue we have no equivalent for them. Thank God, they are untranslatable! Shall we look to see Annetje flaunting in the streets with the graces of the fashionable women whose souls are snared with the fleeting beauties of this world? And for yourself—what danger is imminent! No man has the right to expose himself to the wiles of the other sex—we are but flesh, sir, flesh—and the devil lays bait for us even when we are descended in years. Age is no safeguard; it is easier to slip then, than when the road is level and our step firm——”

“Mynheer Kip, I am a man of God.”

“Sir, sir, be your thoughts never so spiritual there are moments when the carnal will creep in; the Elders themselves were tempted of Susannah—so it stands written, and they were devout and holy men.”

“But this girl, this child—nay, I must speak—she is of my daughter's age, merry-hearted like—like——” the domine hunted painfully for a simile, “like the sunlight there, and as pure. You shall not defame her by such imputations. I know not how you heard of her coming hither, though I think it be true that walls not only have ears but tongues as well. Let that pass. There is no need for secrecy in the matter that I can see. The child was thrown from her horse and her

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arm broken and her cousin—the soldier you referred to, an honorable gentleman, let me assure you, one previously known to me and deeply respected—brought her to my home, thinking I could help her in her distress. What I could do, sirs, I did, not one of you would have acted otherwise. She was suffering, ill from excitement and, for a few days, was feverish and even delirious at times—”

“ But her people? ”

“ They were in the country, save the young man—her brother—and he has been here daily to see her, as is most natural. My house, then, in her need is hers. May I not play the good Samaritan unrebuked? ”

“ The Samaritan, Domine, left the stranger at the inn.”

“ But only because the inn was near at hand and his home distant. O generation of cavilers!” his voice shook with sudden anger, “ is not the spirit the same? Must we go by on the other side if the fashion of the garment is different, saying: ‘ because you are of other blood than ours you must lie there until your own people come to succor you.’ Friends, friends, it matters not who it is—the service is demanded of us, our hands must give the cup of cold water, or—failing—the lost opportunity is placed against the credit of our souls.”

The grave faces seemed to grow longer and graver, the perplexity deepened; the sunbeam, as if it were indeed of the same light-hearted composition as Peggy Crewe, danced persistently upon the silver buckles that adorned Mynheer Kiersted’s colossal feet, throwing off little derisive sparkles; it had quite left the chair occupied by Mynheer Roelofsen.

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The domine was the first to break the silence.

"Are we not told to show hospitality to strangers?" he asked almost gently, his whole aspect changing and becoming on the instant full of tolerance. "You remember the injunction, surely. For thereby, it is said, some have entertained angels unawares."

"Nay, if you will pervert the Scriptures and quote them—twisting their meaning to serve your turn, I'll meet you on the same ground, I'll match you—'He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it,' mark me well!—shall smart for it——"

"*Stil! Stil!* Slowly neighbor, curb your zeal."

"Why waste the time in further discussion? It is unavailing. We had better appeal to the Classis——"

"But, gentlemen, my brothers, think a moment. I have labored long among you, I have——" the old man's voice trembled, "I have endeavored not to fail you. This guest is not of my own seeking, but hospitality is the law and honor of my house—as it is of each one of yours, and I could do no otherwise. Were the girl of frail character I still must give her shelter."

"Your charity and toleration exceed your discretion, Domine Ryerssen. However, until the case is proved different we prefer to believe that your guest is unimpeachable in her morals; though we must consider her protracted stay ill-advised. What pains us most at this time is the rumor that in your sympathy with the English you wish to make certain innovations in our church——"

"It is false. I would not change an iota. Your informant?"

"Such a step is to be deprecated. It would involve

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the loss of doctrine, mode of worship, government, ay the very name of the church itself."

"Gentlemen, listen to me. On my honor, I protest, this is farthest from my heart. For me there is no speech so beautiful as this our language—I speak the English but haltingly, as you know, though I comprehend it—I comprehend it. But I would be loath to welcome it, or any other alien tongue, into our church and yet He, who made us, hears and understands every word and thought of ours, be we who, or what we may. For Him there is no difference in nationalities."

"'Twill be a black day when English is preached from the Garden Street pulpit—I'll not submit to the change—I'll fight the matter to the extent of the law, and if the case goes against us then—if I must have English, I'll have all English—I'll go to Trinity. I won't listen to an English sermon set in between Dutch prayers and Psalms, as we give a child a bolus hidden away in some delectable wrapping. I won't be hoodwinked in that fashion—all, or nothing, is my motto."

"Be moderate, neighbor, be moderate. There is no prospect of such preaching in our midst. Happily, for the present at least, that danger does not threaten our beloved church."

"You say true, Mynheer Kip—the danger is to be averted while we keep our stanch Dutch hearts, while we hold to old customs and oppose the encroachments of the English, whose speech has crowded ours to one side, though it is not moribund, thank God! We will resist the tendency of the mart in our house of prayer like men of might."

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“Amen and amen, neighbor Van Corlear. Even the domine is with us there, I doubt not——”

“Hold!” The minister’s voice was sharp with command. “I object to your phrase ‘even the domine,’ Mynheer Kay. I tell you the domine is heart and soul for the preservation of the church as it is to-day. Not one of you—I care not who he is—feels it more a part of himself than he does. Sirs,” Cornelis Ryerssen glanced slowly around at each one of his guests, “I am older than the oldest of you and change does not come readily to age; the old ways are best to me. I had hoped—I hope—to die in the service of the Garden Street church such as you and I have always known it. With a sadness that I trust you may never know have I looked upon the decreasing congregation there; perhaps, if you noted that such an one absented himself from the house of God, you said among yourselves, ‘Well, the domine ages, he does not see.’ And all the time every defection has been a knife-stab to my heart.” He had been walking up and down in front of the table, restless with pain, but suddenly he came to a pause.

“You have misunderstood me cruelly—cruelly,” he cried. “The speech of my people is mine while I live, their ways are my ways, their God my God.”

An audible sigh of relief went up from the little assembly, and the heavy faces brightened a trifle.

“You have set our minds at rest,” blustered Mynheer Kiersted, usurping the place of the slower spokesman. “The rumor came from many quarters—we were forced to give it credence. We understand English, being men of education and meeting the other nation-

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ality frequently in trade, but we love the old tongue and cleave to it at home and, wherever it is possible, abroad. Your stanchness is goodly news to us."

"But he must rid himself of his guest, if he would thoroughly convince us," Mynheer Roelofsen whispered. "We have the right to demand that much of him. Insist upon it, neighbor, insist upon it."

"You ask more than lies in my power to perform," the domine interrupted before anyone else could speak. "My guest has recovered, but my roof still shelters her and I cannot bid her begone. To-morrow, or the next day perhaps, it may be her whim to leave us. Cannot you wait till then? Cannot you, knowing me, trust me?"

"It is pernicious for the neighborhood—for your daughter."

"Ah! my Annetje, never fear for her! Say she speaks the other's language most excellently—to her father's ear, that is—well, she learned it, picked it up, as the expression goes, and your little daughters—have they not done likewise? There is no harm in that; she and they are none the less Dutch maidens because of their proficiency. Have no fear! My child comes of Dutch parents, she is true to her people—the English are nothing to her, nothing—you may believe me. Besides, though I lift the veil from her heart in telling you, one day she will wed a Dutchman, Adrian de Hooze by name——"

"No—no, that cannot be!" Mynheer Van der Grist stuttered vehemently, his mind whirling with certain secrets that had been whispered to him on the conjugal pillow about his daughter Bertha and the young man

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the domine was now claiming as his prospective son-in-law. "You err, sir, you deceive yourself, sir——"

Whether the congratulations that filled the air and drowned the bewildered father's indignant protestations were sincere, or not, was beside the question; for the moment they bridged over an awkward situation, and that was no trifling service. The visitors rose, with one accord to take their departure, warned by the lateness of the hour and their host's inflexible demeanor that nothing could be gained at this time by a longer stay. Yet they had satisfied themselves in one regard at least. There was no doubting the domine's loyalty to his native tongue—that was clear to them all—though his tolerance, to their more rigid thinking, seemed a sad fall from grace.

A species of truce was therefore declared; the subject under discussion being held in abeyance. With that rooted aversion to change so deeply implanted in their natures the elders and deacons were not a little relieved by the fact that the affairs of the Garden Street church were to remain as of old and, mollified in some measure, they sought their own homes. But mistrust and suspicion, quiescent though they seemed, were not sleeping; they lay with wide open eyes watching intently.

XVI

A LITTLE PROVINCIAL

Meanwhile Peggy, the real cause of all this perturbation, was as unconscious of the disturbance she had created as the pebble cast into a placid pool is unconscious of the agitated surface of the waters where the widening circles communicate their knowledge to one another long after the little stone has ceased falling.

During the early stages of her convalescence her attitude toward her host and his daughter bristled with arrogance tinged by a certain amount of suspicion, but their simple kindness disarmed her completely and, however petulant and capricious she might comport herself to the world at large, she was full of a pretty show of deference and gratitude in her bearing to them. And Peggy, under the dominion of such feelings, was a creature of better and softer moods than even her intimates knew, and altogether adorable.

It never occurred to her, being for the moment well pleased with her surroundings, that her presence might prove an inconvenience to the household. Wherever she went welcome always ran on tiptoe to greet her, and the fact seemed a natural one even among these strangers, who gave their hospitality with such unstinting hands. Their quaint speech and manners afforded her infinite diversion; and the tranquillity of their life, coming after the excitement through which she had

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passed, she was not slow to appreciate. To make a virtue of necessity was never a characteristic of her nature, but, all precedent aside, in this instance she was content to remain in the haven which her cousin had so unexpectedly provided for her, without troubling herself with questions of delicacy, or departure.

Bellenden surprised her one afternoon in the garden which, emboldened by some such hope, he had entered by the little gate. In vain had he presented himself with Larry day after day he had never been able to see her. The glimpse of a vanishing petticoat, the sound of a ringing laugh were the only rewards doled out to him for his very evident concern in her well-being. A swift thrill of elation passed through him as he recognized her from a distance and perceived that she was alone, save for Annetje's old hound. She was seated on the ground in the shade of a cherry-tree, leaning against its trunk, with the dog close at her side. The grass all around her was splashed with little sun-discs, dancing down through the lightly moving leaves overhead and one, more venturesome than the others, played in and out of the soft shadows of her unpowdered hair. The boughs above were shining with fruit set thick like jewels—garnets in the shade, rubies where the sun smote them against the turquoise glory of the sky. And so quiet was she, and so much a part of the summer loveliness, that the robins flew fearlessly about in their wholesale maraudings and the bees hummed in lazy circles in the golden air.

He made his way noiselessly across the grass, which gave no hint of his coming save to the finer hearing of the hound, who stirred into instant attention. With

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her free hand Peggy drew the dog back and, unconscious of the watching eyes, laid her cheek against his sober face. He submitted to her caresses stolidly, but as soon as he was released he bounded off to meet the new-comer with a quick, glad bark.

Bellenden put him by with a hasty touch and came around in front of the girl.

"Have you no welcome for me, too?" he demanded.

She disregarded his outstretched hand and strove for an air of indifference, but all the color in the cherries above her seemed on the moment to be concentrated in her cheeks. She cast a helpless glance around, then, seeing that flight was not possible, she met his eyes half defiantly.

"Faith, Joris is the older friend, I doubt not. I'd not forestall him."

"Then imitate him."

She was mistress of herself in an instant.

"La, Cousin Bellenden," she tittered, "is this how you'd spoil my pretty manners? Fie, sir! to counsel a young lady to fall upon you as Joris has done and kiss your hand, and frisk, and caper with no becoming sense of dignity. I wonder whatever my mamma would say, could she hear you now, and she always declaring you the very pink of propriety."

"You are pleased to be merry."

"Oh! 'your only jig-maker,' as the man in the play says. Well, 'tis better being merry than sad on a day like this."

"Will you not bid me welcome, Peggy?"

"As many times as you may desire, seeing that you must be wofully out of humor because the mistress of

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this garden is absent and I so indifferently fill her place. But the rose not being by, the humbler flower may play the queen. You are very welcome, sir."

"I vow I'd expected better treatment——"

"From me, or from the rose? Truly, by this, you must have learned that a man's expectation and its fruition are seldom on bowing acquaintance. The surest way of being pleased is to expect—nothing. What do they say abroad?"

"They still talk of Touchstone's victory."

Her eyes fell.

"Ungenerous! I had not thought that of you."

"A woman's thoughts and a man's expectations end oftenest in disappointment. Shall we cry quits? 'Tis true that at the coffee-houses they still remember the run, and that deeply; too many were losers through their lack of confidence in the little lad from home to make forgetfulness possible. I know of no wound so slow of healing as that which the purse suffers. But no one has yet hazarded a guess as to the jockey's identity—that danger may pass. 'Twas a fearful risk, Peggy."

He put his hand on hers where it lay on the great dog's head, and, for the moment subdued by the gravity of his manner, she let it rest without stirring her own.

"I thought you would be killed, child." His voice was shaken by a deeper feeling.

She flung his touch pettishly aside.

"Lud, you'd a pretty confidence in my horsemanship, Captain Bellenden, and I thank you. There was small danger. I owe Touchstone something for his lack of manners, though, poor beast, he was not so much to

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blame after all. Never did I see such a great, gaping, vulgar crowd. Is my mother well?"

"Lord Lofters could give you more trustworthy information."

"Hm! Sits the wind in that quarter? I'd best be going home—perhaps. Tell me," she threw him an arch glance, "is there anything of shorter life than a man's love?"

"Unless it be a woman's."

"La, the old trick! I might have remembered that the pot will always call the kettle black. Well, I'll stay here and dream of faith."

"I have thought—" he paused, disconcerted by her eyes. He was as ignorant as the others of the storm which was gathering about the quiet household and attributed the domine's more broken appearance to his age, but it seemed to him, remembering that fact, that they had already trespassed too long upon his hospitality. "I have thought, Peggy, now that you are so far recovered of your hurt, it would be better every way if you were to leave here. The domine is old and probably unused to visitors, and this was to be but a temporary asylum——"

"And where to go?" Her manner was so meek that it deceived him.

"Your friend still waits for you at Albany."

"The boat that was to carry me to her carried my excuses instead, she—knowing me as she does—knows, too, that I sometimes change my mind."

He laughed, but had the instant wit to alter the sound into something resembling a cough. She darted a suspicious glance at his quiet face and lowered eyes.

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"Besides," she went on sharply, "I'd run the risk of discovery surely, if I went by public transport, for none of my mother's ships are sailing again this month—there'd be always the chance of some acquaintance aboard."

"You say true; yet with this constant coming and going of your friends you run another danger. Those who look to see you in Albany will think it strange to find you've not been there, and their reports will set others wondering."

"I wrote Nancy that I wasn't in the humor for gayety, and so I was going to Crewe instead. I care not if she believed it, or remembered it to quote me. La, out of sight is out of mind as any man can tell you. I'm not of so much importance in folks' thoughts as in yours, Cousin Bellenden. I wonder, such being the case, that you seek to banish me."

"I'd not banish you willingly, unless I might banish myself at the same time and to the same place. 'Tis only for your sake, child, because I would have no whisper of disgrace attached to your name. It should be as sweet and fair," he looked around swiftly, his glance encompassing the beauty of the earth and sky within its range, then it came back to the face before him; she offered the only comparison, "as sweet and fair as its owner."

"Bravo, Captain Bellenden."

He flushed under her jeering tones and went on with heedless precipitancy.

"Why will you always mock? Before God I swear your name is dearer to me than my own, because it is

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yours, because I hope to take it into my keeping one day and give you mine instead."

A short silence followed his daring words. She tugged at a tuft of grass without speaking, almost as if she had not heard him, though a warm flush deepened perceptibly along her face and throat. A robin fluttered past, its soft wings disclosing the rich color of its breast as it mounted to a higher bough and burst into an ecstasy of sound. Little tell-tale of what its eyes had seen in passing, a man's love, and that curious thing—the heart of a girl. Bellenden moved a trifle nearer the quiet figure and put out his hand to touch her shoulder. She was on her feet in an instant facing him.

"Tell me," she demanded in that unusually gentle voice, "did you ever lead a forlorn hope?"

He could not miss her significance.

"A forlorn hope, child," he laughed as he said it. "How shall I answer you, seeing that to you the words mean one thing, to me another? With us soldiers they stand for the troop sent forward to perform some service, whereas you would have them of a different nature. And yet, often, yours is the truer meaning, the quest is hopeless enough, God knows!" He looked before him as if he did not see her, as indeed was the case just then. His face kindled.

"It ill becomes a soldier to speak of his prowess," he went on a moment later, "but once the good fortune was mine to lead such a charge. If you will have the tale, it is a short one. The battle was against us, our men had fallen by scores—you'd not have found the scene a pretty one, but Pity and Mercy

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came there later and bent above it and soothed away the horrors. There was a gun to capture—a handful of men might do it, or die in the attempt—and victory was swaying in the balance. That outpost ours, the day was ours; if not—the enemy's. And our general saw it in the flash of an eye, he pointed out the work, the danger as well—he would not command us, yet there stayed the opportunity—grim but golden. Well, a man has only one life to live, one death to die—I volunteered—I and some others. That is all.”

“ You knew no fear ? ”

“ I knew the fear and faced it. There was the one chance of victory set against awful odds, but they were worth the risking to clasp it close. I was conqueror that day.”

“ It has left you with a brave spirit.”

“ It has left me with the will to dare all obstacles to win my heart's desire in love, or war.”

“ La, I'd rather hear about the latter any time than the former, and about neither just at present—” she made a pretence at stifling a yawn. “ I marvel,” she went on, “ that you should care to fall into sentiments with one who reads you so well. What's to gain on my part? The king's shilling, against a crown. Since my lord's coming I've thought often of a coronet—shall I—sha'n't I?—And I've even dreamed of a throne.”

“ You'd grace them both, my pretty Provincial.”

The words escaped him, smarting as he was beneath her disdain, before he realized what they would mean to her; the next minute he could have bitten his tongue out for his rashness. She gazed at him in silence with

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angry, reproachful eyes that said more than she knew, then, still silent, she swept past him, inflexible of face.

“Peggy,” he had overtaken her, “Peggy——”

She made an effort to shake off his detaining touch, but her fingers were like snow against the iron of his.

“Say you’ll forgive my ill-temper, child—come, say it. I’ll not let you go until you do. ’Tis useless to struggle, you’ve but one hand to fight your battles. I’ve a great mind to kiss you, sweet.”

“If you should—dare——” she panted, “and I’ll not forgive you. What! call me provincial, try to woo me, to win me, and then, because I’ll not listen to your suit—call me provincial!”

“I never meant it, I swear. You know, if I could, I’d carry you home to England, my country should be yours. You’ve but to speak the word and the domine here will say his say——”

“The domine—oh! this is past endurance. And what of his daughter, sir?”

“I do not understand you.”

“What of your pretty speeches to her, your love-makings—trust me, I know something of the world and men.”

“I am no Lovelace, madam—suppose I have found some pleasure in looking at a pretty girl, in being with her, the matter ends there.”

She uttered a sound half of contempt, half of dissent.

“Do you think if what I say is untrue,” he continued slowly, “that I would have had so little respect for you as to bring you here in your need? I told you that day that these people—this father and daughter—were my friends, and I told you the honest truth—they are

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nothing more. You chose then to insult me and them by a gross suspicion—I was not blind to it—you choose to hint at it now. Are you the only one to be angered? Does forgiveness lie alone in your gift? I, too, have something to pardon and I pardon you so.”

He stooped, as he spoke, and kissed her full on her disdainful mouth, then he moved away from her.

“Jack Bellenden has many faults, as he himself knows well—it’s a long score!—but falsity is not among them, and once having loved he will love on to the end.”

“Oh!” she interrupted in a voice choked with anger, “that’s what it is to be a man and presume upon your strength—the strength of a bully—to overcome a woman. Swear what you will, I’ll not believe a single word. Not ten minutes since you were all for having me leave here, and why? I’m not a child. I can see what must be patent to everyone but the poor old domine—your friend, as you would say. Save us from such friendship! My presence in this household makes too great a demand upon the time of Miss who, if I was not here, would be free to listen to your philanderings.”

“Your thoughts do you scant honor, but ’tis idle for me to try to dispel them; I leave that task to your cooler, more generous moments. If you were not here, neither should I be, no matter how much I may have frequented this garden in the past. Let a man see Paradise once and he is not content with a lesser glory. Despite your bitter words I have had my glimpse this day.”

“And that will have to suffice you. Have you forgot that a man’s presumption lost him Paradise? As it was then, so is it now.”

A Little Provincial

“The expulsion was not so hard, since the woman went with him. If you parallel the case, Peggy, what is lost is regained a thousand-fold.”

“You go too fast for me. I have neither the wit, nor the inclination, to follow you. Our ways lie apart, as your discernment should have taught you long ago.”

“Then it’s good-by Paradise,” he bowed low and turned to take his departure. “For the present,” he amended over his shoulder.

“For always. A wiser man would know that the banishment was eternal, but la, your Mr. Pope understood some natures well when he said: ‘fools rush in, where angels fear to tread.’”

“Mr. Pope was a cynical, captious little man who would have been glad to scale Paradise in any guise. But I thank you, child, for quoting him, since you show me there is still a way back by daring to attain; the folly would lie in disregarding it to my thinking.”

She bit her lip in vexation and fell to tapping the ground with her little, slippered foot. He waited a moment, then he spoke more gravely.

“I’ll not weary you further with my presence since it seems so distasteful to you. But if I can serve you in any way, command me; my time, my love, my life are at your service, though until you need any, or all of them, I will take good care that there shall be no intrusion on my part.”

He walked a few steps from her, then turned again.

“Surely now that Eden is closing upon me, you will bid me good-by, Peggy?”

“With all my heart,” she cried tartly. “Good-by! I never said the words more cheerfully, not even to a toothache.”

XVII

PEGGY AND ANNETJE

Annetje's room was lighted by two bayberry wax candles which stood, like diminutive link-boys erect and important in their conscious splendor, upon the narrow mantel. One tallow dip was the usual allowance, and that only in winter, but with the visitor's coming the old order of things had been overthrown and Heilke, tremblingly guarding her store-closet, doled out the evidences of her thrift with a rage that was none the less bitter because it could not leap its bounds as far as the chief offender was concerned.

Peggy, accustomed to the brilliancy of many lustres in her own home and not aware of the concessions made in her favor, secretly termed the place 'villainously lit,' even when it was bravely putting forth this unheard-of show of wealth which dazzled its mistress and filled her with pride in that she had given of the best the house held, wresting it from the hand of authority at a cost undreamed of by the guest.

Heilke, on her way to her room, grumbled wrathfully as she came in sight of the open door. What had God put a moon in the heavens for, unless it was to serve His purpose? Search the streets of the town, and not a lantern would be found blazing anywhere. Man knew better than to set up his little trumpety light in the face of the great luminary. And moon, or no moon,

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couldn't a girl go to bed in the soft, summer dark—what need had she of candles? And such candles!

The low rumble was like the growl of distant thunder. It came nearer, increasing in volume as the steps lagged momentarily at the bar of light cast out into the passage-way. It was like treading upon gold—gold thrown underfoot wantonly and not to be recovered by any effort. A glance at the shelf revealed the candles to their creator, slim, straight, pale in color like a leaf set against the sun, with a crowning glory of flame. She gulped hard. By judicious management each ought to last a week, perhaps longer, before entrusted to the save-all, and here—for the sake of a fine lady's whim! the two would not live out the night. A thief had crawled into one and the sight was too much for the onlooker. She made a quick swoop into the room, descended upon the candle and expelled the luckless intruder with a great show of wrath. The proceeding hardly occupied a moment's space; she was a large, unwieldy woman, but extraordinarily quick in all her actions, then with a look of undisguised contempt at the girl who, still dressed, was lolling upon the bed, she stalked majestically away.

Peggy had a book open beside her upon the pillow, though she was not reading and had not turned a page for an hour; she was too far from the light for a book to be much of a pastime as any person, gifted with penetration, must have discovered. She started up at the unwonted intrusion, angry in her turn, and met the old woman's eyes, understanding their meaning more clearly than if their owner had hurled an anathema at her head, for a glance is at home in any language and needs

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no lexicon to define it. She did not speak, however, and her adversary passed on unchallenged. The girl listened to the heavy footfalls growing fainter each moment then, when a door had been closed with wrathful significance, she made a wry face.

"There's one who'd be of my Captain Bellenden's way of thinking," she said half aloud, "glad enough, I warrant, to have me leave bag and baggage, and the sooner the better."

She looked before her. Should she go? If she did, would it not be a tacit admission that her actions were guided by his will—dependent on his say-so? The comfort of her present position was owing to him, the care and skill of the domine, and Annetje's gentle nursing were but the result of his provision for her. And if he had been different, or not by to help her, what would have happened? Her cheeks flamed at the probability; her mother's displeasure, the admiration and the contempt of the town passed before her in swift procession. She had escaped the danger, yet, safe though she was, she suffered from it almost as keenly in her imagination. But he had helped her with the delicacy and tenderness of a woman, the strength and resourcefulness of a man. The fairness of her name was more to him than the fairness of his own. The thoughts wove themselves into an unending pattern in her mind; they had come between her and the printed page earlier that evening making it impossible to follow the thread of the story. Nor were they the only ones; anger, outraged pride, triumph, met with them and a feeling, she could not define, which crept in and out of the maze like a will-o'-the-wisp vanishing, when she

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sought to detain it with the grasp of reason, to mock her from a distance.

Her fingers lifted the cover of the book almost shyly and fluttered the fly-leaf apart. It was not for the first time. "Jack Bellenden." The words leapt up and challenged her glance. She smiled lazily, but confidently, to herself. Even her amusement he had provided for, and it was through no fault of his that she had yawned over the trials and adventures of Joey Andrews and old Parson Adams, nor that her mind continually wandered from that journey to the seat of the Boobies to the pleasant sunlit slope of Annetje's garden. The scene stood out suddenly before her as if it had been conjured into being by his name. The trees dreaming against the tender blue of the sky, the swift coming and going of happy birds, the gleam of a butterfly's wing in the sun, the glowing touches of color in the flower-beds and the breath of fragrance and well-being that everywhere pervaded the air. Her smile deepened.

She would not go. If she must try to avoid any smirch on her name she would remain where she was, for nothing could endanger its purity in this little peaceful haven. She sat up leaning on her elbow, a smile half of derision, half of satisfaction, curving her lips as she noted the different articles of furniture around her. Something like contempt for their plainness stirred her momentarily and the remembrance of her own room, only a short distance away, came swiftly to her mind. She put the picture by and yet—how Annetje's eyes would widen at sight of the silken curtains there, at the long mirror that reflected the beauty of the

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apartment into double seeming, at the elaborately carved wood and gleaming brass and at all the paraphernalia of the dressing-table—the little boxes made of Battersea enamel, or curiously wrought in silver, and the numberless bottles and jars containing sweet-smelling waters, unguents, and cosmetics. Would she understand how their owner could find content in these humbler surroundings?

The high feather-bed occupied the space at one side of the room opposite the mantel with its clean, sweet linen frill, and between the chintz-curtained windows stood a chest of brass-ringed drawers surmounted by a small mirror in a narrow, black frame; farther along, a low table, holding a silver-clasped Bible and some Psalm-books, was drawn out a trifle from the side wall; these, with the addition of a chair, from which was hung a book suspended by a ribbon passed through the rings at the back of the volume, and a little wooden stool, made up the plenishings. The walls, unlike the tapestried ones Peggy knew, were white and bare of ornament save for two samplers, one, with the colors almost as fresh as when alphabet and numerals were fixed there by Annetje's fingers in her childhood, the other faded and dim—the letters, the basket of roses, the verse of Scripture and the name Katrina de Vos all partaking of the same lifeless hue. Peggy, since her coming, had studied both pieces of needle-work with unflinching interest, learning the alphabet and how to count under Annetje's instruction. She had mastered both verses, but the one on the older sampler had taken the firmest hold on her memory. She repeated it softly to herself:

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“ ‘ Beter is een goede name dan goede olie.’ ”

A good name! How everything came back to that. No matter what the time, the rule of the Preacher, or that of His Majesty George the Second, nor where the place—it was the one, priceless possession. And yet it was as brittle as glass, its beauty so perishable that the breath of public disfavor would dim it past repair. She stirred defiantly. Why should she trouble herself with these fancies? She had done nothing wrong, wild, yes—unwomanly, yes—but not wrong. People might blame her, would blame her without a doubt if the truth were ever known, still they could accuse her of no real harm. She put the thought aside.

“ Annetje,” she called softly.

There was a slight sound of someone moving in the next room and a moment later, in response to the summons, the girl entered, blinking a little as she came into the light.

“ What were you doing,” Peggy demanded peremptorily, “ sleeping or dreaming? ”

Annetje gave a low laugh.

“ Toget'er t'e two go ; put not many treams haf I v'en I sleep.”

“ What girl doesn't know that the best ones come when her eyes are open—wide open? Confess, were yours closed? ”

“ No-o, py t'e vintow vas I kneeling toing not'ing, joost looking out at t'e night.”

“ Was that the way to treat your friend? ”

“ Nefer a girl frient haf I hat pefore,” Annetje cried in delight, amazed at this sudden graciousness on the part of her guest who, all that evening, had borne her-

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self with a chilling demeanor which precluded any companionship, "not one."

"Oh lud! I've had a plenty of 'em, horrid missish things who'll kiss you one minute and scratch you the next. We aint a very nice lot, if the truth's spoke of us."

"Put you are not—nefer—of t'at sort?"

"Bless you! my dear, no, a thousand times no, I'm what your fancy paints me—just perfection." Peggy broke off to laugh and, for an instant, her glance strayed to Annetje's sampler and a swift picture of the lonely child making it day after day came into her mind.

"When men fall out," she continued, "swords are the best weapons, or pistols—though they make such a prodigious noise I can't endure 'em—and it's so many paces, then—'Gentlemen, are you ready? One, two, three—hack, or blaze away' and honor's satisfied. What round eyes, sweet? La, we women do different. Our tongues are our swords and we don't fight fair. If we can stab in the back so much the better, if we can keep on stabbing—best of all."

"Put Miss Crewe——"

"But Miss Simplicity?"

"You to not vant to pe a man?"

"I tried once, as you know, and I didn't like it—I looked so outrageous ugly. What, be one of those great, clumsy creatures all feet and hands? Not for the universe. And I wouldn't be a fop, thank you, with his silly, simpering airs and his 'oh luds!' and 'sink mes!' and his mincing, little steps and eye-rollings at the sight of a Petticoat just like a clucking hen running

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from danger. But to be master of one's fate—to do great things—to lead desperate charges—” she checked herself quickly, a smile curving the corners of her lips. “ Ah! that's a different matter—still even the bravest is slave to a girl's whim, trembles and goes all colors before her, hems and haws, and looks the fool,” her laughter—clear as a thrush's note—interrupted her. “ La, I'd rather be the girl,” she resumed, “ and wield that power. Heaven is wiser than we are, child, and we won't quarrel with what we are.”

“ You—how can I say it?—t'ere haf—perhaps—peen many? ”

“ By the thousands have I slain them, yea, by the tens of thousands. In the morning I have gone forth and when evening hath come I have not stayed my hand.”

“ T'at you couldt pe cruel, I treamedt not.”

“ I don't know the word, believe me. But a truce to the silly creatures, they're not worth your sympathies. Prick 'em, and they bleed wounded vanity, naught else. I'd like to set you down at some rout, child, and see the havoc you'd make in their ranks—there's not a woman of us all but would hate you——”

Annetje's lips parted in a smile of frank vanity; she rested her arms on the top of the foot-board and leant toward her companion.

“ Not you.”

“ Even I, Flatterer, I should probably poison you at the very least. How do you know that I don't hate you already? ”

“ Put for t'at, no cause haf you—somet'ing fery wrong must I first to unto you.”

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"Does hate grow that way? Don't steal my brother's heart then, Miss Sly Eyes."

"No tanger is t'ere to t'e young man."

"Nor my cousin's."

A quick wave of color flushed the girl's face and dyed even her throat crimson. Peggy, watching, smiled almost cruelly.

"No tanger is t'ere," she mimicked.

Annetje stood erect, her breath coming hard.

"Is it t'at you lof him?"

There was a short pause during which the two girls eyed each other unflinchingly. It was the first time the subject had been broached between them, though they had played with it indirectly ever since the beginning of their acquaintance, each eager to discover the other's real attitude.

"Who—I? A hopeless passion that I may recover from in time if I have change of air and can drink asses' milk—but not else. Was there ever so distressful a plight?" Peggy stopped to laugh at the mystification in the face before her, then her voice grew grave.

"Tell me, child, do you love him?"

"T'e frient of my fat'er is he, ant fery kint has he likewise peen to me; prout am I of his frientship, Miss Crewe."

"Spoken like a true woman and so understood. We're not such fools after all, are we, dear?"

Again the mocking, rippling laughter held that irritating quality that made the blood tingle in Annetje's veins and filled her with a helpless feeling of resentment. She did not know what to think of this bewildering creature, with her clear gaze and her frank admissions

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that told everything—and nothing—in a breath. Some sense of courage, however, kept her from changing her position; she remained quite still under the merciless scrutiny that seemed to penetrate to her very heart through the flimsy veil of an acknowledged friendship.

Suddenly, in the tense quiet of the room, the attention of each girl was attracted to a moth flying about the candles, its shadow thrown large upon wall and ceiling. They watched it for some moments, in that strange silence that had settled down between them, as it circled around the light, now near, now remote, though the flame—with the steady patience of a fixed destiny—drew it continually back to its destruction. It fell at last with fluttering wings to the chimney-ledge; this time it did not rise. Peggy was off the bed and bending above the little lifeless thing in an instant.

“There are none who’d blame the light,” she said, drily, “’twas the fault of the moth alone and it had wings beside.”

She put out her hand and extinguished one of the candles, watching the trail of smoke that ascended slowly like the spirit of the flame. The aromatic smell of the bayberry was pungent and pleasing; it had the savor of sunlit pasturelands in its breath. She turned toward the other candle, paused, and looked back over her shoulder at her companion still standing by the bed, clasping and unclasping the knob at the top of the post with nervous fingers.

“My cousin was here this afternoon when I was in the garden,” she said coldly. “He thinks now that I’ve recovered I had better go.”

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Annetje took a step in her direction, uttering a quick protest.

"But I shall have to go some time," Peggy's voice softened at the other's evident distress.

"Most true is t'at, only not joost now, if you please. Fery lonely vill it pe visout you, let me get first accustomed to t'e t'ought of your going, pefore you really go."

Peggy blew out the candle.

"Draw the curtain and let the moonlight in, child. I protest I think you like me after all."

XVIII

JAN PRAA SPEAKS HIS MIND

Sunshine and little, wandering airs, and all the ecstasy of June at its full, streamed in a flood of gold into the Garden Street church—through open doors and windows—where, it being Saturday, Jan Praa was making his preparations for the next day. It was his custom to assume a different manner for each of his vocations as another man, possessed of a larger wardrobe, might have dressed the parts with fitness.

As gardener, he whistled at his work, or croaked some ancient tune. As bell-ringer, he was bluff in his demeanor and heartened himself with a low chant like the singing of sailors weighing anchor, or bending to their oars. As voorleezer, the dignity of his office was increased a thousandfold by the importance of his carriage, and the beauties of an assured religion were not half so worthily evidenced by the domine in his ministerial robes as by his subordinate.

As sexton, however, Jan wore his honors with a difference. The austere bearing of Sunday, as he lingered near the door before assuming the rôle of voorleezer, was not apparent in his deportment of Saturday when he was in working-day clothes, and when he al-

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lowed himself considerable latitude. Sing he did not, whistle he did not—such conduct would have seemed nothing short of profanation to the temple; but as he sanded the floor, or chased stray particles of dust from the pulpit cushions, he kept up a little mumbling talk—there being no sound quite so dear to him as that of his own voice. Yet on this particular morning the self-satisfaction, which usually lightened his labors, had little effect upon him; he moved about flicking his brush half-heartedly. Presently he paused beneath the pulpit and looked up at the desk with something like consternation in his face.

“I remember the first time he preached there,” he murmured after a moment in a troubled tone. “If it was yesterday it couldn’t be clearer and it was seven-and-thirty years ago last week. ’Twas on St. John’s day, I mind me, and he made a picture of the little, brown herring-boats leaving the Amstel, dropping down stream abreast, and one after the other, on their way to the sea. The folks didn’t think it seemly to bring them into a sermon, but ’twas meant for a figure, and he gave them doctrine enough before he got through. ’Twas a longish sermon—a longish sermon—for he runs to words, and the sand fairly galloping through the glass. Seven and thirty years! and I’d been here twice a twelvemonth when he came,” the old sexton broke off with a sigh and resumed his polishing.

It was apparent to him, as to the others, that for once minister and people were at variance, and not one of the Consistory felt the danger which hung like a cloud over the church as keenly as did its old servant. Ever

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since Bellenden's first, mysterious appearance at the parsonage Jan had subjected the domine to the most rigorous supervision, following every word he let fall from the pulpit, and watching him jealously to discover the least deviation from the true path on his part. Several times, as the days wore on, there had seemed as a sorry reward for this untiring vigilance a new note of gentleness in the minister's teaching and a less marked insistence on the sternness of his creed. They were a deeply religious people—that little congregation of the Garden Street church—but their piety was the terrible piety of the ancient Hebrews which smote hip and thigh without mercy, and this inexplicable tenderness from the domine's lips might well set Jan Praa wondering.

“He weakens, he weakens,” the old man told himself with a groan. “God help us, when will the others see as I do?”

It was a long while before they perceived any lapse of doctrine, so accustomed were they to the familiar voice as almost to disregard it, as the noise of the breakers upon the shore sinks to a lulling note to the hearing used to their thunders. The news of the stranger in the domine's household was the first intimation of the approaching storm and aroused the folk into instant alertness. There would be no fear henceforth of nodding during sermon-time, though the summer breeze wooed never so languorously; words, looks, gestures were to be subjected to the minutest scrutiny and every man and woman of the church of St. Nicholas became a self-constituted spy to act in its interest.

On the Sunday following the visit of the Consistory,

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which had become public talk, Jan listened with the hearing of the entire congregation, it seemed to him, to the domine's words, but as the sermon progressed peace entered the voorleezer's breast. Never had the doctrine been so forcibly expounded, never had the Dutch tongue sounded more majestic, or more beautiful, than as it came from the sacred desk. Not a trace of English speech, or influence, was manifested that day, but only an unusual lingering upon the words as if he, who uttered them, appreciated their charm with new significance and an increase of tenderness, perhaps, in the old husky voice; the tenderness of a father for his children—the tenderness and love that had grown and grown through seven-and-thirty years. Plainly, the domine was not to be convicted of heresy at this time, though he was self-willed and obstinate to a degree almost past pardoning.

Since then nearly a fortnight had elapsed, and though the error of his way had been clearly indicated to Domine Ryerssen he showed no disposition to act upon either the suggestions, or the admonitions, bestowed by elders and deacons. Peggy Crewe still laughed and chattered in the sombre, old house and sunned her saucy loveliness in the glowing garden. An ominous calm settled upon the waiting church-people, but their stillness, like that of the tiger about to spring, held the concentration of energy—not of repose—in its attitude.

Jan Praa drew his sleeve across his eyes, trembling a little, then he passed to one side and went slowly down the aisle, pausing at last in front of a small tablet let into the wall. The record was not a long one.

Jan Praa Speaks His Mind

GEDACHTENIS:

KATRINA DE VOS,

GELIEFDE VROUW VAN CORNELIS RYERSEN,

GEBOREN DEN 8 AUGUSTUS 1720,

GESTORVEN DEN 4 JUNY 1740.

“DE GEDACHTENISSE DES RECHTVEERDIGEN SAL
TOT ZEGENINGE ZYN.”

He stood gazing at the inscription, reading it again and again; suddenly he struck the stone fiercely as if it were some sentient thing deserving of his anger.

“Lies, lies, lies,” he cried aloud, “I might have known when I held my peace, abetting him, that evil would descend upon this church. Our God is a God of truth and His judgments will not be delayed forever.”

He broke off with something like a sob choking him, for his wandering glance had fallen upon the lower edge of the tablet which, jutting out like a small shelf, held a bunch of dead roses. He lifted them almost tenderly and dropped them into his apron, gathering up the stray leaves that had been jostled apart by his touch, all traces of wrath gone from his face. The faded petals in his hand were like little keys which, on the moment, unlocked the days of the past and showed him the simple unfolding of Annetje’s life. Would he have had it different—clouded? He did not answer the insistent questions, though the past and the present fought long within him. Yet his duty—his duty. What was required of him? He could see the domine’s duty plainly enough—trust a man’s eyes to perceive what his

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neighbor ought to do!—but his own was hidden in darkness.

Presently his face cleared a little of its perplexity, as the sun comes out in a feeble way through a mass of clouds, and something like resolution kindled its flame in his glance. He straightened himself gradually and drew a long, deep breath; then he put out his hand and touched the tablet again, but this time with fingers that held a rough caress in passing. The next moment he turned away.

Ordinarily Jan considered himself a brave man; the doggedness of ancestors who had resisted Philip II. of Spain lived in him after some fashion, yet despite that fact he felt his courage desert him rapidly at the mere prospect of the task which now loomed big on his immediate horizon.

“Why should the pleasing face of a gentlewoman terrify me?” he muttered as he hastened home, leaving the church to sweeten itself in the summer air and sunshine. “I’ve encountered many angry men in my day and have not been fearful above measure. All flesh is grass; there’s naught to tremble at in a weed, Jan lad.”

Fortunately for him, on his arrival at the house, Heilke was absent, and he crawled noiselessly through the deserted kitchen and up the stairs to his own room. There he decked himself out in his Sunday apparel, in much the same spirit that a certain brave, military leader used to don his best uniform on the eve of a battle honoring the awful hour with all pomp and circumstance. Jan, however, despite his trappings, did not present a martial front even to his own fancy. Had he been a catholic his next move would have been to

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throw himself upon his knees to implore the aid of his patron saint, but his theology did not admit such appeals for assistance, though it did not exclude a very fervent worship on his part of some of the heroes of the Fatherland. These illustrious personages he regarded in the light of lesser gods and, when hard pressed in previous emergencies, he had often fortified himself with a mere mention of their names; as if, by so doing, their strength descended upon him and kept him true to their standards. Once dressed, he began to mumble them eagerly to himself, checking them off on his fingers much as a devout monk tells his beads, and though he would have been appalled at the discovery with each name his heart sent up a mute, little prayer. "William the Silent—Admiral Horne—Count Egmont!—brave men—brave men all!"

He hesitated on the threshold, then, as if thrilling with the power he had invoked, he shut the door behind him thus closing off retreat, and took his way through the silent house. The enemy he was about to encounter was not within doors, that much the quiet told him; and he was not sorry for two reasons. First, because the meeting was deferred for a little longer, and next because he was more at ease in the open, on ground he knew and loved and which owed much of its beauty to him. He reached the kitchen and peeped cautiously in; nothing was stirring there save a trembling vine which danced lightly on the oblong patch of sunshine upon the floor. Heilke's voice, grumbling in the still-room, and the tinkle of Annetje's laughter came to him with semi-distinctness. He started at the sounds, wavered an instant, then fled precipitately to

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the garden beyond. The quiet and harmony there stilled his fears in some measure and he passed slowly along, his swaggering exterior giving no evidence of his timorous heart as he studied his surroundings with a conscientious glance that was born of his will, not of his desire. On a sudden a great tremor ran through his frame and his knees knocked loudly together; he stopped, perforce, in his walk, cast a longing look over his shoulder at the house, then—eyes front again—he steadied himself. “William the Silent!” he gasped faintly.

For the moment flight was imminent and Jan's cause would have been lost at the outset, had it not been for so trivial a thing as a flower lying, with broken stem, across his path. He stooped in anger and possessed himself of it, shaking the dust gently from the wilted leaves. He knew well enough what careless hand had plucked the rose and had dropped it—one of God's fairest blooms—broken, and useless to die. He forgot his former apprehension, under the lash of this keener emotion, and walked boldly across the intervening space to the quiet figure dreaming beneath the cherry-tree.

“Taughter of Papyllon,” he said sternly.

Peggy turned quickly, the smile, which had begun to break upon her face at the sound of his steps, slipping into a stare of icy wonderment.

“Taughter of Papyllon.”

“I do not know what you mean,” she cried angrily, “nor can I imagine why you should address me, and certainly not by that name and in that voice.”

“Pecause it is my tuty, pecause— Papa Tromp!— Egmont!—so—so— I——”

Jan Praa Speaks His Mind

Jan glanced wildly around and wrestled with his neckband. "No, jonge juffrouw, you must listen," he went on. "From t'at house must you go, harm ant trouples haf you prought t'ere alreaty, ant shame pe-sites——"

"How dare you?"

"It is t'e trut'. So goot a man as nefer vas ant *hard-nekkig* has he pecome—no vomans is vort' it. T'e church peoples say, 'pest haf her go, for us are not Enklish vays.' Ant he say, 'It is my house. I cannot pit her pegone.'"

Peggy was on fire in an instant.

"Why was it necessary that my stay here should be public talk? I did not wish it known—I looked for quiet. What concern is it of your people when I go? What right have they to talk about me as if I was some charity patient rescued from the street? Your domine shall not lack payment, I promise you, for every moment I have passed beneath his roof and for the poor skill he has made me beholden to."

She sprang to her feet in a tempest of wrath.

"Vait," Jan stuttered, "vait a leetle, leetle moments, ton't you go ant act hot-headtet, ton't you get egsitet."

"Annetje might have spared me this—the deceitful minx!"

"Annetje? She is glat as nefer vas to haf you here—she ton't know v'at t'e ot'ers say—always apout t'e Enklish pusy in her mindt is she. Ant t'e domine, he ton't say not'ings apout you, no more as Annetje toes, put t'e neighpors see t'e young mens coming ant t'ey ask Heilke. T'at vomans, juffrouw, is like a—a—t'at t'ing you cannot carry vater in pecause of t'e leetle holes

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in t'e pottom, ant she gapples—gapples— For myself, I say not'ings—I am tisgretious!”

Peggy tapped the ground angrily with her foot.

“This is too much—it is unendurable! Where is the domine?”

Jan retreated a step in horror then, under the excitement of the moment, he moved forward and laid a detaining hand upon the girl's arm.

“T'e great—t'e great Peggar!—Horn!—Egmont!—oh listen! Ton't you efer a vort to t'e domine speak, put joost go. He say his roof it is sacret; to a guest he can not teny it. Ton't you unterstant? T'e elters ant teacons make it a question of his right-toing—t'ey temant it of him. Ant he answer t'at you go of your own vill, not pefore, t'ey must vait for t'at. Vell t'en, t'ey vait—tays, ant tays, ant tays—it is now most two veeks t'at t'ey are here, ant always he tisregart t'eir varnings ant t'eir plack looks. *Sacrament!*” Jan finished with a snarl, “ton't you see v'at harm you vork him in t'eir mindts?”

“Do you mean to say that the domine is suffering for my sake,” Peggy asked sharply, “that he is being persecuted——”

“P—per—per—secutet, yes, only Kott forgif me! he teserfes it in a measure. Vell t'en, ve say not'ings apout t'at—not'ings! T'e domine lofes his peoples so tenter like a fat'er, ant it hurts him not to to as t'ey say, put he t'inks no ot'ervise can he act. T'e ent is not yet; v'en grumplings rise in a church t'en must t'e minister pevare for himself. Ant he has peen t'ere sefen-ant-t'irty years—*ach!* it vill preak his heart, Kott knows, it vill preak his heart.”

Jan Praa Speaks His Mind

The slow tears gathered in Jan's eyes and, brimming over, ran down his furrowed cheeks; he turned his head aside to hide his grief. There was a certain amount of dignity in the action. Peggy stared at him incredulously, different emotions filling her breast; suddenly she put out an impulsive hand and plucked his sleeve very gently, with a touch that was like a caress.

"You don't mean that they would turn him away?" she demanded in an awestruck whisper.

"I ton't know. T'ey wait now, only t'ere is murmurings ant tiscontent eferyv'eres, t'ey say he is *hardnekkig*—like in your speech stiff in t'e neck—not eassily to pe turnedt."

"They would not dare to send him away on my account. I will not have it. I will go to them and tell them how good he has been to me—I am sorry if I've worked him any harm—I will explain——"

"Nefer, juffertje, nefer. Put if you vouldt some'tings for him to, joost so softly like t'e shatow from t'e grass go away, ant let t'e sun shine clear once more."

Peggy threw back her head with a laugh.

"'Tis the first time ever I was called so black and ugly a thing; my going has hitherto brought the shadows, or men have lied. But vex yourself no further, if light and happiness will come here by my leaving then I'll go quickly, I'd have gone long ago had I known; no one shall ever suffer on my account," she paused, meditating upon her flight. "You will help me?" she asked after a moment.

"So goot as in my power lies, put—put—" his face became troubled again, he hated to ask favors of so generous a foe, "t'e domine, if he s'ouldt know— It

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is for his sake I speak, put his home is also my home, to me is it sacret likevise."

She put her hand again upon his arm, laughing into his perplexed eyes.

"I shall say nothing, you may trust me. He will think my going so hastily at the last is prompted by a girl's whim. A woman has many a wayward mood that there's no accounting for."

"Vonterful! vonterful! out of t'e mouths of papes ant sucklings comet' vistom. 'Tis efen as you say—unstaple, like vater, is t'e mindt of vomans, now one t'ing, now anot'er—no tepentance can pe placedt upon her. All t'e trouples, ant follies of t'e vorldt are to pe lait at her toor."

"Jan—Jan—were you ever crossed in love?"

"No vomans haf I lofedt efer, t'ank Kott! For me has my neighpor's misery peen enough, put I haf eyes—I haf eyes. Not one of t'em is to be trustet——"

"How can you think, then, that I will be true to my word?"

"I ton't t'ink—I know."

Peggy clapped her hands delightedly.

"Bravo, that's as pretty a compliment as ever came my way, and I thank you—you'll have no cause to rue it."

"T'ere vill—t'ere vill pe, perhaps, no vort to Annetje?"

"Not one that could pain you at any time. Now will you carry a note to my brother, so he may come and fetch me away after sundown? I must go to Greenwich."

Jan Praa Speaks His Mind

Late that night Jan sat upon the kitchen door-step, his complacent face turned ruminatingly toward the stars; they were like so many kindly eyes beaming approbation upon him.

“Praise be to God, the hussy’s gone,” Heilke’s strident voice cut across his reflections, “gone, and good riddance to her! But who’d a-thought the end would come so sudden? Well—well—the ways of Providence are past our poor human finding out.”

Jan’s breast swelled triumphantly and, under cover of the dark, he allowed himself the gratification of a sly wink at a certain star which flashed a significant sparkle back at him; but he remained silent, not trusting himself to speak in this moment of elation. The quietness of his attitude angered his companion.

“I’ll be bound you were caught by her pretty face,” she went on wrathfully. “I saw how she bewitched you, and you as soft as butter in August when she came to go away.”

He sat still, outwardly unmoved, though anger was beginning to stir within him.

“There, get away with you, do—’tis time you went to your bed. Merciful Powers, it would try the patience of Job to see you sprawling there, as if you’d earned the right to dawdle that way. You don’t catch me ever lolling like that, and I do the work of twenty like you——”

“Woman, it’s false! Know that I’ve done the greatest work of my life this day, and it’s been set to my account in the courts above. I have made this house fair and sweet again——”

“This house! Not a hand have you laid to it, Jan

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Praa, not a finger. Oh! the conceit of your kind. A little brandishing of a broom in a church, a little polishing, and dusting, where dust never comes. Don't talk of making fair to me! A child would turn your task into play, and yet you call it work."

"'Twas I that did what elders and deacons could not do, 'twas I that brought home to the English girl her duty, 'twas I that bade her go and be no further annoyance to this house—to the domine—to the church. Can you say now I've done no work?"

Heilke stared at him through the dusk.

"You—didn't?" she breathed, then she wrestled with her admiration and surprise.

There was an interval of quiet during which Jan thrilled with a deep sense of pleasure; her silence was the highest tribute that could be paid him. The sound of her voice aroused him from his content.

"When the ass spoke to Balaam," she said slowly, "'twas to be wondered at, past a doubt, yet no instrument is ever too humble for Providence to use and having done it once He could do it again, to be sure. Let thanks be given where thanks are due, Jan Praa."

XIX

THE FULFILLING OF A TRUST

Heilke's relief at the visitor's departure found a natural vent in increased nagging, not only of Jan who, lest his complacency should unduly inflate him, was kept in a state of continual abasement, but of Annetje who came in for her share of the old woman's displeasure. A hundred times a day was the girl convicted of aping the airs of the good-for-nothing young gentleman and charges of temper and utterly demoralizing, soul-destroying idleness were laid at her door. If Jan, with a sudden realization of the loneliness which encompassed Annetje, could make allowances for her lack of spirits it was more than Heilke could do.

"So," she cried one afternoon when Annetje, driven at last to desperation, fled to the garden with Joris loping at her side. "So! no sooner are we rid of one fine lady than another settles down among us. God help us! folded hands and the sun hours from setting. I tell you, Jan Praa, Domine Ryerssen has more to answer for than he knows. You can't touch pitch and keep your fingers clean; and no more can you consort with idleness and keep a mind for work. Human nature is dreadful quick at imitating; the most of us play follow my leader from the cradle to the grave. Look at Annetje now, she's doing nothing—nothing—and me with the work of the whole house on my shoulders. It's

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all that brown-eyed, laughing hussy's fault. She never knew the worth of a moment, I'll be bound, nor that—try as hard as you will—you can't set back Time's clock and pick up a lost chance. Just laziness day in, and day out—sheer wanton laziness—and the devil ramping up and down the earth seeking food for his net. He don't so much tempt the idle after all, as the idle tempt him; the sight of dawdlers is enough to make his fingers itch to set them at some mischief—and small blame to him!”

Jan ventured a pacific remark which was swept aside with the force of a mountain torrent after a storm.

“Annetje will be all right again, eh? It's natural to miss a guest? *Foei!* I said you were bewitched by her big eyes. Think shame to yourself, Jan Praa, and at your age, too, your mind should be set on other things. There's no excusing Annetje's idleness—and that's not all. What's come to Adrian de Hooge, I'd like to know?”

“But woman, he's in health, he was at church Sunday.”

“Ay, and the Sunday before and in health truly, as you say—oh! blinder than the mole. Before he went to Virginia he was all for Annetje, he'd lover written on him from top to toe. But since he's come back has he been here once? Has he waited to speak to her after church? Has he cast glances at her even? Though she wouldn't have seen them, so full of dreams is she about those children of the Evil One, but I was watching——”

“Your eyes should have been on the domine.”

“And so they were, but a woman can look at one

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object and see a dozen others at the same time—It's the way the Almighty made us! I marked the domine's face and lost no word of his sermon, and I saw besides that there was a slit in the sleeve of his gown, no wider than this nail, but still a slit—I saw there was dust in the corner of the pulpit-stair and, moreover, that beneath our tablet were some dried leaves—you must do your duty better, Jan Praa, before you preach mine to me—I saw, too, that Mynheer Bickers's coat needed brushing, and that Mynheer Kay's linen was hungry, and especially did I note the change that has come to Adrian de Hooze. Once he looked at Annetje with anger, not love, in his eyes, 'twas the merest glance here, and gone again in a twinkling, but I caught it—I caught it. And after service, when he could have stopped for a word as of old, he was all smirks and bows for Bertha Van der Grist and her mother waddling on behind the two, with the strut of a duck whose offspring has taken to the water for the first time. Oh! you can't deceive me."

Jan gazed before him, speechless for the moment in the face of this complication which he had not foreseen.

"And all because the domine would harbor the stranger within his gates," Heilke wailed despairingly. "I don't quarrel with the decrees of Providence—I know my own sinful state better—and if it seems right to Him that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children He knoweth best, that's all! But it is cruel hard and bitter that so fine a match should come to naught, just because the domine chose to be pig-headed. There's no one yet has brought that home to him and

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he'd never see it for himself even if it was written in letters of fire."

She hesitated momentarily then, as if her mission were as clearly indicated to her as she would have had the domine's wrong-doing evidenced to him, she sought him in his study. She returned thence, after a short stay, so triumphant in her bearing that Jan, glancing askance at her from the door-step, grudgingly acknowledged her superiority to himself with a swift groan. She had neither word, nor look, for him, however, but swept out into the open and summoned Annetje in a loud, strident voice.

The girl came in answer to the call obediently enough, and listened almost sullenly to the message which Heilke, scorning its pristine simplicity, chose to embellish with comments and chidings of her own; but at the first pause for breath on the woman's part Annetje betook herself to her father's room. She had no liking for the place and seldom frequented it, save on occasions like the present one when duty, not love, drove her thither. She had but a single pleasant remembrance to set against the memory of numerous, depressing visits there, and over that one she often lingered. In answer to the summons from within she opened the door and passed up to the table with something of the bearing of a little child in her mien, half frightened, half defiant. Heilke's words had left her in a state of angry wonderment.

The domine pushed aside some papers and turned his face toward her; she did not notice its increased pallor and weariness, nor did she appreciate the depth of love in his glance of welcome. She regarded him with in-

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different eyes, while his, sharpened by a truer affection than hers, noted with distress the trace of sadness in her looks. He put his hand out timidly—it was his nearest overture to a caress—but she made no motion to take it; did not perceive it in fact.

“You miss your companion?”

Annetje held her peace mutinously. If she spoke the truth, or a quarter of the truth, what would follow but reproof and sermonizing? She was tired of being scolded, why should she be subjected to it further? She had lately learned of the disapproval of her father's congregation and, resenting it, she included him in her resentment also, as if in some way he were culpable because his position, instead of being powerful enough to exempt him from reproach, had but laid him open to a keener censure. Heilke took every means to keep her aware of the scandal which had arisen since Peggy's coming and remembering that, next to the desire for aid, Bellenden's demand had been for secrecy the knowledge filled the girl with dismay. She blamed her father in unreasoning anger because the sanctity of his roof had afforded food for the market-place.

“It is natural, of course, that you should miss your—your companion. The house must be lonely without her.”

“Very lonely,” she admitted tacitly, wondering at him. She did miss the English girl, not only on account of her merry ways but because, while she had been present, Annetje had felt that her ministrations were laid upon another altar, one higher and more beautiful than would ever be erected in her heart to Peggy-Crewe. She had seen little of Bellenden during

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his cousin's stay at the parsonage; yet knowing that she was serving him, in serving her, and thus earning a place in his thoughts she was well satisfied. Now that she was alone again she found herself listening continually for the signal that never came. Her face had sharpened a trifle, her eyes were saddened, but she was willing to wait, telling herself, with unshaken trust, that he would come one day.

"Gray with shadows, gray with shadows," her father went on in a low tone as if to himself, "and youth loves the brightness, loves its kind." He looked toward the girl with a wavering smile. "I had forgotten how lonely the house must seem to you," his voice dropped wistfully.

"I was used to its quiet," she answered a little defiantly; "it never has been different. If my mother had lived the sunshine would always have been here, I know." She stopped abruptly, going on after an almost imperceptible pause, "Heilke blames me for moping, but she can't understand, and it would have been so easy for my mother, that's all. When Miss Crewe was here it was as if a window had been opened and the sun came in and little sweet, cool breezes and the songs of birds. Now," she spread her hands out before her, "the window is closed and barred, there is no sunshine anywhere and no singing."

He watched her through his half-closed eyes; the tremor in her voice hurt him like the pricking of a knife.

"My little child," he murmured slowly, then again and lower, "my little child."

A short silence settled down between them; in the

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interval of quiet comprehension hovered, with soft, dove-like wings, over their hearts. It was a lovely moment for them both, during which they knew a nearness of spirit never before experienced. The domine was the first to speak, as if some power outside of himself compelled him to break the charm which lapped him in a content he knew he did not merit.

“Your mother,” he said hoarsely, “your mother—” He tried to speak further, but a kind of paralysis held his throat.

He turned his face away, clutching at the table's edge with tremulous fingers. He had determined, when there should be mention of the mother between them, that he would tell her story as he knew it from beginning to end. He had faltered over this purpose, deferring it at one time, revolting from it at another, and yet it had grown into a definite, powerful shape within him, something that must be communicated no matter at what grief to him and to his child. The struggle between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, had warred incessantly within him ever since he had wrapped his wife's shame in the trappings of a lie; and there had hitherto been nothing but that futile juggling with resolution, that putting off to a vague to-morrow for the ultimate triumph of his soul, while each day saw what he felt was its deeper degradation instead.

The moment that had also held a great peace for Annetje passed for her likewise, and she was back again in the mists, but a little trail of its light still lingered to govern her actions. She thought she understood the reason of his evident suffering. Shyly, and yet with a compassion that softened her face into exquisite ten-

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derness, she put her rosy, little fingers on the shaking, bloodless hand that was old, and withered, and as cold as ice to the touch; they clung to its irresponsiveness almost fondly.

“Father, father.”

It was her heart calling to him, he told himself dully. He was all she had in the world—he and the beautiful memory of her mother. He could not darken it—would not! His face set grimly. He could not, with his own hand, destroy forever that thing more beautiful than earth's greatest beauty—the faith of a child in its parent. Let him alone answer for his sin—he could not have her suffer—he could not set night in the place of glowing day, could not give her great shadows to cloud her sun of love, when the brightness and the warmth were dear to her. Lie, or no lie, she must be kept in the ignorance that so far had wrought only for her peace. He loved her too deeply to sacrifice that even in the interests of truth, even as an expiation for his own wrong-doing. It was for her good!

Suddenly, with a precision that smote and blinded him like a flash of lightning, the thought occurred to him for the first time that in taking upon himself the double burden of their common grief he had deprived her of a means of development for her soul. She was not strong enough to withstand the approach of calamity; even the regret she experienced at the loss of a companion, known not many days, made her droop like some frail flower before an oncoming tempest. But if the ground beneath her feet should be torn away, if the support around which she had twined her young life should be withdrawn—what then? Had he this to an-

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swer for as well, not only her incapacity to meet trouble, but her inability to triumph over its attack? Bearing one another's burden is to mutual advantage, and a law never lightly to be disregarded, so the domine had always taught; now he felt—with a bitterness of heart too deep to be controverted—that to take upon one's self a cross which God has fitted to another's shoulders is to do a great wrong not only to that other, but to the Love and foresight which placed it there.

The old man stirred uneasily and turned his shaking, haggard face to the girl. Her eyes were like the bit of sky he could see through the window, blue and infinitely tender, the purity of heaven was in their smile. They were young eyes, too, and had never looked upon shame. He watched them half fascinated, picturing to himself how they would droop and grow sorrowful before the words he must speak. This unexpected interview, with the opportunity it offered by her mention of her mother, was one he could not evade. In sending for her, he had meant to let her know that he appreciated her loneliness, doubly accentuated as it was by Miss Crewe's departure; he had wished to give her some little word of comfort, and it was left for him to fasten a heavy grief upon her instead, one that could never be removed.

He made an effort at self-control and sat erect in his chair; his face, still sad, was stern with a resolve that stiffened his whole bearing and made him like a man of stone. She was sensible of the change, though she comprehended it as little as a flower comprehends the cloud that shadows the sun and casts a chill into the very soul of summer. Her hand fell away from his

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arm ; the old barrier was established once more between them, so high that her heart could not find the way to his. He stared at her moodily for some moments without speaking, then he pushed his papers aside and began to fumble in the table drawer. His hands shook as if he were smitten suddenly with palsy ; they could hardly hold the little leather case which he finally brought out to view. Annetje took a step nearer in childlike curiosity.

“ It is your mother’s gift to you,” he said slowly and with much pain, “ a trinket that was her mother’s before her.”

The girl’s fingers closed tremulously, yet with a certain greed in their touch, over the case, but she did not speak.

“ Your mother,” he went on again, “ your mother—she—” his lips were so dry he could hardly move them, he made another effort, “ she did——”

“ No, no,” Annetje protested. “ Please—it’s not necessary to tell me the least, least thing—don’t I know how good she was ? ” Her voice trembled with its rapture, then sank like oil upon the troubled waters of his spirit. “ And it hurts you. I won’t listen to anything, I don’t want to hear anything— My mother—my beautiful mother.”

He covered his eyes to shut out the sight of her glowing face ; the ecstasy and love it held were almost blinding. There was silence in the room again while he fought with himself—and lost. He could not put out the light in the faithful young heart. Besides, he told himself speciously and to excuse his paltering, if the truth were known at this late day Adrian de Hooge

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might repudiate Annetje not only on account of her mother's sin, but for her father's deception as well. If he could be displeased by so trivial a cause as the young gentlewoman's stay, as Heilke declared was the case, what would he say to those other, graver charges? For another moment Annetje's happiness trembled in the balance, then it outweighed the domine's scruples and silenced the voice of his conscience.

He lowered his hand and stared at her. He was not a man to be deeply stirred at any time by the sight of beauty, it was something he did not perceive; but suddenly he became aware of its presence, though like a blind person, who conscious of a rose that holds the whole of summer in its loveliness is yet unable to analyze its charm, he was at a loss to define the subtle attraction. She had fastened the pearls about her neck, where they fell to her bodice, and as he looked she raised the chain and held it close against the dewy freshness of her lips; her eyes were limpid wells of joy that had brimmed over a little of their water upon her flushed, dimpled cheeks and her glistening hair formed a nimbus about her April face. She was thrilling with delight in the possession of the necklace, not only because it had once belonged to her mother, but because of its beauty as well. She loved the beautiful for its own sake with an almost sensuous adoration.

"These dear, dear pearls," she said childishly. "They are so pure and lovely, they are like angels' tears."

He looked at her with a tinge of pity in his glance.

"The angels don't weep," he answered tonelessly, "only mortals do that. The voice of weeping does not

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enter there, 'neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.'" He was silent a moment, during which the gladness went down in her face.

"Now go," he added not ungently, though he resumed his book on the instant as if her presence annoyed him.

She moved away softly, but half-way to the door his voice arrested her steps.

"You may not wear that—that—necklace, the best ornament for a young maid is a meek and quiet spirit."

She unclasped the pearls in a spirit of outward obedience, her pulses throbbing in quick revolt at his tyranny. She had been trying to gather sufficient courage to offer him some little caress, though such was never the custom between them, but now she told herself resentfully that he was ungenerous, first he made her glad with the gift, and then he disregarded her happiness by bidding her keep it hidden; he deserved no especial mark of gratitude since the necklace was not of his giving, but of her mother's. She let the door slip to behind her without speaking and hurried away.

Domine Ryerssen sat quite still after her departure with his book held close to his short-sighted eyes, but he turned no page; the printed matter did not exist to him. He seemed to be listening for the sound of steps without, yet usually he was hard of hearing and the silence around him remained unbroken. Presently, as if he could no longer stand the strain, he stumbled almost feverishly to his feet and crossed the room hastily to the door; he flung it wide with an impatient hand and craned far out into the passage-way, anxiety

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sharpening his gaze. Once his lips framed the word "Annetje," but he did not utter it aloud.

After a few minutes of this futile waiting he closed the door and went slowly back to the table, though he did not sit again ; instead, he stood leaning there lost in thought. He roused himself at last with a start and gazed about in some bewilderment like one in the midst of strange surroundings, then suddenly, as the familiar objects presented themselves to him with their old distinctness, he fell upon his knees by the chair and threw his arms across the seat, burying his face in them. "Oh! my God—my God," he cried in a shaking voice, "be merciful to me a sinner."

XX

MASTER AND SERVANT

Notwithstanding Jan's prophecy the figurative sun which, according to him, was to shine so clearly after Peggy's withdrawal from the Ryerssen household remained persistently hidden. The people regarded their pastor with the utmost disfavor. They were aware that his guest's departure was due to her own whim and not to any compliance on his part to their wishes, and the thought fed their displeasure until it grew out of all proportion to the original cause. Mists of distrust and misunderstanding hung low over the church; there was a scarcely veiled antagonism everywhere which set even the peace of the sanctuary ajar.

Nor was this all. A more serious matter had occurred about this time, in consequence of which a ship, bound for Holland, bore with it a long chronicle of the troubles of the Garden Street church. In stating their grievances to the Classis at Amsterdam the members of the Consistory had not omitted any details of Miss Crewe's stay at the parsonage, nor was the domine misrepresented in his vindication of his own actions—the complainants were just, though their ideas of justice were narrow. Still, to each one of them, it was evident that his office among them must come to an end. If his neglect to follow their admonitions was deemed insufficient reason to warrant his recall, they were con-

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vinced that other, and graver, charges could be laid at his door which the Classis would neither overlook nor condone. In short, keeping their personal disapprobation as a side issue, they accused him of holding heretical opinions. It was apparent to them that a marked change had taken place in his preaching. Several times in his sermons he had inferred that it was God's eternal purpose to save all men; he had been heard to say that all men possess the divine image, and he had shown, not once but with alarming frequency, an unusual spirit of toleration toward all persons whatever their religious views might be.

The members of the *conferentie* party, as the conservatives were called, smarting at the heresy of their pastor and disdaining to treat with him, moved with the utmost secrecy in the matter and petitioned the Mother church to discipline the offender and free them of his influence. With the departure of the ship they experienced a sense of relief, as if the responsibility of his wrong-doing had been shifted to other shoulders, and prepared to possess their souls in patience to await the judgment from over sea.

The domine, utterly unconscious of the net that was closing about him, felt the trouble in an indefinable way and ascribed it wholly to his unwillingness to act on the suggestions of the Consistory. He knew that from his people's stand-point he had failed them signally; yet in pursuing his line of conduct there had seemed no other alternative open to him. That his parishioners would not recognize this was a very bitter drop in his cup, but even more bitter was the thought that no comprehension helped to make his own position easier; for self-

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justification, while it offers some panacea to one's wounds, does not bring the same healing that lies in the commiseration of others. At this moment he stood remote from the sympathy of his kind, as it had been his lot to stand in another and darker period of his life and indeed, for that matter, through all his days.

His interview with Annetje left him utterly broken. Never before had he so fully realized the power of the secret, whose shackles had eaten into his very soul; he was unable to free himself from the dragging weight. It was not that he feared his congregation, nor even the wrath of God, but just the happiness of a girl. The voice of his duty sounded clear to him with the thunders of Sinai, yet above and beyond it rang that little cry: "Father—father!" in which she had called to his heart. The touch of her hand clinging to his made it impossible for him to stand before men as he was, not as he seemed.

As the days passed Jan Praa realized that matters were not improving in the least; though with the faith which he had kept sunny throughout a long life he told himself that the dark hour would soon slip away. Even the sight of Annetje—dull, tuneless, indifferent, could not dispel his confidence; nor could the attitude of the church people shake his trust. Their anger which had been slow to kindle would die as slowly, but that it would die eventually he did not doubt. Meanwhile, far from dying, a little breath—from no one could tell whence—fanned the flame into keener life. In the increased glare the picture of that idle young gentlewoman with her laughter and her disgraceful songs was not so distinctly seen as the figure of a girl in a

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jockey's attire seeking and finding admittance at the domine's door. And it was for such an one that he had scorned the wise and tender admonitions of elders and deacons. It was to protect such as her that he had set the power of the church at naught.

These first, faint rumors assailed Jan with great fear, their very incongruity gave them a reality which, to his mind, was not suggested by fancy alone—they must be true, no one could have conceived such monstrous suspicions else. Then he laughed them to scorn; they were utterly false as every member of the domine's household could testify. His words, however, carried small weight with them. The information, fed from some secret source, throve daily—hourly. Whispers of horse-racing, of betting, of gambling-debts, of riotous living, became intermingled with those other accusations. The name of the mysterious stranger, hitherto unknown, was bandied hither and thither until Peggy Crewe grew to be the synonym for all that was evil. The whole community was like some monstrous witches' cauldron that seethed and bubbled with its poison brew.

Jan, beside himself with grief and rage, sought out Heilke as if she, and she alone, were responsible for the accumulation of calumny.

"You know it's a lie," he cried.

"I don't, I feel in my bones that it's God's truth; it has all the air of it. There's no gainsaying that, or calling it a lie just because it don't smack good to your lips."

"You saw her when she first came——"

"I did not. Where was I? Sent off—me, at my

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age!—to do a girl's errand, tramping up and down William Street, stopping now at this mercer's, now at that, for a bit of ribbon and the shops so tempting, even to a woman of my golden sense, that the minutes slipped away like a knotless thread. 'Twas done for Annetje, and she at home here with a—a—headache, forsooth. What had she to do with such a fine lady's thing as a headache? She never knew the throb of one until that day and since—look at her now, heavy-eyed and white-faced, as washed out in appearance as a bit of calico that won't keep its color when water touches it.”

“But I thought——”

“Don't put yourself into a fever with thinking. I saw the hussy when she first came, did I? I did not see her until she was safely tucked away in Annetje's bed with one of the child's night-rails on. There's no deceiving me! I saw at a glance that it was Annetje's, and not a trace of that Miss Crewe's clothes anywhere to be seen—it struck me as strange even at the time. Then the next morning on that very step was a box that had been conveyed there somehow during the night, and when I went to open it Annetje flew at me as fierce as a hungry cat, and nothing would do but the both of us had to carry it up to her room. That's the truth, Jan Praa, now dovetail it in with what folks are saying and see how it matches. Annetje was the only person to be with the minx.”

“Surely then she'll tell you these stories are false—the idle gossip of silly women——”

“Oh! ay, and of sillier men. There's no doubt the world's given over to lying. It's a good catch phrase

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and she had it at her tongue's end when I confronted her with the story, and she put up her shoulders just as that hussy used to do, but for all that she went white as the yarn she spun and her hands shook over her work. I'm not blind, heaven be praised! If the tales are a parcel of lies, you don't get the real truth out of Annetje; she's as secret as the grave. A woman ain't a convicted liar, I suppose some would hold, because she don't tell all she knows, but she comes precious near being one to my way of thinking. Well, God be thanked, truth speaks with more than just the human tongue. If it's only a question of butter and eggs I can tell by the shifting of an eye, or the trembling of a lip, when dealings are false or not. Providence has given to those poor souls, whose invention runs to tricks of lying spech, some outward and visible signs by which men shall know them for what they are. Annetje can't impose on me, even though she denies everything and talks so grand about being above listening to gossip."

Jan groaned in bitterness of spirit.

"And the domine's child," Heilke went on. "Nature's mighty curious when you come to think of it. Many a time I've asked myself how he could ever have fathered such a little, soft thing and now with these double-dealings of hers the mystery grows. I always said there was more of the mother in her, not that *she* ever stooped to deceit, poor soul! she was like new fallen snow for whiteness. Well, you can't tell, a twist will appear in one generation and be lost in the next, and then crop out again when you least look for it—'t ain't for us to fathom. Annetje's like her mother, feat-

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ure for feature, there's no denying that—the child's getting kinder mazy-eyed, too, just as that other did before she went. Somehow, I don't like it—I don't like it. And moreover, Jan Praa, though it's a terrible creepy-some thing to say I've smelled death in the air of late—it's sort of hovering about this house—oh! you can't deceive me!”

Jan fled precipitately. He was not so much disturbed by Heilke's croakings, being in a measure accustomed to them, as he was seriously troubled by the manner in which she fell in with the current reports and dragged Annetje after her as a silent, but indisputable, witness on the side of the plaintiffs. For himself he would not believe any untruth in Annetje, though his confidence in the young gentlewoman was weakening to a fall; but, maintaining his right of appeal to a higher court, he carried his perplexities to his master.

The domine was visibly distressed by this fresh proof of meddling, as he termed it, on the part of his parishioners and deeply incensed at the grossness of their invention. It was with scarcely veiled impatience that he listened to the charges laid before him and long before Jan had reached the end of his recital the perturbed man began to pace up and down the room snapping his fingers nervously.

“I did not see the child until I saw her in Annetje's room,” he interrupted vehemently. “But even if she had come to me disguised, as they say, needing shelter and aid I should have given both without reserve. I would do it this day. Will they not understand that what is mine is my own, and not subject to their de-

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crees? Why do they seek to annoy me? The child has gone. Why will they not be satisfied and let peace take up her abode once more among us? I will not tolerate this backbiting and scandalmongering."

"But the shamelessness of it," Jan gasped. "A minister is not as a common man, as you know, domine, he is set apart—of the elect. What he does he must do with care. They knew better than you about the girl—it was not right for her to be here. As soon as ever my duty was clear to me I spoke to her myself, I bade her begone. Would to God it had been borne in upon me earlier in her stay."

Domine Ryerssen came to a sudden pause within a few feet of the speaker and looked at him curiously, almost as if he were seeing him for the first time. He waited several moments, his gaze fixed and piercing.

"You told her," he said at last very slowly.

Jan threw back his head, every muscle in his face strained tense; he did not flinch.

"I told her."

"That my roof could no longer shelter her? I would not deny its hospitality to my dearest foe, if fate placed him beneath its cover. The rights of a guest are sacred. And you dared violate the law of my home—my home that has been yours, let me forget how many years," he stopped for an instant fighting with himself. "Traitor to its customs," he continued, huskily, "traitor!"

"It was because—you—you did not know how the people were talking even then, though this last indignity, this unwomanly attire, was unguessed. There

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was discontent everywhere — everywhere! I was driven to do it, and she saw that herself when I told her —oh! I'll give her credit for that quickness."

"There is no justification, none. You robbed my house of its most precious jewel as much as if you had broken in and stolen away some tangible thing. There is no excuse for you. Do you suppose that I would willingly pain my people? If I could have satisfied their demands, I would have done so long ago. But interference in this matter was out of their province, as it was out of yours—it was not even in my own hands. The spirit that dwells upon my hearth wields a power before which I must bow. Yet you dared—" his voice shook with passion, "you dared to do secretly what you knew would hurt me most." He trembled, as if he were suffering from some physical injury, and in his self-absorption struck out in his turn, not caring how deep was the wound he inflicted. "This is your home no longer, Jan Praa, you have forfeited it forever. Go at once."

The old man retreated a step in dismay, his weather-beaten face growing a sickly white, his eyes staring incredulously.

"You can't mean it," he gasped in a hoarse whisper, "you can't mean it."

"Every word."

"After all these years?"

"Were you faithful to the years and their teachings?"

"It has been my home as long as it has been yours," Jan's voice was a wail of anguish. "It's honor is as dear to me as to you, nay, I mean no disrespect. I loved

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it too well to see it smirched in the eyes of the people. You will not turn me off?"

"You may not stay."

"Cast out—set adrift—and Annetje—and the—the—garden—my garden! Oh! God, it's too hard to bear. Why, look you, you can't treat me this way any more than you can tear up that tree yonder and toss it aside. It's old—old—and its roots have struck deep, I tell you. Tear it up and it dies. I can't go; my roots have struck too deep."

"I cannot keep you longer in my service."

Jan drew his sleeve across his eyes.

"The south beds were fair choked up with weeds when I came," he murmured to himself after a minute, as if he were thinking aloud and had forgotten his immediate surroundings. "My fingers were itching to get at them. The domine never knew aught about growing things, and Heilke only thinks of herbs. The garden was fast going to destruction, but I labored over it—I labored over it. The flowers—bless them!—got to know me and love me seemingly, and all the tender young growths had a trick of bowing down to me like the sheaves in Joseph's dream, making obeisance to me their master, I always thought of that on a breezy day—always.

"Years, and years, and years," he rambled on musingly, "my garden—all my own. Even when she came, even when she left it to the baby. Annetje says it's hers now— Well, well, let the child think so—I just keep watch—keep watch. She's got the reins fast enough in her little hands, but she knows I'm back of her ready to take them when she's tired, or things get

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too masterful. It's my garden, I tell you." He lifted his head and stared into the domine's face, the realization of the moment striking him sharply.

"Why," he continued bitterly, "men let old stumps of trees bide even if their day is over. They don't drag them out—time makes them sacred. Say they played beneath them when they were boys—that's reason strong enough why they should stay. It's for old sake's sake! And no more do they cast an old friend off, no matter what the offence——"

"I cannot do otherwise, God help me. You may not stay."

A sudden flame of passion leapt into Jan Praa's face, his eyes narrowed until they became a mere slit through which his glance glittered like a weapon. He moved to the door without a word, no longer broken in aspect, and paused there with his hand on the knob.

"You can't take my church office from me, Domine Ryerssen," he snarled. "You can't go to the Consistory and say that I'm unfit—unworthy for service."

The subtle taunt in the angry voice was not lost upon the minister. He raised his head inquiringly and looked back into the other's eyes, before their fixed, contemptuous stare his own wavered and fell; his face grew ashy. He put out his shaking hands as if to ward off a blow.

"You—you knew?"

"I knew—all these years I knew. Wait, I'll tell you how. The day she went away my cousin Gysbert Praa sailed by the same ship. I was at the wharf to bid him God-speed and as I tarried, while the sailors made ready to cast off, a man and woman hurried aboard. They

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passed so close I could have touched her, without stretching out my hand more than this, and the end of her veil flapped in my face so that I could not help but see that it was jagged and rent, as if it had been caught in some place and wrenched away. There was something familiar about her, though she was heavily cloaked and hooded, that made my heart sink like lead in my breast. Something in the turn of her head, the little sideways walk—I couldn't tell what it was—but I went cold as ice on the moment. I put the thought by, telling myself I was a fool to be troubled by a chance resemblance when she was home here, safe with her child——”

The domine gripped the edge of the table so hard that his knuckles gleamed a luminous white, and the veins on the backs of his hands seemed strained almost to bursting.

“Go on,” he commanded hoarsely.

“When I got home Heilke had the child and she said that Juffrouw Ryerssen was gone to the country—she cried out as she finished speaking to know if I had seen a ghost, but I put her off as best I could and went away to the garden. Something, I don't know what it was, drove me down to the little gate. It was open and there, clinging to the upper hinge, was a wisp of black material—a bit of a woman's veil.”

A deep groan seemed wrung from the listening man as he let go his hold of the table and covered his face with his hands.

“Then I remembered,” Jan continued more gently, “that often had I found the gate ajar and once, in the lane without, I had picked up a woman's glove—her

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glove. I knew she used the gate and it was borne in upon me then, like a flash, that she had gone through it for the last time, that it led to the way of shame. After that I waited—waited—I couldn't go to you with my suspicions—soon I knew you knew, for the heartbreak was written on your face. Then came that day when you said she was dead to us all—you know the rest."

"You kept quiet all this time for my sake?"

"For yours, for hers, for the child's, since that was your will."

"I laid no command upon you."

"You showed me your desire more clearly than if you had said, in so many words, do this, or that."

"I—I did that? Then I digged a pitfall for your steps, too, my poor Jan, I made you take a lie into your life, I snared your soul as with a net—woe is me!"

Jan shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"And there's nothing so fair in all this world as the truth," the domine went on shudderingly. "Oh! my God, how have I sinned in Thy sight and caused this other to sin. Lay not this charge against him."

"No, no," Jan interposed, speaking soothingly as if to a little child, "never fret. He doesn't look at sin with our eyes, that's very certain! Maybe He makes allowances. He knows what the woman was to you—didn't He create her? And He knows, too, how grievous hard it is to see those you love suffer scorn, deserving or otherwise, it don't much matter. The world's cruel bitter to the weak and helpless——"

"Hush! I must not listen to you—hush! The very argument I used. I made it seem right. I wouldn't see that it was of the devil—the father of lies." He stopped

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brokenly, then: "Unfit for service, unfit for service," he went on with a bitter cry, "oh! worse than hypocrite that I have been."

Jan moved away from the door and went quite close to the trembling man.

"When I said that I was smarting with rage—I—I did not mean it—I but struck with the first weapon that came to hand. Forgive me."

"Am I so blinded by my sin that I cannot behold truth when she sweeps by with her mighty wings? Unfit—unworthy—Those are the badges to fasten on my coat after the heat and the burden of the battle. But there shall be no more dalliance with evil to lap me in ease——"

"And Annetje?"

"Annetje—oh! God, what shall I do? My one little ewe lamb, my one little lamb! Nay then, Annetje must suffer with me—it is the only course——"

"Listen to me," Jan pleaded. "Surely there's no need to speak. I was never one for dragging the dead past into the living present. The Scriptures say 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and that, I take it, means what is gone—the day that has held its wrong and shame—as well as what's to come. This is over and done with long ago. Let the past rest."

"I—I cannot see my duty—I am bewildered—like one blind. Go now."

"Do you mean as you meant before?" Jan's voice was the merest whisper.

The domine looked at him and hesitated, a sad perplexity in his gaze.

"If I bid you stay," he said after some moments,

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“ does it not mean that I fear you? Does it not imply that you are my master, even though you serve me, even though I bind the irons of secrecy upon your lips by bribing you with your heart's desire? I—I know not. But if, ignoring your fidelity, I bid you go,” his voice trembled, “ because out of love for me you have disregarded a principle of mine, am I not still master—master most of all of my weak, wayward self? ”

He stood gnawing his lip irresolutely, while the watch among the papers on the table made a noisy comment on the passing minutes ; presently he moved closer to his companion and touched him gently.

“ You shame me, Jan, every way you shame me. Oh ! more than friend, I cannot bid you go.”

Jan took the trembling hand from his arm and clasped it between his work-worn palms.

“ And my garden—mine—” he cried brokenly.

XXI

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The long room at the Province Arms was almost devoid of company. It had been well frequented during the earlier evening by the habitués of the place; there had been the usual faces at the tables, the usual amount of wine taken, gold lost, and jests passed. To the hum of many voices had succeeded this semi-quiet. The candles were burning low in branches and sconces, the air was close and stifling, though the windows were flung wide to catch any stray breeze that might be abroad, the ones in the rear opening on the broad piazza which commanded a view of the river and the line of the Jersey shore beyond, lying dark against the star-gemmed heavens. Many of the guests had idled the moments away there when the night was younger, or had descended into the sleeping garden which sloped to the water's edge, strolling about in the soft dusk far from the excitement of the game that sharpened the feverish faces of the players into unlovely lines.

But garden and veranda were deserted and wrapped in silence, while in the house itself a number of weary serving-men lounged against the wall at one side of the room yawning furtively and casting distasteful glances, from time to time, at the group of revellers still gathered about one of the card-tables.

"A bottle of Madeira, Hobbes, and don't let the grass

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grow under your feet while you're getting it," one of the players called peremptorily. "Step lively, do you hear? I say gentlemen," he continued, turning back to his companions, "the trick's mine—the queen takes."

"Ay, just your luck, Moulton, the petticoats are always for you."

"Not always," interpolated another slyly.

"'Sdeath! sir," Moulton cried with a quick lowering of his hand to his side, "am I to understand——"

"No offence in the world, my bully boy. A man may be lucky at cards and—you know the adage. But that was not my thought." The speaker paused with a laugh. "Lord! if we all moped and wore the willow because a certain lady is deaf to our sighings, we'd form a line that might take the King's fancy for numbers, though it doesn't take hers.

' Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flowery meads in May,
If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be? "

He broke off in the song and looked around, "There! she's gone and God speed to her," he resumed. "I was thinking of that other jade hight Fortune. Didn't you get bit up Greenwich way with the rest of us?"

"Ay, I lost a pretty sum, curse the luck! How did I know the Beauty would be up to fresh tricks?"

"You don't mean——" the words were tumbled out with a hasty oath.

"I do, though, who doubts it? It's a pity we didn't suspicion it then and there. I'd given ten times the sum

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I lost to have been able to say to her—' Ah! ha, madam, I know you.' "

" But who says? "

" Man, who says—who says? Who doesn't say? It's all about us; you can't disentangle it, any more than you can disentangle the air we breathe. Who can tell how a rumor grows? A whisper here, a whisper there, a word, a glance, a sneer—softer than snow—quicker than steel—and hydra-headed at the last. What does it matter to us how it came into being when the fact remains that my fine lady, who prides herself upon never having had the reputation of an intrigue, is convicted of as pretty a piece of unwomanly daring as ever the sun shone on? The heroine of a nice bit of scandal! Oh! she'll come back to us devout enough, never fear. She's been tarrying of late in the household of a Dutch minister getting back her roses, forsooth——"

" Not—not—" the girl's name was uttered in a sharp whisper. " Gad, was there ever such a jest? And we thought her safe at Albany revenging our ills on the fellows there."

" Norrie swore to me Sunday that she hadn't been there at all—'twas just a blind!—and Miss Stirling gone to all the trouble to make a rout for her. He said 'twas given out that she was staying at Crewe Park up country. I began to smell a rat the moment he spoke. You know we thought it deuced queer the way the jockey was hustled off that day and old Middleton at hand, too. Somebody had gone to fetch him from the seats and when he came running up with his—' Eh man alive! is the lad hurtit?'—Sink me! if the patient hadn't flown."

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"Yes, yes, I remember. And here in town, you say, all the while? I wonder did she make a conquest of the minister—domine, don't ye call him? He must wear his heart on his sleeve. Was it he that told?"

"There you're at it again! It's well for the rest of us that we are satisfied with facts as they come to us and not troubled with the itch to trace the news step by step. You've seen the *Post-Boy*, doubtless? No? Well, I can tell you this much—it's no secret—there came a letter to the office t'other day with the news of the Beauty's daring writ therein in full, and a pretty poem's the result."

"That accounts for your preoccupied air these last days, and your 'don't-trouble-me-I'm-not-in-the-humor-for-junketing.'"

Moulton's breast swelled complacently as he settled his ruffles aright.

"Nay," he laughed nonchalantly, "you give me too much credit. A sonnet, or a quatrain perhaps, but an epigram now—egad! it's beyond me. I'd be but a 'prentice hand at it."

"Still there must be a beginning some time. Where's the *Post-Boy*? I say—you—somebody—there, fetch the *Post-Boy*. How slow that cursed drawer moves; he'd be a good one to bring in Death. Hola, the *Post-Boy*, I say."

"Have a care, Drake, here come Bellenden and Larry."

"Who's Bellenden that he's to be feared?" growled Moulton under his breath. "Damn his high and mighty airs, he's only a two-penny captain after all! And as for Crewe, I wish somebody would take me that young

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fool and drop him in the river. Look at his swagger. Is he the only man who ever had a horse win? Have you heard him bleat 'my horse—my horse?' Lord! you'd think 'twas he that created Touchstone. By heavens, I'll take the conceit out of him and out of that cousin of his before I'm an hour older."

The party of men who entered the room at this juncture was composed of Bellenden, two fellow-officers—Whyte and Nevil—and Larry. The three soldiers were in uniform, their coats thrown open because of the heat of the night, while the slim young exquisite was foppishly arrayed in a suit of silver gray with an elaborately embroidered waistcoat—London was written on him from top to toe. Despite the chorus of greetings showered upon them the new-comers could not but feel that they had furnished food for the previous conversation; the lull that followed their entrance was surcharged with an intangible suspicion.

Bellenden looked keenly about. He had been annoyed throughout the day by a hundred little happenings, too insignificant to put one's finger upon and yet more irritating than the constant buzzing of a blue-bottle against the pane is to the hearing of a man in fever. In the gardens, whither he had strolled in the afternoon, the hilarity of the different groups there was noticeable, but a sudden cessation of the chatter followed in each instance his appearance within ear-shot. Broken sentences, peals of laughter, chance words, set every nerve within him ajar with the thought of what they really might mean.

"La, Jack," Mrs. Crewe called as he stalked past, raging at the covert innuendoes, and quite oblivious to

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the smiling presence of the widow and her companion, whom she was parading for the benefit of her less fortunate friends, "Ia, Jack, I'll have to send for Peggy. All the town is talking of her and wondering why she don't come home. I protest, a person would think there was no one in the world but Peggy."

She paused to let the young nobleman at her side whisper a contradiction to her words and Bellenden continued his morose way unheeded.

No one in the world but Peggy! It had been his thought for many weeks—though he felt, rather than knew, that this sudden public interest in her was but the result of her escapade which had leaked out in some fashion. He chafed at the continued queries: "How was she?" "When was she coming back?" What could he say? He had not seen her himself, save in his dreams, waking and sleeping, for a full fortnight. Smarting with these thoughts and full of suspicion he had betaken himself to the Province Arms with his companions that night to have a try at cards, or the bowl, and so win forgetfulness one way or the other.

"Have a game, any of you fellows," Drake called glibly, throwing himself into the breach, "or shall we say cuts? Come, you're deuced flush, Crewe, and can afford to stand the crowd and let us win back some of our money."

Larry put his hands on his hips and swayed from side to side, humming lightly.

"I'll keep what I have, thank you, and thank my horse. Truth is, I've sworn off *pro tem.*, but I'll join you in a glass fast enough. Cards, gentlemen," he added with a pretty air of sententiousness, "play the

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devil with us. Best give 'em the cold shoulder when we can."

"Ay, cards and women," Drake laughed, "though you've no need to complain at the fair hands of the latter, Crewe."

Larry smiled fatuously and smoothed his laces to an imagined advantage.

"'Tis not for me to say," he ventured with assumed simplicity.

Bellenden, looking on, was possessed with a sudden desire to shake the boy. He was angry at him and doubly angry at the laughter of the others. That there was more in Drake's remark than appeared on the surface he was very sure; he had not lost the quick glance which had passed between him and Moulton. He knew Drake for a mischief-maker, a dare-devil, who could never let well enough alone; Moulton, dark-browed, sinister-eyed, lacked the other's frankness, though immeasurably his superior in cleverness. There had never been more than the shallowest pretence at friendship between Bellenden and Moulton; belonging to the same set, they met almost daily in the diversions of fashionable life, yet each man, from the start, had had an instinctive dislike for the other.

"Well, there's no occasion to shun wine, thank God," Nevil ejaculated piously. "You're with me there, Jack?"

"That I am," Bellenden returned, throwing aside his heavy mood. "Care vanishes with the first gulp—here goes! I'm one also with that old fellow who has set down for our creed five good reasons for drinking——"

"Out with 'em, Captain. What are they? Tell us who fathered 'em."

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"Sink me, but I forget how he is called. What tricks a man's memory plays him sometimes! Well, 'tis small matter. A dean of Oxford, gentlemen, his verses are more rememberable than his name. Come, count me off the reasons:

' Good wine, a friend, or being dry,
Or lest you should be by and by,
Or any other reason why.'

"And if Oxford were situate in York Colony the old duffer, like one of his cloth here, might have added a sixth argument to his five—Beauty in boots! Gentlemen, I give it now." Moulton stood up as he spoke, his glass lifted high.

Bellenden and Larry started in surprise, though each man had himself in check almost immediately, and not so much as a look passed between them to show that they had noticed the covert allusion to Domine Ryerssen.

"'Slife! but that's good," Drake cried as he drained off the bumper. "Only you've forgot to say whose boots."

"A most grievous omission, Mr. Moulton," Bellenden put in coldly, shifting his untasted glass and watching the liquor it contained with a curious glance. "Your friend is right— Whose boots? Your words need simplifying—to my understanding at least."

"The *Post-Boy* might offer sufficient enlightenment, that is, if you have any acquaintance with the muses."

"No personal acquaintance, I regret to say. It has not been my custom, or my privilege as you might term it, to lisp in numbers, still I've a tolerable familiarity

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with the endeavors of other men. We've some poets of our own at home, as doubtless you have heard. I didn't know you bred 'em here."

"A few," Moulton raged. "I fancy we'll be able to boast as good singing-birds in the future as any of yours."

"'Tis a question to be left for time and 'pert posterity' to decide. Meanwhile I wait with impatience the commentary of your gazette."

Moulton picked up the paper, which a servant had previously placed upon the table at his elbow, and smoothed out the sheet several times with the back of his hand. He turned it, in the same precise, irritating fashion, running down the page with his eye until he came to that which he sought. Then he cast a swift glance around at the hushed, expectant group, threw back his shoulders with an air of bravado and, after clearing his throat noisily, began to read.

In the silence that followed the closing words Larry, his face drawn with rage, his hand gripping his sword-hilt, moved a step nearer his cousin. Bellenden stood apparently unmoved, though in the blur before his eyes he saw all things red, and his mind was a whirl of confused impressions out of which whole lines of the scurrilous lampoon rose and smote him again and again. The pause was not of a minute's duration, though it seemed of interminable length to the entire company. Bellenden was the first to speak.

"As a man of taste, sir," he said calmly and deliberately, "I cannot praise this effort of the muse. It halts sadly and it owes besides, or I much mistake, a line to Mr. Pope at his worst, as if your poet's ingenuity

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must needs borrow something of another's brains to eke out the poverty of his own. In short, sir, if you will have my opinion the verses are most villainously writ."

Moulton struck the table angrily with the folded paper.

"At least, my good critic," sneered he, "there's no fault to be found with the sense."

"Does it contain sense? Egad! I never looked for that pearl there, I only heeded the sound—it so got into my ears, confusing 'em. It made me think of a time at home when I was sitting at White's and a fellow in the street was playing the bagpipe; my teeth were set on edge with the noise, I remember, and I let fly the first thing that came to hand, knowing 'twas but what the wretch merited. Nay, I could never bear with some noises and damn me! if hearing vile poetry vilely read isn't the worst of 'em all. 'Tis a monstrous waste of good wine, some would say, but I know no better use to make of it than in this fashion." As he spoke he threw the contents of his glass into the jeering face opposite.

"'Sdeath! you'll answer for this," Moulton choked through the liquor coursing down his cheeks.

"With pleasure, when you will, where you will, how you will."

"Nay, you'll answer for it now."

"That would be to my best liking. I was ever one with the poet: 'defer not till to-morrow to be wise.'"

"Then out with your sword, sir. Clear a space, gentlemen, give us room. Or stay, let's adjourn to the garden, there'll be less danger there of interruption from the watch."

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"A happy suggestion that. I second it with all my heart. We want no interference in this matter. After you, sir."

The company had almost instantly divided into two groups, the one composed of Moulton and his friends, the other of Bellenden and his.

They made their way now with but little noise out to the piazza and thence to the garden below. The two cousins walked side by side.

"I wish I was you, Jack," Larry said sadly. "I'd like to put my mark on that low fellow. 'Twas he that writ that poetry, I'll swear. He's had a grudge against Peggy ever since she laughed at his wooing—as if she would have stooped to him," he stopped contemptuously. "But how the devil did he hear of the domine," he demanded the next moment, "through Annetje, do you think? P'r'aps he knows the little gate, too, eh? 'Twas in the verse."

Bellenden came to a standstill, a sudden light dawning upon him. "Through Annetje—my God, yes—yes, of course—she was the only one to see Peggy in the garden that day." He ground his teeth in rage. "She's let her tongue wag to her neighbors, damn her!"

"She may not—" Larry began.

"Let her go," Bellenden interrupted hotly. "I'm finished with her. Nothing can undo the mischief she's wrought. God! if she was only a man and in Moulton's place for five minutes—that's all I'd ask."

They turned into the path, down which the others were passing, and walked gravely along. The air, sweet with the perfume of dew-bedrenched flowers, was

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doubly refreshing after the stifling atmosphere of the room they had just quitted, with its fumes of wine and the drip of tallow candles. The little pause of quiet was welcome, too, though it held danger, and perhaps death, in its clasp. It brooded over them with the weight of mystery in its still breath.

"Tell Peggy," Bellenden said swiftly, breaking the silence.

"I won't be burdened with messages," Larry cried, his face twitching despite himself. "There's no need for 'em, Jack, you're going to pink him, bleed him, kill him—you know you are! And so you'll carry your own messages, old fellow."

"But there's a chance that he'll do for me; he's master of his weapon, I've been told. 'Tis but a fancy of mine anyway and if the worst befalls me, why tell Peggy I've dreamed of Paradise——"

"Tut, tut, man, don't talk of the place at a time like this; 'tis enough to make a jelly of your courage. Come, here we are."

They joined the others where they stood—the two parties still separate—in a little clearing well removed from the house. Someone had brought out a torch and had stuck it in the earth where the garish, orange flame showed crude and artificial in the beauty of the scene. The night was clear; remote stars burned in the heavens and a waning moon was making its slow way across the sky. It swung above them, pale and languid, like the ghost of a passion long since dead, looking down wearily, ironically, upon the hate and discord in this little place of life. The white light smote the still tree-tops into a weird loveliness; the

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beams, moving lower, blanched boughs and shrubs and made a path of radiance across the grass. Heavy shadows gathered outside the plain of light and hovered beneath the bushes and in the thickets like waiting foes. The ground dipped sharply to the river that throbbed black, and almost voiceless, in the dark beyond; it was like that other river—of which each man present had heard some word—whose dank chill struck across the soft, sweet air.

Bellenden and Moulton stepped forward into the very heart of the white glory. They stood facing each other, looking unflinchingly into each other's eyes for the moment, then they saluted punctiliously at the given signal, as if the exquisite courtesy of the formality were some token of friendliness which did not conceal a bit-terer, darker intent.

There was a flash of steel, the smiting of blade on blade—and across the tumult came the voice of the watchman in the street beyond, calling the hour:

"Past two o'clock, my masters, and a fair morning."

XXII

AT TRINITY OF A SUNDAY

Mrs. Crewe twitched her head impatiently away from her woman's hands and turned in her chair at the sound of the opening door.

"Peggy," she cried in a voice of displeasure as she recognized the new-comer.

"Just Peggy," the girl answered with a touch of bravado, though she looked tired and white, and her eyes were full of an unaccustomed gravity—"Peggy the wretch, the sinner, come home again. Are you glad to see her?"

"I wonder you dare show yourself here. 'Tis too brazen-faced! The whole town is talking of you."

"I know, Larry rid out to Greenwich last night with the information. He showed me the *Post-Boy*, too."

Mrs. Crewe groaned aloud.

"The whole town—I shall never survive it—never! Filkins," she continued sharply, "do you go on with your work. I don't pay you to stand with idle hands. Lower that curl—you've dragged it so tight it makes me look hidjus. Not so far down—oh! I should think you could see for yourself how outrageous unbecoming it is, but my servants never take any interest in their work. So it's over and done with quickly, that's all they ask. There! that's better, but the pin—oh! you're driving it into my very skull— I think you do it

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on purpose, you hussy. You ought to have more feeling after all the time you've been here, and I always kindness itself to you—you ought to be considerate when I'm half distracted with these slanders—we're undone forever!"

"La, mamma, don't take it so much to heart. 'Twill be forgot as soon as a fresh trouble for someone else arises. We women sweeten our tea with scandal, and no one remembers last week's dish when one is satisfying one's thirst with a new brew."

"There you go, trying to find some excuse for yourself. Heaven knows what I've done to have such a child! I never slept the whole night through thinking of your conduct—you can see the ravages on my face. Filkins, put on more red. What gown have you laid out for me? My green taffetas, did you say? By whose orders, stupid, by whose orders? I said my yellow lute-string."

"Then my blue won't clash with your gown," Peggy's cool voice cut in. "I'm glad, for my heart was set on wearing it to-day."

"Where are you going, miss?"

"To Trinity, of course. Where else should I go of a Sunday morning? Isn't that what a devout, well-brought up girl would do?" Peggy paused, then she went on her defiant tones growing almost wistful, "Don't you see the people won't talk so much if I am there? My presence will give the lie to their words."

"'Twill but confirm them—you're as white as a marble image and fallen off desperately in your looks."

"They won't see that when I've on my fine feathers. Never fear, madam, I won't do you any discredit."

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"You've done me enough as it is," the older woman retorted. "Ain't the whole town laughing at me—at me, looking on at you riding the race, ignorant that it was you?"

"La, who says I rode the race—who can prove it?"

"But everyone is talking of it and of those Dutch people who took you in—Ryer—Ryer—something. Hang the creatures! I'd like to see them at the whipping-post."

"And I too, madam, especially that little she-thing," Peggy cried between her teeth. "'Tis not often we agree so well."

"Then that poetry! Half the town has it off by heart already, I'll swear. Lord, who writ it? That sneaking Moulton, do you think? It's like him but for the wit, for wit there is, though your cousin made the lack of it his cause for quarrelling. Oh! if I was you, Miss, I'd want to go away and hide. I'd die of shame because of all this trouble—scandal such as never was, and a brave man brought to death's door for your sake."

Peggy caught at the dressing-table with shaking hands that jarred the bottles and boxes there into a tinkling commotion.

"Larry said 'twas but the veriest scratch," she cried in a dull, toneless whisper, her eyes wide with fear.

"Larry—pouf!—of course, he'd say so. There was a great deal of blood shed, a great deal. Mr. Willet was mad with rage. He says gentlemen oughtn't to bring their differences into a coffee-house and its pleasure-grounds, it gives the place a bad name; if they must meet there's Golden Hill, or Ranelagh, or——"

"But Jack? Larry swore on his honor 'twas only

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a pin-prick through the shoulder—he swore it twenty times.”

“Twenty, or forty, it makes no difference; he did it to save your feelings. I have it on good authority that Jack’s wounded past cure—that patch a little higher, Filkins, nearer the eye, so—! And Moulton——”

“Leave Moulton alone. Who cares one way, or the other?” The defiant voice broke and Peggy’s hand slipped to her mother’s *negligée*. “I—I—why it can’t be true about Jack,” she stammered faintly. “Tell me it isn’t true.”

“Lud, Miss Peggy,” Filkins interposed, “sit you right down. See, mem, if she hath not gone as white as curds even to her very lips.”

“There, child, sit down—do,” Mrs. Crewe cried pettishly. “I declare you’ve given me a dreadful turn. Where are my drops, Filkins, and my volatile salts? Quick, get ’em for me. Lord, Peggy,” she continued sharply, “I didn’t suppose you cared so much for the fellow as that.”

A sudden flame of red chased the white from the girl’s face and she tossed back her head defiantly, though she trembled against Filkins’s arm and clung to its support.

“Who says I care?” she cried with spirit. “It always makes me giddy to hear about blood and—and—such things. Besides, I’ve had a longish ride, and I didn’t sleep well last night.”

“That’s it, that’s it, now rest you quiet, miss,” Filkins crooned, “’taint to be wondered at your feeling so. My Lady Betty Withers at home had just the same weak stomick as you, she couldn’t a-bear to hear

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about juels and wounds—she'd fall to shaking at the mere word of 'em—and she'd go white if she pricked her finger ever so little—that she would! 'Twas the constitution and the sensibility, she said, as only goes with the first families. Come, miss, sit quiet, there's a love, and watch me fix your mamma. Ain't my lady just ravishing this morning, and don't that style of hair-dressing become her?"

The woman returned obsequiously to her place behind her mistress. "Lud, mem," she simpered, "a hundred times it's been on the tip of my tongue to tell you that I saw Mr. Larry's gentleman this morning, and he told me that those shocking stories we heard overnight about poor, dear Capting Bellenden hadn't a word of truth in 'em. The Capting, mem, hath sustained but the smallest injury—oh! the very smallest—he will be abroad in a day or so."

"Very good news indeed, Filkins," Mrs. Crewe observed complacently. "Where's the powder? I declare I can go to church now with a thankful heart and I was feeling so low about the poor fellow." She glanced sharply at the figure on the sofa, then her face softened a trifle. "You'd better not think of coming, child."

"Nay, madam, 'tis as you say, though I, too, might carry with me a thankful heart because our cousin has not suffered too deeply in my cause. Larry and I thought," Peggy faltered a little, "we thought—as long as I must come home some time—that 'twould be best to be here now. 'Twould look as if I was innocent of all the monstrous things folks say."

"H—mm! there's some truth in that of course,"

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Mrs. Crewe mused. "They'd be apt to argue that if you were guilty you'd stay away. But your arm?"

"La, mamma," Peggy laughed, "you're not ever going to believe that silly story. Why, see, one arm looks like the other—to my eyes, at least."

"Ay, mem, if so be that you will pardon my speaking, there's naught amiss with my young lady that any one could remark—a little palish perhaps, but Mrs. Bennet will soon mend that. And the blue gown goes so beautiful with your yellow lute-string, mem,—'tis the advantageousest way to set it off! It's my humble opinion that you two ladies should always be seen together, looking like sisters as you do, for no one would ever think you was mother and daughter, as Mr. De Lancey's gentleman remarked to me only the last Sunday you walked out together. 'Mother?' says he taken aback monstrously. 'Stepmother you mean, mem,' says he, 'that's all I'll believe, though you swore never so.' And I just laughs for answer. 'Stepmother,' says he again, 'come, Mrs. Filkins, out with the plain truth, if so be plain is the word to use about so lovely a lady.' But I wouldn't give him no satisfaction."

"La, Filkins, you'll never get me ready in time if you keep up such a chatter, though I do protest you've surpassed yourself in fixing my hair this morning. I like it hugely. There! run away Peggy love, and dress if you mean to accompany me—it lacks a half-hour to starting."

A little more than a quarter of a century earlier New York had an ill name among the Puritans of New Eng-

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land, because "it was too much given over to Episcopacy" which, some years before, had been virtually established by law in a large part of the province. To those serious-minded folk "the show, and ostentation, and purse pride" which obtained in the town seemed to be an effectual barrier to the kingdom of Heaven, but despite their intervention, which bore unmistakable fruits of righteousness, the high-church party continued to flourish and people of all denominations were obliged to contribute to its support.

The "English set," as those who worshipped at Trinity came to be called, was composed of the Governor *ex officio*, his council, and the fashionable inhabitants of the colony, who represented largely the most consequential families in the province. It was an aristocratic company, therefore, that met in the church of a Sunday morning to listen to a little sermonizing and, at the close of the services, to indulge in unlimited scandal-mongering and flirtation among the graves without.

Trinity, at that time, was a social register where one might discover what persons of importance were in town. The latest arrivals from England made their first public appearance within its walls, as did also the visitors from the manors, and the country-people in general, though they might belong to other denominations. It was the speediest way to advertise their presence. Even rigid Presbyterians, forgetful for the nonce of the antagonism existing between them and the Episcopalians (a feud that was being materially increased by the growing dissensions between the two representative families of the rival churches), availed themselves of this custom to spread the news of their

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return to their homes and sat complacently under the Rev. Mr. Barclay, quite unmindful of the fact that their own house of prayer opened its doors to them only a few steps away in Wall Street.

All the world, in Peggy's parlance, seemed to have invaded Trinity the Sunday after the duel at the Province Arms. The square, roomy pews, made more comfortable with "the great luxuries" of cushions and hassocks, were filled by the owners and their families; there was not a vacant place anywhere, save in the big pew well up toward the front, where persons of the greatest social prominence sat, and that was significantly empty. As the organ pealed out the last notes of the Gloria, there was a swift sound throughout the church, scarcely musical and yet not dissonant, of brass tinkling on brass as the little green moreen curtains—hanging from the slender rail surrounding each pew to shield the occupants from observation during prayers—were drawn back almost by one accord and the people settled themselves to follow the sermon, for the worthy divine had ascended the pulpit and was about to give out his text.

He paused, according to his custom, and surveyed his flock in a gently urbane manner, looking slowly from right to left, and from left to right, as if scanning each face within his range of vision. As his glance lingered on its way the quiet of the sacred edifice was broken by a slight commotion at the door, the sound of advancing steps on the stone pavement of the aisle, the swish of silken draperies, and then, in full sight of the congregation, the belated comers swept to the empty pew near the chancel rail.

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Mrs. Crewe, a trifle in front of her companions, moved languishingly along, a self-righteous little simper upon the fixed red of her face, her yellow lute-string gown, with its garnishing of silver, floating around her like a sun-touched cloud. She was an elegant figure, from the waving plumes in her hat to the tip of her satin slipper that peeped decorously from beneath her petticoat as she walked, yet—after a single glance—no one heeded her, nor was any but the scantest notice accorded to the young fop strutting in her wake. A slim, girlish shape riveted the attention everywhere. It was impossible to believe—impossible! The same graceful bearing they were all accustomed to see, the head carried high, the Sunday face—devout, demure—presented to them in profile, the eyes fixed discreetly on the pulpit beyond—Innocence in blue lute-string, with a bunch of little country flowers at her breast.

An involuntary stir, like the rustle of leaves when the finger of the approaching storm touches them in swift monition of danger, ran its round from pew to pew. There were other sounds bravely, almost instantly, suppressed; a gasp of amazement that, on a sudden, turned to a sigh, a sneer that became a sneeze, a smile—trembling on the brink of laughter—that safeguarded itself as a cough, and the quick, agitated sweep of the fans everywhere, setting ribbons and laces a-flutter and rattling out an indescribable meaning against the breasts of their owners. Then quiet settled down again, save for the little clatter of fan-sticks, not an unusual accompaniment of a summer Sunday—and the sonorous voice of the clergyman filled the church.

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The Rev. Henry Barclay had had some misgivings at the time of the composition of this particular sermon. It had seemed to him to be short—a noble, notable effort, but wofully short—five minutes, nay, ten minutes' shorter by the slowest reading than the usual length of his sermons. But his peroration being couched in well rounded terms and the weather being unconscionably warm, he had the good sense to leave well enough alone, trusting that his parishioners would not notice the brevity which, in any other instance might safely be attributed to wit, but which here—he felt almost guiltily—must signify a mental deficiency of some sort.

Short then, by actual page and delivery measurement, the sermon undeniably was; and yet, never within the walls of Trinity had there seemed, to the majority of the listeners assembled there, one so tediously dull and lengthy. The women fidgeted in their seats and cast indignant looks at the pulpit. Would he never be through? No one knew the text, no one cared what it was, and still Mr. Barclay droned on in that slow precise fashion of his, slower and more precise than usual this morning as he best knew why, though his people were in the darkness of ignorance.

If the sermon seemed long to the others, it was doubly so to the girl who furnished the subject-matter for much of the thinking that went on within the sacred place. She kept her gaze riveted upon the benign face above her, knowing only too well that those of her neighbors who could watch her were cognizant of every least change in her expression and every motion of her body. She tired with the unusual strain; ordinarily she did not preserve so discreet a demeanor.

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Sometimes (generally) she looked around numberless times to see who was present, sometimes (generally) she yawned twice, or thrice, behind her fan, sometimes (generally) she sent arch glances to those of her lovers within reach of her eye, and very often she would further divert herself by making a doll out of her handkerchief to match the one little Johnny Watts would concoct in the adjoining pew and each puppet would seek to outvie the other in a series of marvellous performances. But this day—eyes straight before her, head high, features immovable—she must sit and sit, and Mr. Barclay seemed to be going on forever!

Every minute was like an hour to her. She let her glance wander to the altar-piece at the rear and studied the familiar details, though they were powerless to hold her attention long. She knew all the adornments of the church by heart; the little gilt busts of the wingéd angels at the tops of the pillars supporting the galleries, the glass branches suspended from the ceiling, their beauty enhanced at this time by the sunlight that played among them in red, and green, and yellow sparkles, the different escutcheons on the walls and the furniture of the communion-table, desk and pulpit. From where she sat she could catch a glimpse of a sculptured entablature on the side wall, and she shivered at the thought of what it signified—the name cut deep in the stone, and beneath the floor the vault containing—She shivered again. Every pulse in her body was tingling with the mere joy of living; she was in love with life, and the idea of its grim counterpart filled her with unaccountable terror. She put the thought from her, trying to think of something different and suddenly her

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mother's words sounded again in her ears: "A brave man brought to death's door!" The whole place seemed to swim round, echoing with them.

She set her teeth hard on her lip. She was very tired. So many things had contributed to her fatigue; the long anxious night, the slow coming of dawn, the sickening distaste for food that had made breakfast impossible, the drive down in the lumbering chaise whose revolving wheels had comforted her a little with their refrain "a mere scratch—a mere scratch—" and, at the end, to be met with that other news "a brave man brought to death's door!" Something trembled in her throat, she made a swift effort to maintain her self-control and, on the moment, there appeared before her, as if heaven-sent, Filkins's simpering face with its thin, flat mouth primmed up as if holding invisible pins. What was it she had said? "Abroad—" yes!—yes!—"abroad again in a day or so——"

Peggy almost laughed aloud with the relief that came to her. She steadied herself and glanced furtively around, wondering how it would seem if she were to encounter anyone's eyes. Lenny Lispenard's, for instance, that young boy-lover of hers. Would she find a new boldness in his gaze because of what she had done, or contempt, or just the old adoration? He was such a nice boy! She looked up resolutely, looked his way with, if she had known it, an unusual wistfulness in her brown eyes, the next moment a little, soft smile tugged at the corners of her lips. Well, she'd face the whole world after that, and hold her own.

XXIII

THE STRANDS TIGHTEN

“Lord, Jack, you’d died a-laughing to see the way Peggy routed ’em all, and she so monstrous sweet and gentle the whole time, but her words went home, sir—egad! they went home.”

Bellenden turned an attentive face toward his guest, smiling grimly to himself; none knew better than he the direct quality of his young cousin’s speech.

“I’d my misgivings at first,” Larry continued reflectively, “but they didn’t last long. Peggy wouldn’t see the looks that made my blood boil—’Slife! from our pew to the door I wished a thousand times that the folks had but one head, and I’d my sword handy so I might smite it off. Well, sir, what d’you think? The first thing that minx did was to get Lewis Morris in tow—you know the old fellow—’twas his horse that so nearly won that day. I’m a brave man, Jack, but my knees shook at her daring—and she as unflattered as you please.”

“‘And have you missed me at all?’ says the jade, ‘or have the beauties of Morrisania driven poor Peggy Crewe entirely from your memory?’

“‘No beauties anywhere could do that,’ says he with a bow. ‘No matter how they may take our eyes sometimes, there is but one that hath our hearts.’

“‘La, sir,’ simpers the wretch, ‘you overcome me

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with kindness! But a moment since I called myself poor, now I can never apply that term to myself again while I have Mr. Morris for a friend. Is never too long a word, sir?' she adds amazing soft.

"'It's short to measure the term of our friendship, child,' he answers, in a voice as solemn as Mr. Barclay's, 'there hath not been one coined yet to do that.' She shot him a look then, I can tell you. 'And what mischief have you been doing?' he laughs. 'Speak up, there's no place like a church for confession.'

"'Mischief,' says Peggy with a long face, 'how can you suspect me of that? Why, sir, I've just this morning come to town.' And then, off she goes and tells him about the country and talks most learnedly of crops and such, and my gentleman listening with all his ears. 'Tis admitted when he says anything he never departs from it, so nothing could have been better for our cause than his advocacy, as the girl knew. Oh, she played her cards well! By the time she reached the door she was holding a regular levee."

Larry paused, chuckling to himself at the remembrance.

"'Twas sport I wouldn't have missed for the world," he went on, "the prettiest give and take you ever heard! There were some sarcaistical speeches too, but Peggy turned 'em off without the quiver of an eyelash, though once I thought she'd come a cropper. 'Twas when that bony Hutchinson took the field. 'La, Peggy, and did you do much riding?' says she. Peggy gave her the innocentest look. 'Why, to be sure, child,' she says simply, 'there's nothing I so much dote on when I'm in the country as to be a-horseback.' 'And in

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town, too,' titters Miss, 'only here there's always the danger of a fall.' 'For some riders,' Peggy says, looking full at her. At which, a smile went round among us all for the Hutchinson wobbles like a jelly in the saddle, she couldn't sit straight even on Mary Price's horse. 'But 'tis something out of my own experience,' Peggy goes on, as modest as a Quaker, 'I have no fear, as perhaps my friends will vouch.' 'Ay, that we will,' cries Mr. Morris. 'There's no unseating Miss Peggy from her horse, or in our hearts.' And then that precious sister of mine swept him a curtesy, and taking a flower from her dress she kissed it and handed it to him before the whole company."

"What's your mother's attitude?" Bellenden demanded.

"Now this, now t'other. All the way to church she rated Peggy soundly, but after, she was in better humor. Peggy so diverted us, mimicking some of the folks, that my mother couldn't hold out against her; and between their two tongues they didn't leave a shred of reputation to anyone by the time they got home. 'Twas cut and come again with a vengeance. Oh! she'll stand by the girl fast enough in public, however she may rate her in private. She has already bidden half the town to our house to-morrow night for quadrille and whist, and I'll lay a guinea no one will stay away. She writ this card for you."

"And Bard says I may not leave this room till the end of the week," Bellenden groaned. "Does your mother want me? What does Peggy say?"

"Yes to your first question; the second is harder to answer. Peggy? Lord! Peggy says nothing about

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you. There! women are the ungratefulest creatures living, I think. Do 'em a favor and 'tis like writing in water. My sister's the lightest-hearted jade I ever saw, singing, flirting, dancing, while two men are suffering on her account. When I told her up at Greenwich of the duel I thought she'd some sensibility at first. Gad! I looked to see her swoon, she went so white—but that was past in a minute, the next she cries sharply: 'I thought our cousin Bellenden was an expert at swords. How comes it that he is wounded? He should have managed better for my sake.'

Bellenden's face brightened.

"Why—why—" he stammered.

"Oh!" Larry cut in almost brutally, "you can't suck any comfort out of that. She meant you'd—you'd—forgive me, Jack, don't you see,—you'd bungled. She hadn't a word of thanks for what you'd done."

Bellenden turned away irritably.

"I don't want any thanks. And Moulton was as good a swordsman as I've ever seen; 'tis no slight on a man's skill to be wounded at his hands. You may tell your sister that."

"Lord! I daren't, and save my skin whole. She's a pepper-pot if Moulton's name is mentioned, she'll hear nothing of him, nor of fighting either. She's in a pretty temper, too, about Annetje—I think she'd scratch her eyes out if they were to meet; she lays all the blame at her door."

"Where it belongs," Bellenden interposed. "The domine knew nothing about it, I'll be bound."

"And I thought her an angel," Larry cried ruefully, "so gentle and sweet, I was vastly taken. Oh! have

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nothing to do with girls, sir, leave the whole lot—they're builded of vanity and ingratitude, honor isn't in their make-up."

"Amen, say I. You're to be congratulated for having your eyes opened so early. Yes, let them go! Get out the cards there and have up a bottle——"

"But the doctor——"

"The doctor be hanged! Can't a man amuse himself as he likes? There's the bell-rope behind you."

The affair of the duel occupied the town for several days, and the lampoon which was supposed to be *prima facie* its cause was repeated everywhere, discredited by some, believed by others, as the people were inclined for, or against, the Crewe faction. Peggy's presence upon the scene did much to lessen the slanders, for no tongue was bold enough to wag when she was within ear-shot, however loudly it might contemn her the moment her back was turned.

In the swift succession of gayeties organized for her entertainment, as well as in the interests of the card-tables and their stakes, there was little time afforded for the discussion of scandal. At evening concerts, however, when violins and German flutes discoursed most eloquent music, and where the 'thin, metallic thrills' of the harpsichord furnished a slight accompaniment to the whispered gossip, there was occasional mention of her daring and conjectures as to its truth, or falsity. But for the most part her name was allowed to rest in the accumulation of newer material. The robbing of the Philadelphia coach, over which the timid shrieked, the losses sustained by Madam B— at quad-

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rille, the defection of Miss H—'s lover, the elopement of a certain lady with her husband's partner, the peccadilloes of a few gilded youth and all the other tittle-tattle of the town yielded sufficient food for the passing hour.

As for Peggy, herself, she danced, sang, chattered, flirted from morning to night, presenting to the world's eye the same merry, insouciant face as formerly. She allowed herself no graver moments. If she thought of Moulton lying at death's door, or of Bellenden confined to his room by his wound, she gave no evidence of such thinking in her demeanor. Nor did society seem to remember them, having a fashion of forgetting those who do not live within the range of its vision. It had been Peggy's intention, in the first heat of her anger, to seek out Annetje and upbraid her for her falsity; but, subjected as she was to a constant surveillance, she soon realized that her wisest course was to avoid the neighborhood of the Ryerssens's home, if she would free her skirts entirely from the charges that already, in certain quarters, were beginning to die from lack of any real evidence. There was small danger that her scorn for the girl's disloyalty would be lessened because, for the time being, it was forced to remain unexpressed.

Meanwhile other influences were at work in the little portion of the Dutch community which acknowledged Domine Ryerssen as its pastor. In formulating his scheme of revenge Adrian de Hooge had not clearly foreseen the ultimate fate of the intelligence he submitted to the *Post-Boy*; but knowing that the newspaper was the speediest medium for reaching the public ear, he felt confident that so succulent a morsel of scan-

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dal would not be disregarded. The appearance of the lampoon, and the duel following in quick succession, threw him into a state of delight bordering upon ecstasy. Let men quarrel over the false quantities of a verse; he knew, and the world knew, how flimsy was the pretext in veiling the real cause. He gloated over the picture of the wounded contestants, though it would have pleased him better if Bellenden and his adversary could have changed places. He speedily recognized, however, that in one way Bellenden's sufferings, though not so dangerous as Moulton's, were keener—increased, as they must be, by his suppositions regarding Annetje's violation of faith.

It was all De Hooge could do, at this time, to refrain from seeking out the girl to give her the details of the duel. As a boy he had found one of his chiefest delights in watching the ineffectual struggles of entrapped animals and he gloried in the idea of Annetje's helplessness under his sneers. He longed to taunt her with her lover's plight, brought about in defending another woman's name; he wanted to see her droop and whiten under the vile aspersions he would cast upon her. It seemed as if this were a fitting revenge for what he had suffered at her hands; then he put the thought resolutely away. He had formulated a scheme for the ultimate confusion and downfall of the old domine which could not but give pain to the daughter also; and her own punishment would not be long delayed, if constant espionage on his part could bring it about.

The news of the duel in the rear of the Province Arms spread almost immediately in and around Gar-

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den Street ; it became the current topic everywhere, save in the domine's household. Jan heard it with trepidation, but he kept it jealously to himself ; his master was utterly unconscious of the report and Heilke, who usually gathered gossip as if it were some precious fruit, being willing to go far a-field for its ripest clusters, remained closely within doors at Annetje's side. As for the girl, she had no inclination to go abroad and there was, consequently, not the slightest suspicion on her part that harm had befallen Bellenden. Only he did not come ! At first, love found many excuses to account for his absence, save the bitter truth ; so impossible is it for faith to perceive unfaith. But after a time it occurred to her that he had heard of the gossip concerning Peggy's disguise, which was rife in the neighborhood, and, thinking she had divulged the secret, he remained away in his anger. She longed to go to him and plead her innocence. That he would believe her, she was very sure, even in the face of the inexplicable mystery which surrounded them. Ignorant, however, as to where he should be found, she shrank from making inquiries, fearing that in so doing she might displease him further. Her own indignant denials of the story to Heilke and Jan seemed to her the best way to serve him.

As for seeking Peggy at Greenwich, feasible as the idea was, it was speedily dismissed. Annetje knew, at the time of their guest's departure, that she was going into further hiding, and to go to the little village, therefore, demanding her whereabouts, might only plunge the girl into fresh difficulties. It was out of the question. Not even to vindicate herself could Annetje

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make the captain's cousin suffer. Besides, would she believe her? Would she not mock at her rather, when the little, pitiful veil that hid her true feelings should be drawn aside? "Do you love him?" she had asked. Would it be necessary to ask that now?

The days dragged by leaden-footed, yet swifter than a weaver's shuttle when compared to the long, still nights with the dazzling stars that would not pale. A hundred times throughout the day it seemed to Annetje that the rippling signal called to her from bush and tree, the whole garden rang with the sounds; though, on fire with expectancy as she was, she could not run to discover if they were true or false. Heilke was always watching her, plying her with questions and laying tasks mountain-high for her to execute. Annetje felt too pitifully weak to resist the stronger will and in a way the work was a boon to her; it stopped the dreadful thoughts, tired her and deadened the ache of suspense in her breast.

Finally, throbbing with the audacity of her purpose, she determined to write to Bellenden. If he came (as she tried to cheat herself into believing he had come many times!) and she was unable to evade Heilke's vigilance, he might look for some message from her in the hollow of the old tree, which he had used as a post-office on two memorable occasions. She guarded the notes he had hidden there as her most precious treasures. How dark the days had been because he didn't come—and then, in a moment, how bright, and beautiful, and sweet! Those blessed letters! What happiness was hers just to hold them in her hands, against her lips, to let them lie near her heart, to go over them

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again, and again, until she knew every word. If she read more between the lines than had existed in the writer's intention, she was not the first, and far from being the last, so to construe a love-letter.

Her decision once formed she went stealthily to the study, during the domine's absence, and purloined some paper from his portfolio, returning almost immediately to Heilke's side, outwardly calm but tingling in every nerve of her body with the enormity of her enterprise. The intervening hours before she could go to her room for the night seemed interminable to her, but when she was at last within its four walls, though she had made a rough outline in her mind of what she wished to say, she did not set about her writing for some time. She had secreted a bit of candle in her dress and she waited for the noises in the house to cease before she lighted it; yet that night, of all others, Heilke chose to be wakeful, and moved about her room, muttering wrathfully to herself. Annetje quivered with fear lest those vigilant eyes might see the design in her breast, and drew the folds of the window-curtain more closely around her. The soft night-air came in like some cool hand to touch her hot face; she leaned farther out to meet it as if it were the caress of a lover.

She let the hours go by, not daring to risk her task by disturbing Heilke's first light sleep; from the streets beyond she could hear the cry of the watch calling the time—'past eleven—' 'past twelve—' 'past one—' At the last words she got to her feet softly, and, striking a spark from the flint upon the steel, she ignited the bit of cambric tinder, trembling lest the unwonted sound should give the alarm. She waited momentarily with

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the little, flickering flame in her hand, then in the silence that settled down about her she lighted the candle and placed it upon the seat of the chair, kneeling down beside it to begin her letter. As she smoothed out the paper she became aware that she had neglected to provide herself with either pencil, or pen; the discovery stunned her, and she knelt there inertly, letting the precious minutes slip by; presently, however, stung to the fact that she must act necessity showed her the way.

She took up the candle and crossed the room on tip-toe, stopping breathlessly for a moment on the threshold, then, still in the same noiseless fashion, she began to descend the stairs. The house lay wrapped in darkness, save for the tiny point of light which moved as she moved. She reached the hall and passed swiftly to the study. The door was closed but, as she put out her hand to open it, she was conscious in some inexplicable manner that the room was not untenanted—Yet it was dark—dark! She paused wondering, listening, every nerve in her body stretched to its utmost tension. There was no sound within, then suddenly, as she waited, there came a sigh, keyed with doubt and pain, and a low murmur of words:

“Oh! God, what shall I do?”

Her hand fell away from the knob. In an instant she remembered, what had hitherto glanced off from her self-absorption, that her father, during the last few days, had altered indescribably. She had not noticed it at the time, but now it flashed upon her, almost as if he stood before her and she noted the ravages of trouble upon his face. She grasped the knob softly again,

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pressing against the door as if to open it the more readily; the next moment she started back, her hand falling to her side. What comfort could she give? Was he not sufficient unto himself? If she should go to him, would not his first question be why she was there? Would he not discover the true meaning of her errand? No, he must suffer alone, as she must suffer alone.

She turned and crept back to her room, extinguishing the candle as she went, then she sat down at the window again, shivering a little. All over the world, perhaps, others were keeping just such vigils as she was keeping here, and her father was keeping there. She had not comprehended until this moment that "grief walks the earth and sits down at the foot of each by turns;" but suddenly, with the realization that suffering brings, she understood the birthright of humanity.

The night went on to that solemn hush that comes before the dawn—the hush that waits on death and life—and she still sitting there, wakeful, thinking her own thoughts, heard her father leave his study and stumble cautiously up the stairs, each footfall weighted with fatigue. Her heart stirred with a great wave of pity. How old and tired he must be to move so slowly! How cruel life was! Presently the door of his room was closed softly and the silence lay unbroken around her; so it continued for a while longer, save for the cocks crowing faintly in the distance.

It was almost day. She descended swiftly once more to the study, found quill and ink-well, and carried them back to her room where she made her other prep-

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arations expeditiously. She was but an indifferent pen-woman at best, and in this task she had the additional difficulties to surmount of a language which she spoke with inaccuracy, and had had but little experience in writing. The letter was not a long one—only a few, shaky lines that ran up and down hill lamentably on one side of the sheet, but before it was finished the candle had burned itself out, and the early day was filling the land with a glory as fresh and fair as that other day which received the commendation of the most High. And just as the quill fell from her stiff, little fingers, the last word written, a lark flew by her window showering down note after note of rapture. She followed its flight with shining eyes, then fled, fleet as a deer, to the garden. It was the work of a moment to deposit the letter and to return, panting slightly after the run but back again before Heilke set foot in the kitchen.

Throughout the rest of the day Annetje waited, busy at her different tasks; her ears strained to catch the faintest indication of the signal. Twice she was almost positive that she heard it, once clear, sweet, plaintive, then again—after an interval of quiet—sharp with impatience, but there was no evading the strict watchfulness to which she was subjected.

The sleepless night passed slowly, the dawn came again flooding the land with its silver and the girl, the first astir in the house, ran through the waking garden to the old tree. She peered half-frightened into the aperture—peered again, her eyes widening, her whole frame trembling. The letter was gone! The next moment she threw herself down on the grass, glisten-

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ing in the new-risen sun with myriad points of dew, and flung her arms about the old dog's neck.

“Oh! Joris,” she breathed against his ear, “oh! Joris—” then she turned her happy face to the sky, her lips dumb, her heart quivering with a great gladness.

XXIV

AN UNWRITTEN MESSAGE

It was Joy—glowing-eyed, rosy cheeked, lark-throated, that Heilke found in the cool depths of the stone dairy at the churn, singing the old charm in time to the movements of the dasher :

“ ‘ *Buitterchee, buitterchee, comm ;
Alican laidlechee, tubichee vall !* ’ ”

The woman stood speechless, scarcely crediting what she saw. She could not reconcile the picture of this radiant, laughing creature with that little, white-faced, dejected girl who had crept like a shadow through the house, or had bent silently above her tasks, on the yesterday. She looked to see her vanish as, good housewife that she was and retaining her superstitions, she told herself the evil spirits that were exorcised by the fresh, lilting voice vanished into thin air.

But Annetje did not disappear. She was tangible flesh and blood—never so gay, never so tractable, never so helpful before. She anticipated Heilke's wants in a thousand ways, she was light of foot, deft of hand, and through all her services there tinkled an irrepressible murmur of song as if the little bird at her heart must sing from sheer ecstasy and never tire.

No sound of the happiness that glorified the rest of the house penetrated to the room where the domine sat

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inertly among his books. For the first time, in all the years of his ministry, Saturday was at hand and his sermon still unprepared. Occasionally the thought of this neglect of duty on his part pricked him, and he would rouse himself from his abstraction and plunge into a fever of composition. So by fits and starts he worked throughout the day, with little interest in the undertaking, and night had grayed in before the discourse was finished. He pushed it from him then with a sigh of relief, yet he was thoroughly dissatisfied with his efforts.

It was very still everywhere. Heilke had come earlier with his supper and had lighted his candles and then had gone away, returning—after the lapse of an hour—to remove the tray. Her hands jarred the china in their distress as she noted the untouched food, but she left the room without a word either of reproach, or coaxing, going back to the kitchen which, whether men ate or sulked, must be set in order. It was silent there too. Annetje had gone to her own room, the singing bird was mute at last, but still happy.

The domine did not change his position for some time. He was so motionless one would have thought him asleep, but the repose of his body did not penetrate below the quiet exterior, within that incessant warfare robbed him of any peace. Finally he rose from his chair and went to a corner cupboard where he took from one of its shelves a small lantern. He lighted the candle it contained and after finding his hat he extinguished the lights on his table and left the room, stepping out through the window into the garden. Thence he passed, almost swiftly for him, around the house to

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the deserted street. The July night was still and dark, everything lay shrouded in shadow. The far away stars gleamed small and faint through the thick haze which lay like a veil between them and the earth, but the domine did not need a light to guide him. It was a familiar way, one he had travelled for thirty-seven years; he could have gone over it blind-folded, not deviating an inch.

The church reached, he unlocked the side door with the key he always carried and let himself into the silent building. The lantern was not a necessity to him here any more than it had been without, though there was something heartening in its gleam which made it very acceptable; it was like the presence of a friend who has a message of cheer. He held the light up and threw its little beam searchingly around, smiling indulgently at the action as one smiles at a child. He knew every detail of the church—his church—not a thing escaped him. He flashed the lantern on the iron-bound strong boxes that stood one on either side of the door—those boxes for the poor, with the small hole in each padlocked lid, and painted also with the figure of a beggar leaning on his staff. The old eyes grew misty as they looked. To give to the needy—how blessed!—how blessed! He could almost hear the sound of the falling coins as he paused there. It was very sweet music, that chant of benevolence.

He moved forward step by step, casting the light about on the familiar walls where the painted escutcheons of many of his congregation hung between the long, narrow windows with their little panes of glass, whereon good Master Gerard Duykinck had burned the

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arms of the principal families who worshipped in this house of prayer. The windows in the semi-obscurity showed the merest blotches to the domine's eyes, yet mentally he reconstructed each one, line for line, legend for legend. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum!* The words leapt out before him almost as if they were written in letters of fire. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum!* The lantern shook in his hand, he lowered it quickly and drew his breath hard; all the little elation and affection he had felt for these adornments of his church dying out of his face as it settled again into its former despair.

He crept forward after that very slowly, looking neither to right nor left, and not pausing until the pulpit loomed above him, then he came to an abrupt standstill at the foot of its stairs. Some irresistible impulse had driven him, at this time, to seek the church as in earlier days sinning men, hunted and despairing, sought Sanctuary, finding in its stronghold a temporary respite from the dangers that threatened them without.

By degrees a sense of supreme peace and well-being pervaded him, easing his troubles; he put the lantern down and looked around. How he loved every inch of space—every inch! The body of the church showed dim and shadowy in the feeble light that barely indicated the place to his glance, yet to him it was as if the full glare of day penetrated everywhere. He saw everything. The brass branches, the small organ loft, the two galleries, one for the white folk, the other for the black, the silver baptismal basin with its learned inscription and, not far away, the "Juffrouw's Bench" where, for three short years, his wife had sat—her face showing like some flower amid her surroundings. He

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shivered from head to foot at the memory and clung to the rail for support ; so he remained for some moments half crouching there, his shadow cast forward upon the steps. Suddenly, in moving, his attention was arrested by that dark spot flung before him. He looked at it curiously, wonderingly—looked again. Then the realization of the meaning of that black, distorted shape smote him with the sharpness of a knife. Like some ugly stain his presence lay upon the pulpit stairs !

He sank down, covering his face with his hands. The candle's little beam on the instant became an accusing finger to point out the truth which he had disregarded for so long a time. Sunday after Sunday, year after year, he had stood facing his people stimulating them to the confession of sin and to the desire for grace and pardon, and all the while he had carried that vile weight of hypocrisy in his own breast. He had stifled the voice of his conscience with the thought that, in acting this lie, he was trying to shield others. But was that the only reason? Had he not been influenced by his own pride of name, his love for the church office and his dread of the laughter of men? Had he not found forgetfulness in his books, losing himself so far in his studies that the little affairs of each succeeding day were unheeded, and the past lay unstirred almost as if it had never been?

He scourged himself bitterly with these questions, realizing, now when it was too late, that he might have reserved the right of reticence in his trouble and no one would have gainsaid him. But to do that other thing, to give out false evidence, to continue in his high position accepting the sympathy—the love, and the

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trust—of his people—what did such conduct stamp him? Jan's words, uttered in the heat of anger, came into his mind with the solemnity of a final judgment in their syllables.

“Unfit—unworthy.”

On the instant it seemed to him that the whole church throbbed with the stir of life—there was a sense of the human presence everywhere. Pews and galleries were crowded to the uttermost and a vast concourse of people pressed about the doors and thronged the aisles. The silence was broken by the tread of many feet advancing to the pulpit, as to some shrine, pausing there, then turning and going dejectedly away. There was no cessation in the pilgrimage; the steps were always coming—coming. He slipped his hands from his eyes to his ears to shut out the terrible sounds and, on a sudden, the place swarmed with faces. In the remotest corner of the building he could see their gleam. The faces of the people who gathered within these walls on a Sunday to listen to his teaching; the faces of other parishioners, whom he had known once and had not looked upon for years; the faces again of those other worshippers, whom he had never seen, but who had brought their sorrows and their joys into this holy spot. Turn which way he would they confronted him reproachfully—accusingly—and nearer, so close that he could reach them with his hand, though they shrank back at its touch, were those predecessors of his who had spoken the word of the Lord from the desk above. Their glances seared his soul.

“Unfit—unworthy!”

He stumbled to his feet and moved tremblingly from

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the pulpit, keeping his eyes averted lest they should behold again what had terrified him earlier—what he could never forget. Silently, as he had come, but without another glance at the familiar objects, he made his way out into the night and back to the parsonage. The window was open, as he had left it, and he paused on the sill a moment to rest, then he entered the dark, silent room with a deep sigh of relief. He had come home. The church, which through the years had been a place of refuge and of divinest comfort to him, had suddenly become void of all peace because of his wrongdoing, but this other asylum did not fail him. Here he had committed no desecration. The walls had witnessed his misery, his fears, his doubts, and he crept back to their shelter as a tired child creeps into loving arms, with no question of his worthiness, or unworthiness, to their clasp, satisfied only to know that he has reached home.

The domine put the lantern on the table and sank wearily into his chair, making no effort to get further light. He was very tired. He sat, shielding his eyes for some minutes with one hand as if even the meagre rays from the almost burned out candle were too brilliant for him to endure. Presently he leaned forward a trifle to rest his elbow on the table and a quick sound of wood striking on wood followed the action. Too fatigued to feel any curiosity he settled himself into a more comfortable position, extending his arm further and again there came that dissonant clatter. He looked around in some bewilderment. The place where he had rested his arm was partly occupied by a clumsily tied bundle through the wrapping of which the end of

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a stick protruded. It was that which had jarred against the surface of the table. He drew the lantern nearer and inspected the package carefully. The paper bore the superscription "Domine Ryerssen" in great letters.

There was no mistake. Someone, during his absence, had probably left the bundle with Heilke and she had brought it into the study, placing it where she knew he would find it on his return. Was there a message? What could it mean? He moved the parcel aside, but no note met his eye, no scrap of writing even, except his name in that big, unfamiliar hand. The message might be within, he told himself making no effort to seek it, or Heilke might be able to give some information concerning the bearer. Longing for speech with someone of his kind, he went over to the door to seek her. But, as he turned the knob, he discovered that the door would not open, it was locked from within—the key in its place where he had turned it some hours before.

He retraced his steps to the table, confused a trifle in the face of this little mystery. Whoever had left the parcel had come in through the window, relying upon the darkness of the night to conceal his identity. That much was plain. But why? Suddenly a smile trembled about the old man's lips, though his eyes grew misty. In a moment everything was clear to him. The package was a surprise—a gift—from his people, that was it, from his people to him and he—undeserving. His hands trembled excitedly as he tried to open it. He undeserving, but they loved him! Why had he not trusted that love earlier? The knot loosened under his shaking endeavors, the two ends of the string slip-

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ping apart; then the paper crackled open beneath his touch.

With the expectancy of a little child in his attitude and softening the haggard lines of his countenance, he leaned down and peered at the contents of the bundle. A stout club, a pair of old shoes, a crust of bread and a silver coin. He rubbed his eyes, as if doubting their testimony, and peered closer, touching the queer medley curiously with lingering fingers. Then he drew the lantern nearer and let its faint light fall upon the objects one by one. What did they mean? What could they mean? Gradually he became aware that each article before him held some symbolic import which, if unravelled, would furnish the key to the whole matter, and on the moment there flashed through his mind instances from his reading and from common hearsay of certain emblematic communications sent to individuals, in time of trouble to warn, or threaten, the purport hidden in just such trivial details as now confronted him. He sat half stunned, groping vainly for some interpretation to the puzzle and feeling at heart, with a strange, sickening fear which amounted to conviction, that no loving thought had framed this message, and no loving hand had placed it there.

“Money, bread,” he went over the little inventory slowly, checking off each object on his fingers, “provisions for a journey surely, shoes to wear on the road and stick to support one’s steps, or—or——”

He broke off with a strangling sound in his throat; he could not put into words the thought that burned within him. There were other uses for the stick—it was to drive him hence—to push him away! These

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things were means for his departure from the church he had served so long—they indicated that he must betake himself to other fields. The message was clear at last.

He fell back in his chair staring wildly into the darkness, for the candle in the lantern had burned itself out. He was thrilling from head to foot with the degradation put upon him. From his people to him and he—undeserving—

“No, no, no,” he cried, “deserving of it all, God knows, deserving of it all.”

XXV

AT THE CHURCH DOOR

Heilke glanced sharply at her companion as they took their way churchwards. The girl had grown a trifle thinner but, aside from that, her beauty was more triumphant than it had ever been for it had gained materially in expression during the past weeks. Her mouth curved happily and the color rioted in her cheeks with the intensity of her emotions; the joy of the previous day still lingered in her face—less exuberant perhaps, but equally as confident. The watchful woman, who, only a short time before, had bewailed the alteration in Annetje's appearance, felt secretly resentful at this sudden change which was attributable to no visible cause that she could discover. It angered her to note the unreasoning exhilaration that found vent in a ringing laugh at so slight a thing as a bird's flight, and the little soft hum the girl kept up, though it was one of Datheen's hymns, irritated her beyond expression.

"Your father's got to have some new neck-bands," she broke out shortly. "Will you set about making them to-morrow?"

There was no answer for the moment.

"Did you hear Annetje?" she demanded sharply. "I can't tell what's come over you, one would think you were going to some waffle-frolic instead of to

At the Church Door

church, you've been smiling ever since we started and stepping out as if you were keeping time to music. I don't hold with sour looks on Sunday, goodness knows! but such conduct as yours is unseemly—and you a minister's daughter, besides."

Annetje started guiltily as if she had been detected in some wrong-doing.

"It's such a beautiful world," she cried with a little gasp, "I can't help being glad to be alive in it. Everything seems so happy to-day, birds, flowers—everything. Don't spoil it all with a long face, Heilke."

"Your father's neck-bands—that was what I was saying. Did you happen to notice the one he had on this morning?"

"No—yes—no, I think not."

She had not noticed anything about him, though she had stood at the door for some minutes after his departure watching him, as he passed along the sun-checked way. But her happy, indifferent eyes had not been keen to note anything amiss in either his dress, or his face, so busy were her thoughts elsewhere.

"Well then, it was not fit to be seen. I hope Mevrouw de Hooze won't perceive it, that's all! A thrifty daughter makes a thrifty wife as the whole world knows."

The flush deepened in Annetje's cheeks.

"Mevrouw de Hooze!" she cried contemptuously, then she repressed her anger. "I'll begin the bands to-morrow," she finished humbly enough.

It would be pleasant work to take into the garden and set the little stitches while she waited. It wouldn't be for long. The shade on the dial would mark three

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o'clock when he would come—three—or the half hour past, not later. He had found the letter Friday, she had been right in thinking he had called to her that day—Saturday there had been engagements to prevent his coming and Sunday he knew she had the two services at her church, so 'twas a day dropped out of their calendar as he had said, but Monday—he would surely come on Monday! No wonder then that it was a difficult matter to walk sedately with such a thought beating in one's breast. The same sky that smiled down upon her, smiled on him taking his way to Trinity; the little breeze that touched her cheeks, fanned his likewise; and the bird, flying westward, might sing to his understanding ears: "I come from Garden Street!" She laughed aloud.

"There you go again—giggle, giggle, giggle! The whole morning long! And singing before breakfast, too, I heard you at it. Well, then, that bodes tears—when will you ever learn? Tears before the day is out—you mark my words. Is that the last bell? Come, come, don't dawdle so. There goes Juffrouw Bickers hurrying along with her little, mincing steps—she's always late—she'll be late, I warrant you, even on Judgment day, only the Lord won't listen to her excuses that the clock was slow, or she'd mislaid her cap—not He!"

Annetje lagged behind. Earth and sky were so fair it seemed a pity to exchange their loveliness for the walls of a church. One was so much nearer God, somehow, in the open under His blue heavens, than in a man-reared temple, under the critical, carping glances of fellow-worshippers!

"It's early yet," she said wistfully, "see how many

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of the folks are still in the street. Let's wait a little."

"There's something a-foot," Heilke ejaculated shrilly, stepping along more briskly. "Now what's to do at the church, I wonder, that the folks stand gaping about when the bidding-bell's ceased ringing? Look at Vrouw Pieterse and Vrouw Blauvelt gabbling away for dear life. Dear! dear! the tongues those women have—as long as my arm—and swung in the middle as all who know them can testify. And scandal! When those two get together there's suffering for some one; they're like crows lighted upon carrion—oh! they'll pick it bare, skin and bones, I promise you. Make haste."

Instead of heeding this injunction Annetje came to a sudden standstill.

"Wait," she implored, "let the others pass in first. It's something more about Miss Crewe, I am sure, and they are angry with me. I can't bear to meet their glances. I will not go in now."

"Hoity toity! Something more about Miss Crewe, eh? Haven't we got through with that hussy yet? Now you see what harm has been caused by yours—and your father's—foolishness, setting the house of God by the ears in this fashion. Well, then, this is your punishment. You have brought it all on yourself and you can't escape it. A wrong done is like a walnut-juice stain—it just bides and bides—water won't wash it out and sun won't fade it much—the stuff carries that spot to the end. Come you at once."

As Heilke finished speaking, she put her hand authoritatively on the girl's arm and pushed her slightly in the direction of the church.

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"Don't," Annetje cried below her breath. "Don't shame me like this before all these people. I'm not a child to be dragged along, I am a woman. Take your hand away, I tell you. I have done nothing wrong."

Heilke cast a swift glance at the face near her and released her hold instantly. The intrepidity of her companion's bearing filled her with a kind of awe. She did not recognize any similarity between the fearless creature and the little, pliable girl she had watched over and guarded since babyhood. This was a different Annetje, one made strong not only by her sense of right, but by the thought that the persecution she was about to undergo was laid upon her in consequence of her endeavors to serve Bellenden. The idea steeled her nerves. She walked firmly, almost buoyantly, forward, the flush deepened to a vivid red upon her cheeks, her eyes shining, her mouth kept from trembling by the pressure of her teeth along the scarlet line of her lip.

"How that deep blue does set off her skin," Heilke muttered to herself, "milk and roses, milk and roses, I never saw its like. Say what they will, there isn't one on this island that can hold a candle to her for looks."

The group, gathered about the centre door, was made up of about twenty persons, men and women—though the latter outnumbered the former. Some of these had early noticed the appearance of Heilke and Annetje, and the fact was speedily communicated to their companions, so that as the two made their way nearer, every eye was turned upon them. For the most part the glances were distinctly hostile.

"We can go in by the side door," Heilke murmured

At the Church Door

in sudden relief, her courage deserting her rapidly as the crucial moment dawned. "Thank God, it's not beset by venomous toads."

"We never use that door," Annetje returned coldly, though her voice trembled, then it softened a little, "but if it will be easier for you, Heilke, go—please go that way—and let me keep on by myself."

The old woman gulped down something in her throat and set her lips firmly.

"We'll go in together, child. You can't learn an old dog new tricks, and I'd feel like asking the Lord's pardon if I sneaked in at the side, because I was afraid to pass a few gaping fools."

Annetje's mouth quivered into a little smile of thanks and she moved on steadily, Heilke pressing close at her elbow. The people, at their approach, fell back a trifle on either side, leaving an open space between their lines up which the new-comers must pass to the church. Not a smile of greeting met them anywhere; the faces Annetje swept with her swift regard were cold and immovable as though made of stone, only the eyes, looking back into hers, seemed to be alive and full of a contempt that burned to her soul; her little, gentle salutations fell upon deaf ears, eliciting no response.

Short though the passage was to the entrance it was interminable to her fancy, stretching on indefinitely between the lines of the silent onlookers, who seemed like the sands of the sea for numbers. At the end—how far away!—rose the few steps to the open door and beyond lay the cool depths of the church, where the majority of the congregation had already assembled unconscious of what was taking place without. De-

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spite the brilliant rays of the July sun beating down upon her Annetje shivered at the thought of the fresh glances of disapproval she must encounter as she passed up to the Juffrouw's Bench. She faltered a moment, then kept on without wavering, her eyes fixed resolutely before her. A group of young men assembled on the top step gazed down at her with a freedom in their glances she had never before encountered.

"Hoity toity, Vrouw Pieterse," Heilke growled in great wrath, "there's no call for you to draw your dirty petticoats aside when your domine's daughter goes by. Think shame to yourself, dame, and bear a humble mind. If you've forgot that Pinkster week of twenty years syne, it's more than the rest of us have. How dare you act as though you thought you'd be be-fouled in the face of this whiteness?"

The woman retorted with a sharp laugh, using a word that whipped the color from Annetje's cheeks; she stopped aghast, breathing like one in great pain.

"You can't mean me?" she cried brokenly.

"Go you on," Heilke commanded. "This is not for your ears. I'll give her her dues."

She turned with the spring of a tigress upon the calumniator who, foreseeing the attack, warded it off with considerable dexterity. The attention of the on-lookers, diverted for the moment by the altercation, swang back almost immediately to the girl herself as she crept forward pale and trembling. The music of the organ swelled out through windows and doors, deep and calm, to meet her and silenced her fright with its message of peace. It deadened the sounds of Vrouw Pieterse's shrill voice as she took her revenge

At the Church Door

upon Heilke in taunts and jeers, and it softened the grief-stricken cries of the old housekeeper, each one falling slowly and brokenly upon the air like the signals of distress from a ship on the rocks.

Annetje reached the steps and began their ascent. The ordeal was almost at an end and within lay quiet. Through the hours of the service she could regain some measure of calm and at its close she could creep home into hiding. There was only a short way further to travel! Then, suddenly, a low sound near her stung her into instant attention; she glanced aside to where Bertha Van der Griest stood with parted lips as if she had just spoken. But no other word was uttered only, as Annetje looked, the girl raised her hand and pointed with unmistakable significance before her. Annetje's wondering eyes followed the line of the plump, rounded arm, from which the Psalm-book swung by its silver chain, the sun smiting the links with dazzling radiance, followed the curve of the wrist, the back of the dimpled hand to the upraised forefinger pointing—pointing steadily— At what?

She moved nearer, like one under the impulse of a stronger will, driven forward resistlessly. Through the open door came the voices singing:

“ ‘ *Ik roep tot U, O eenwig Wezen
Mijn Rotssteen, novit naar eisch volpreezen—* ’ ”

She did not heed the appeal in the words, she did not heed the holy peace of the sanctuary beckoning to her. Her eyes were held by the bit of paper nailed at the side of the entrance just above Jonkheer Wendell's head. He moved away smiling impertinently into her

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face, but she did not even see him. She only saw the paper with its little, staggering characters upon which the sun beat so pitilessly. She steadied herself to keep from falling. Her letter to him—her letter to him—scorned in this fashion; the little, loving contents exposed to the jeers and taunts of men! It couldn't be! It was some church notice—some church notice—yet there her name stood out boldly, confronting her. What did it mean? All at once she knew. He wouldn't be in the garden on the morrow, he would never come— He was angry—angry—angry— This thought was the first to pierce her dulled brain, then came another, and another, swiftly—bitterly—to account for the scornful glances on every side and the horror of Vrouw Pieterse's condemning word.

She turned from the open door—she could not enter—and looked down at the people watching her. Suddenly she stretched out her hands with a little, eager cry and stepped hurriedly to the pavement.

"Adrian," she called softly, seeing only him and back of him her childhood, "Adrian."

She smiled bravely, though her face was very pitiful to see.

He let her come close to him and put her hand on his sleeve and look into his eyes, challenging his friendship—the friendship of so many years—then he dragged his coat from her fingers and thrust her brutally aside.

"Discarded by one lover, my pretty light o' love, you would comfort yourself with another," he sneered with a laugh that drove the color into her cheeks, though it receded the next instant leaving her ghastly white.

At the Church Door

"But know, you must seek him elsewhere than in Adrian de Hooge."

She fell back in consternation and stared at him, trying to speak, but her pallid, shaking lips refused to utter a word, nor could her mind frame any denial to his taunt. For a minute her glance, like that of some wounded animal, swept the faces around her for some sign of pity, then she moved off very slowly.

"Ay, get you gone," Heilke cried in choking syllables, "get you back to the home you've blackened, and God forgive you, Annetje Ryerssen."

XXVI

WITHIN THE CHURCH

At the end of the singing the people settled into their places, the little bustle, attendant upon the action, increased by the arrival of the participants in Annetje's humiliation. Their coming caused no small measure of excitement among the more punctual worshippers who had entered by the other doors, or who, passing through the central entrance, had not noticed the letter at its side. Ordinarily a few belated comers might creep in almost unnoticed, save by the immediate few whom they inconvenienced, and who meted out angry glances to the offenders; but that so many should be late, and should take no pains to conceal the fact as they clattered to their seats, was enough to overthrow the established precedents of the church.

Curiosity and consternation struggled for the ascendancy, the former swinging highest by virtue of its supremacy in every breast. No one was too blind to read the elation in Bertha Van der Griest's face, that showed as plainly through the set righteousness of her features, as sunlight through an uncurtained window; nor was there any chance of mistaking the triumph and satisfaction in Adrian de Hooge's whole bearing. His mother, making room for him on the Blue Bench, felt her pulses tingle and her blood leap faster with the sense of the dominant power he brought with him. Vrouw

Within the Church

Pieterse flaunted her petticoats as never before, the air of piety clinging to her like its perfume to a flower—the piety of that kind of converted sinner who is quick to perceive another's misstep, and quickest of all to be the first to hurl a stone at the offender. It needed no especial perspicuity to interpret her attitude, though its significance, for the time being, was not discoverable.

But Heilke herself occasioned the greatest bewilderment as she made her way to the Juffrouw's Bench, which she always occupied with her charge. The alteration in her usually self-reliant demeanor was very perceptible, the traces of tears and the disorder of her dress being the least factors in the change in her appearance. She had struggled momentarily with the desire to follow Annetje for, despite her own wrath, she was touched by the heartbroken aspect of the young face, but throughout a long life nothing had ever kept her away from the house of God and habit is a stronger master oftentimes than love. Recognizing its dominion, therefore, she had entered the sanctuary with the others, bowed under the keenest trouble she had ever been called upon to bear; Annetje was dearer than her own flesh and blood and the revelation of the girl's infatuation for the English officer, and his treatment of her overtures, darkened the whole world to the grief-stricken woman.

The domine, unconscious of the commotion going forward, moved slowly, but without any apparent hesitancy, to the high, circular pulpit which stood in the space at the end of the centre aisle. He paused at the lowest step and knelt down, holding his hat before his face, while he offered silently a short prayer for a bless-

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ing on his coming labors, in which he sought the aid of the Lord. Such that voiceless petition meant to the onlookers. It was an established custom of the church, but they could not know how insistent on this occasion—never so insistent before—was the appeal for strength that filled their pastor's heart. He was visibly altered as if a withering breath of age and pain had swept over him; his step was slower, his face more haggard, yet these changes were unperceived by his parishioners. Unfriendly eyes are never the discerning ones. The small figure in the black silk gown, with the large flowing sleeves which gave it an odd batlike resemblance, was too familiar an object to awaken any particular comment in their breasts.

He ascended the narrow stairs to the sacred desk, his hand clinging to the curved balustrade the better to support his weakness. The platform reached, he prepared to open the Bible but, as he noted the stragglers moving along the aisles, he waited several moments for them to be seated. Then the quiet that followed was broken only by the soft fluttering of the leaves as he sought his text. He raised his head and faced them all.

“II. Corinthians, thirteenth chapter, eleventh verse,” his voice, husky as of old, held a certain note which, while not loud, penetrated to the uttermost corner of the building. “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.’”

He repeated the words slowly, and more gently, his tones softening into a tenderness that seemed to probe the heart of each listener, making the matter a personal

Within the Church

one between him and his pastor, then—as was the custom of the church—the text given, he exclaimed: “Thus far!” and paused, looking almost vacantly before him. After a moment he seemed to recover himself and shut the Bible with a touch that trembled in the accomplishment of its duty, yet carried with it an air of irrevocability which admitted no wavering of purpose.

The noise of the closing covers, doubly accentuated as it was by the surrounding stillness, jarred the hearers into instant attention, and set them thrilling with apprehension as they sought to explain to themselves this unusual conduct on the part of their minister. The abrupt sound, with its ungracious cry of finality, displeased them vaguely; they tried to fathom its meaning.

He did not leave them long in suspense. That thud of the closed book nerved him to action, pricked him as if it were some goad. He leaned toward them, his hands pressed tightly one above the other on the edge of the desk.

“I have no sermon this morning,” he said very slowly, “I had prepared one, but last night at a late hour I—I determined not to use it. There seemed to me good and conclusive reasons why I should not, yet I knew you would assemble here, according to your wont, and I resolved, therefore, to speak to you instead, taking the words I have just read as my text in some measure. They are words of farewell sent, as you all know, by Paul to that church of God in Corinth. Even the slightest child here must recognize that they mean good-by and so I borrow them now, in my need, to use to this church of God in this new world. It does not surprise

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you, perhaps, that I am about to bid you farewell. One could not indeed do otherwise after the message of dismissal that you saw fit to send me; though possibly another man would have refrained from again entering the pulpit which had been so closed to him."

An electrical stir ran through the entire building; something like a murmur of consternation and protest seemed to leap forth on every side, though there was no word spoken. Dismissal? Who had mentioned dismissal? It was one thing to wish one's pastor away, and another to cast him out. Faces full of wonderment were turned from neighbor to neighbor. The members of the Consistory glanced guiltily at one another. Had the domine heard of that letter sent to the Classis? How had he heard? They would not act without authority, and there could be no answer to their charges for months to come. What did he mean? The unspoken questions passed from man to man as distinctly as if they were uttered in a voice of thunder, meeting no solution.

In the excitement of the moment vague mutterings were heard but, for the most part, the people, remembering that it was contrary to precedent to speak in church, kept themselves well in check, though the amazement everywhere increased in volume and surged, like a wave, to the pulpit itself. Domine Ryerssen, glancing around with eyes made clearer and keener by sorrow, recognized, in some measure, the perplexity before him. A little thrill, which amounted almost to pleasure, sent a touch of color into his gray face.

"Perhaps," he said, and his voice trembled, "many of you are unaware of the message. It may have been

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the work of just a little handful of your number acting, I am very sure, from what seemed to them their best convictions. When a surgeon uses the knife to lop off some dangerous growth he knows that pain will follow close upon the operation, yet he does not stay his hand. He is seeking health for the whole body, and the pain is surely of little consequence to gain that end. So it seems to me that, in the minds of those who framed the message, there was the thought that this dear body of our church was ailing and could only be healed and strengthened by measures that, in seeming cruel, were really kind. They acted on that impulse, as firmly and unflinching as the surgeon acts, sorry to inflict suffering but recognizing the necessity which admitted no other course. That I would have withdrawn from my office at a word is beside the question, yet for some reason this method seemed best and I do not quarrel with it. I am not here to blame, or to condemn any man, save the one I know best of all—myself.

He let his glance wander momentarily to the little pew directly in front of the pulpit which Jan Praa occupied. The voorlezer was sitting forward on the edge of the seat, his chin dropped, his eyes fastened on the rod swaying in his quivering hands, on which it was his duty to affix the notices and pass them up to the minister to be read aloud. He did not meet that sad regard; he alone, of all the people in the church, could not look upon that old, shaken face, but the domine did not misconstrue his apparent aloofness.

“I have not been unconscious of late,” the husky voice continued, “that the attitude I was forced to take has occasioned displeasure among you, though I trust

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you will believe that it has been a sorrow to me to act apart from your desires. Let that pass. I told the Consistory that it was my dearest wish to labor in this vineyard till the close of day—it was something that, through all my unworthiness, I longed for as the most precious boon life could give me. Despite that unworthiness I clung to it—clung to it—” he paused, choking a little. “And then last night, even before I received your message I knew the end had come.”

He stopped speaking and looked around again at the people near him; at that window on the side with its legend clear in the light of day, letter for letter, like the writing on the wall—“*Vestigia nulla retrorsum*”—but his glance did not seek out the Juffrouw's Bench. He could not force himself to see, even for a moment, the lifted face of his child with its likeness to that other flower-like face.

“Last night, perplexed, and sorely troubled, I came hither,” he said presently, with no faltering in his voice, “very often have I come here at odd hours for comfort—it has been like a home to me. I came to the foot of this sacred desk, thinking only of these beloved surroundings and suddenly, the light from my lantern revealed my shadow on the pulpit stairs. I am not afraid of shadows—what man is?—yet I trembled before this one. It was very dark, very ugly, and it lay like some great stain stretching up—and up—before my eyes. We must have light to see darkness by and that little, slanting beam showed me at last the blackness which I had hitherto disregarded. It was the light of my conscience. I could not evade it! I knew, then, that it was laid upon me to show you what I had seen. I went

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back to my home and found those symbols there—the stick—the bread—the old shoes—and the bit of money—and I read their meaning aright. I must go forth—that is your wish—away from you—from this place—go forth.”

A sound of protest interrupted him; something like a sob, from an impressionable woman, made itself heard with startling distinctness. He turned in its direction almost fiercely.

“ You shall not pity me. I will not have it. I am not worthy to receive it. Nor shall you blame, for so much as a moment, the persons who devised that message, cruel and insulting though it seemed to me at first. It was my punishment. For thirty-seven years I have preached in this house and I have met with love and kindness far beyond any deserving of mine, God knows! For the last sixteen of those years I have nursed a black hypocrisy in my own soul and yet during that time I have counselled you, and rebuked you for your shortcomings; I have been the mouthpiece for your prayers in which confession was made and pardon implored; I have sought to lift up the veil that hangs before each heart to search its corners, and I have kept my own closely curtained. That is why I am undeserving of your sympathy now.

“ Is there a word of extenuation, do you ask in your tolerance? Is there ever any extenuation for falsehood when the command has been laid upon us ‘ Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor? ’ You know the answer; I know the answer. Yet believe me, in my perplexity I found some excuse for myself for a time. I saw the sin, but I kept it in my life while I told myself,

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trying to justify the act, that it was done for another's sake. That was insufficient reason. Either a thing is good, or bad, half-good, half-bad, will not stand." He turned his face from the Juffrouw's Bench; now that he was about to strike and wound that faithful heart, he must keep his gaze averted from its woe.

"Many of you doubtless remember my—my—wife. She was a young girl of great beauty, as was evident to everyone who saw her, but more beautiful than her face was the loveliness of her soul; I can say that who had some glimpses of its purity. And, moreover, in her tongue was the law of kindness and her ways were ever those of pleasantness, and peace. She was with me three little years; then she went away—oh! not as you have always thought—be very merciful in your judgment—not by the way, we all must travel, through the valley of the shadow of death. There had been—how can I tell you?—one of her own years in Fatherland—no, no, you must not blame her! She was very young, and I was more than treble her age; she only married me because it was her father's dying wish. There had never been between us that love which God places in the hearts of some men and women to make a heaven of this life for them, to be steadfast and pure through sorrow, shame and adversity to the end—and beyond. I loved her like that, God knows, but I stood apart from her, busy with my books, my work—she was very lonely, very young, and she loved that other even as I loved her. He came to this country to seek her and—they went away—together.

"Now you know my secret and my sin. The essence of lying is the intention to deceive and, knowing this,

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I wilfully deceived you. I did not contradict the reports that were current after my wife's disappearance; I wished you to believe them. It was a time of great sickness in the land, as you may recollect, and death was reaping his grim harvest everywhere; that my wife should be among the number did not seem singular to you, knowing how many—old and young alike—were taken. I let you think so, I—I—took your sympathy. I wanted to save her from your scorn—to keep my child's memory of her mother pure and beautiful. It was enough sadness for her to miss, throughout her life, a mother's care, without the additional burden of knowing that that mother had forsaken her. That is what I told myself. I see now it was done chiefest to save my own pride. I could not bear finger-sticking, laughing, jeers at an old husband tricked and deserted. I let you believe she was dead, I—I—kept still—even when you placed that tablet there—I would not trust your love.

“All through the years that followed I heard no word of her. She was as dead to me, as if I had seen her buried yonder. But a short time since, there came to me this news: she died two years ago after a life of holiness and charity, spent far from here in ministering to the sick and dying. There were many, at the last, to call her blessed—thank God for that! She loved much, suffered much, and surely to such much is forgiven.” He stopped to rest for a moment and the little silence was appalling in its quietness; there was not the least sound anywhere.

“I have not told you my story in order to palliate your judgment of my deception toward you,” he went

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on, his voice dragging wearily. "As I have said, there is no justification for what I have done—I see that now. My grief might have remained my own, without being built around with a lie; you would have respected it, and sympathized with it had I trusted your affection. I chose the other way, preached one thing, practised another, cried 'forgive us our sins,' condemned yours, and hugged my own close. There was no peace for me anywhere; yet all the while I knew how life and living may be made good. To look on the face of Truth, to know one's self a man—to love what belongs to manhood—ay, and to womanhood, too, honor, nobility of purpose, strength, purity—these are the things to win for us the 'well done' at the end of the course. These things comprise the love of God, and in setting them at naught God is set at naught likewise. Yet knowing this, to His judgment, to His forgiveness, to His mercy I appeal."

He was silent a long minute looking before him, beyond him, with eyes that perceived nothing; presently he recovered himself and glanced down at the upturned faces, seeing them but dimly through the mist that clouded his vision. He leant toward them with hands outstretched in a gesture of renunciation, the wide sleeves falling away and revealing his sharply attenuated wrists. So he stood for a moment, his face growing very tender, then he spoke again: "'Finally, brethren farewell. . . . Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.'"

In the silence that followed, he turned and crept unsteadily down the stairs; at their foot Jan Praa met him

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and transferred the shaking hand from the rail to the curve of his own arm. Something like a smile trembled about the domine's mouth, but he gave no other evidence of Jan's presence. The two men went forward slowly in that great, encompassing hush which seemed to hold no other sense of life ; suddenly a heavy footfall sounded near them and Heilke stood close at her master's side. He looked at her in wonderment as she caught his gown between her fingers and pressed a kiss against its folds.

" We'll go home now," she murmured, as if she were speaking to a little child.

XXVII

JAN AS KNIGHT

The day wore to its close, as all days—be they happy or sad—have a fashion of doing since Time, although relentless is also merciful, and night settled down. The domine was in his study, whither he had retired directly after his return from church. There had been no word spoken on that slow, homeward walk in the glare of the summer noon strident with the clamors of myriad insects; but sympathy and love have a thousand means of expression, other than with the human voice, and the old man was not unconscious of what lay in the hearts of his faithful companions. If he missed Annetje, and his occasional furtive glances showed that he was seeking someone, he said nothing. He could make allowances for her suffering; he was willing to wait until, of her own accord, she should seek him out.

Heilke and Jan, whose minds were usually at the antipodes of things, agreed in this instance with surprising alacrity that for the present, at least, the domine must be kept in ignorance of the pain and humiliation which had overtaken his child. It was enough for him to think, as he did, that she was bowed down by the deception which he had practised, without being troubled by the further grief that had entered into her life.

“Wait a bit,” Jan counselled, “wait a bit! The

Jan as Knight

stoutest bow will break with too much straining, I doubt if he could stand up under this fresh sorrow.”

He himself was almost prostrated by it. Heilke's distress and amazement at the revelation of the domine's secret were but slight when compared to what Jan felt when she told him of the scene enacted without the church. He would not believe it; not until he possessed himself of the despised letter and read and re-read its little, pitiful sentences was he convinced. For the time he was the victim of a dreadful inertia which rendered him unable even to form any plans of vengeance, thrilling though he was with rage against Belenden and the longing to punish him. He could only think of Annetje—disprized, cast aside, the scorn and laughter of the neighborhood. Through the long afternoon he sat in the kitchen nursing these thoughts. For the first time in its history the bell of the Garden Street church was mute; there could be no services under the existing order of things and no need, therefore, for the voorleezer to stir abroad.

Heilke, not far from him, clicked her needles resolutely; she could not sit with folded hands even in the fairness of her surroundings which bespoke her right to rest. The shining splendor of copper and pewter brought no balm to her; the plates looked down from their racks with unsympathetic moon-faces and the knives and spoons gleamed in derision from their racks also. She had been industrious, working always from dawn to dark, proud of results—and this was the end! She filled the air with reproaches, recriminations, self-laudings and heartbroken, little cries; she was by turns noisy in her grief and then again plunged into a bitter

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silence, during which her needles went on unceasingly—the only sign of life about her.

Jan fingered his long-stemmed pipe, but he did not smoke; that consolation was not for him. For the most part he was very quiet, though every now and again he would break out with some reminiscence of Annetje's childhood, speaking in that subdued tone the voice takes on in recalling the ways and likings of those who are no longer living. It almost seemed to him that Annetje was dead. Certainly that little simple, pure-souled girl he had once known and loved was no more. She had vanished. He droned half to himself, half to his companion, about the trivial happenings of those other days. The words the child had first learned; her little fancies about the flowers, her delight in the thumb and finger play and how she used to laugh over his change of voice for the Dame and the Friar, and the squeaking treble of the small maid-servant.

"Laugh—laugh—laugh," he said slowly, his own face breaking into a smile as he looked before him seeing the whole scene. "And then it was: 'Over again, dear Jan, over again.' Twenty times in succession have I done it at her bidding."

In the grief the man and woman shared in common neither one heeded the other's sorrow; each went on with a separate monologue, or remained sunk in deep thought. The old dog wandered restlessly in and out of the kitchen, the pad-pad-of his step breaking the quiet there. Sometimes he would climb the stairs and snuff loudly at the closed door, scratching for admittance, or he would lie on the floor without with the patience of his kind, waiting through the long hours.

Jan as Knight

He came boisterously down the stairs with the rollicking spirits of a puppy as the tall clock in the corner struck nine, preceding his mistress—running forward a few steps and then back to her and throwing himself against her in his delight. The girl moved slowly, dragging her feet a little, but she came on resolutely to the kitchen door. The room was lighted by a single candle on the table where Heilke had just finished preparing a tray of food for her master. She looked up as Annetje entered; she had not seen the girl since that morning and she opened her lips now to upbraid her, reproof being sometimes a veil for her deeper feelings. Annetje came quite close, the light revealing her white face, with its dark-ringed eyes, over which the waters of sorrow had gone drowning all its former happiness. It was like the face of the dead, so strangely aloof did it seem.

“Is that for my father?” she asked swiftly. “Let me take it to him, please, Heilke—dear Heilke——”

She put her hands on the old woman’s where they grasped the tray and displaced them gently, but firmly. Heilke, too much surprised to offer any opposition, fell back without a word and watched the girl as she left the room. As her steps receded along the hall without, Jan leaned forward from his corner grasping the stem of his pipe so tightly that it broke in twain and fell to the floor.

“Dear God! she doesn’t know,” he whispered sharply.

“No more she doesn’t,” Heilke breathed. “Oh! my poor lamb, clean gone distracted as she is and wearing her Sunday gown all these hours—was there ever such

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shiftlessness? The domine thinks she knows—and he'll speak sudden—*owee! owee!* I must go after her——”

“Let be,” Jan commanded in a voice she dared not disobey. “Suffering draws folks together and plants love between them; let them find that out for themselves. It's God's will.”

Annetje, in the meantime, went on to the study, found the door ajar and entered the room. The candles were burning on the table where the domine had set them earlier; he had been busy over some writing, but at her step he started, almost as if he had been listening for it, and turned his shaking face toward her.

“*Mÿn wit lammetje*—it is you—at last——” the words came with a rush.

“Yes, father,” her voice trembled, “Heilke let me bring your supper—see, I put it here. You must eat every mouthful——”

“Yes—yes—come closer, *kleintje*, it has been a sad day for you.”

She turned slightly from his glance.

“It is over,” she said wearily, after a short pause. “I am only tired now, and somehow I can't talk—I want to be very still—you—you—don't mind and you understand? I just came to say good-night.”

“My little one—my little one—God bless you for coming to your old father.”

They were at cross-purposes even in this moment of sorrow, as they had been all their lives, each misunderstanding the other. She had expected to be greeted by bitter reproaches and rebukes and had steeled herself

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to meet them; after the other punishment love had endured all pain seemed trivial in comparison. While he, on his part, had looked for vehement upbraiding and poignant sorrow. Near as they were physically they were only at the surface of things after all; real comprehension of each other's needs did not touch them. It was the tragedy of misapprehension—the most pitiful tragedy of all. He put out his hand and drew her face down to his and kissed her fondly.

“*Mÿn wit lammetje—mÿn lammetje—*” he said brokenly, then he released her.

She clung to his arm with both hands, trembling in her turn.

“You are so good—so good,” she cried a trifle wildly, “my heart is very grateful.”

She stood away from him after a moment, regaining her self-control with a great effort; then she moved toward the door, paused, and looked back.

“Eat every mouthful, father,” her voice was still unsteady, though she tried to make it playful and sweet, “every mouthful please, else Heilke will be vexed and good-night—good-night.”

The last words came to him from far down the hall as she took her way back to her room. Heilke called to her sharply and she turned from the stairs and entered the kitchen again.

“You have had no food since morning,” the woman began.

“I am not hungry—just tired—very tired. I must rest. I—I—could not even talk to my father. Let me pass. You shall not look at me like that, I have done no wrong,” her voice sharpened in sudden agony.

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"Oh! you don't believe that I am what Vrouw Pieterse said."

The silence hung heavy in the room; Jan leaned forward breathlessly.

"No," he almost shouted.

"No," the old woman stammered faintly, "no—no—that is——"

"Don't spoil it please," Annetje interrupted with simple dignity. "Let it be that way. Good-night to you both."

"Now perdition snatch Vrouw Pieterse and all who listen to her foul tongue," Jan cried in a whirlwind of grief and rage as the door of that upper room was closed softly, "and forty million plagues seize on that black hearted villain. I'll seek him out, I'll trounce him, I'll shame him, who has cast shame upon the whitest soul that ever lived. She could have done no wrong and shown us that face."

"No," Heilke said again very slowly, "I'd believe her against the whole world."

With the morning light Jan's confidence was unshaken, but Heilke's had suffered some diminution; the kindlier feelings she had held toward the girl overnight were tintured largely with the thought of the scandal in the neighborhood and, seen through that medium, they were very bitter. Dull and tired from the long sleepless hours in which she had repeatedly gone through the misery of the previous day, she stumbled about her work with swollen eyelids. At first, she did not resent the fact that Annetje still lingered above-stairs, though it was contrary to all precedent; one part of her nature was ready to make excuses for the girl

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who was in such sore distress, even though the other part disapproved strongly. But as the day advanced she began to grumble. The necessity that is put upon women to toil, even while they weep, was one which Heilke observed herself and demanded all others to observe likewise. Imbued with this thought she went noisily up the stairs, fortified with authority, but a minute later she came hurrying down with a distorted, ashy face, from which all semblance of power had fled, leaving only a great fear in its stead. Jan, who unlike her could find no relief in employment, was lounging without on the porch; he ran quickly into the kitchen at the sound of her agonized wail, and with blanching face listened to the news that Annetje was not in her room.

"She's somewhere in the garden, never fear," he said cheerily enough. "Nature's got a way of calling to her children to comfort them in their trouble—she'll help the little maid better than we can."

Partly convinced by this reasoning and the confidence of his tones, and too much disturbed at the time for further argument, Heilke returned to her work. Jan waited for a while, pretending a sudden deep interest in the roots of a creeper near the house, but when the clatter of pans assured him that she was deeply engrossed in her labors he moved rapidly away whipped by fears he could not overcome. He sought the garden, beating up every nook and corner and searching the little lane without, and the adjoining thicket. Twice he went over the ground calling now softly, now more loudly, using the little heart-names of her childhood, 'Ladybird—Sweetheart—Jan's Bright Eyes' but no answer greeted him anywhere.

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Finally he crept back in great dejection to the kitchen door where the sun had long since passed the noon mark and Heilke, who had evidently kept only half an eye upon her work, came briskly out to meet him. When she saw his face she threw her apron over her own, and broke into little, whimpering moans. Neither spoke for a few moments, then the old woman withdrew her apron and they fell into a low talk made up of vague surmises and ill-disguised fears. Jan, the more hopeful of the two, argued that Annetje had been driven by her grief out into the country in the hope of finding relief far from the haunts of men in the healing stillness; she had probably gone out in the early morning before they had risen and would return with the nightfall. But Heilke would not listen to such a suggestion, convinced as she was that Annetje would never go of her own free will while there remained the chance of an encounter with anyone who had witnessed her degradation. Harm had come to the child. The bees had not swarmed low that spring for nothing, and there had been other signs of ill besides—it was useless to disregard them—they boded disaster and sorrow.

Utterly cast down, her strong nature shattered, the old woman—as if she were indeed a child—was anxious to seek her master in her distress relying upon his counsel; but Jan stopped her fiercely. There seemed, to his mind, no necessity to involve the domine in deeper sorrow, for in speaking of Annetje's absence and their fears the whole story of the letter and what it signified must be told in its turn. Happily, for the moment, the father was ignorant of the grief and shame to which

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his daughter had been subjected, and Jan determined to keep the matter secret for a while longer at least. He would seek Annetje himself and bring her home safely; his vengeance against the English officer must wait in the face of this new difficulty.

Suddenly it dawned upon him, as he cast about for some way out of the trouble, that the girl in her despair, eager for sympathy which she could not find among her own people, had sought out Peggy Crewe at Greenwich. The thought came like an inspiration. In an instant, though usually slow of action, he formed his plans communicating them rapidly to his companion who saw no hope in the enterprise and derided them with a bitter tongue. Jan, however, was not to be turned from his purpose by mere words. The day had unexpectedly grown brighter to him. He hurried away intent on his quest, leaving to Heilke the sadder task which women must always bear of remaining at home, practically useless through hours whose every minute seems age-long in the dark period of waiting.

He went directly through to the Broadway and walked rapidly on beneath the shade of beech and locust trees in their rich leafage of summer. At that hour the street was almost deserted and he met but few wayfarers; several chapmen loitered by bawling their wares, an empty chair swang past, the bearers swearing loudly at each other, and a pretty girl, attended by a negro wench, sauntered demurely along. Once he caught sight of a scarlet uniform well on in front of him and, tingling with excitement, he started in pursuit, stumbling in his haste to overtake the wearer. He came up

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with him at Little Queen Street and put a stern hand on his collar, but the officer turned out to be a fat, bleary-eyed individual who swore roundly at the Dutchman for his impudence and was for haling him off to the magistrate on the instant. Happily for the offender, however, there was a little stir at this juncture occasioned by the appearance of the Public Crier crying the loss of Miss Sally Remsen's purse and, in the confusion attendant upon that ceremony, Jan escaped and crept on to Old Windmill Lane where he turned down to the waterside. There, in full view of the river—its surface just windkissed into tiny, glinting ripples—and the luxuriant green of the Jersey hills on the other side he went forward; tired, faint, sick with apprehension, utterly regardless of any beauty in God's earth, or sky.

The little village reached at last, he was beset by fresh difficulties. At the time of Miss Crewe's departure from the parsonage he knew she had gone immediately to Greenwich, but whether to her own home, or to visit friends, he was equally ignorant. Acting upon the supposition that she lived there he went from house to house, making inquiries, and was finally rewarded by being directed to a cottage lying some distance beyond the settlement to the north.

The house, when he came up to it, despite the beauty of its vine-covered, rambling exterior, struck a chill to his heart and sent a blinding mist of tears into his eyes. The windows and doors were closed, and the whole place wore a deserted appearance. He steadied himself against the support of the porch. It was too much to bear! All that time lost—his own fatigue counted for less than nothing—it was only of the precious min-

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utes that he thought, and of Annetje—where was she? He stormed at the door in his despair, throwing himself against it and bruising his hands with knocking, as if the senseless wood held a message for him, which he must beat out in some way. But it remained closed and deaf to his appeals—like Heaven, he told himself dully.

Utterly spent and hopeless he turned at last to go and, at the same moment, a woman thrust a sleepy face out of an upper window and demanded his business. As her vision cleared, and she noted his attire, she overwhelmed him with coarse vituperations, but he cared little for them, standing his ground and repeating his questions whenever she paused for breath. In the end his patient punctiliousness, which would have softened a heart of stone, won the desired information. There had been no little Dutch maiden there that day, nor any day, and Miss Crewe was with her family at the town house over against the Fort.

Back again by the way he had come Jan toiled. The river gleamed now rose, now amethyst, now gold, in his unseeing eyes, the little waves chattering happily to one another in the freshening breeze. A wood-thrush from a low bush bubbled out its joyous notes and farther away a Bob o' Lincoln gave its soft call, but he did not heed them. How long the way was!

Through the lane again to the Broadway where a few figures of fashion strolled idly and some leather-aproned apprentices hastened past, their day's work over and done. The air was full of the sad donging of the cow-bells as the cows went slowly homeward in the glow of the setting sun. The clanging sound smote

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Jan's ears fearfully and sent him along with new impetus, running a little at times, and then again moving with feet weighted with a heaviness that made it impossible for him to do more than crawl. How long the way was—how long!

XXVIII

PEGGY INTERCEDES

The door was opened and closed by an impetuous hand, and the further sound of silken skirts rustling over the waxed floor aroused the old man from his bitter thoughts. He had been waiting but a few minutes—though they had seemed like hours to him—in the brilliantly lighted room where the candles, reflected on every side in long mirrors, mocked him with their glare. Candles—candles—candles—an infinity of splendor that dazzled him, unaccustomed as he was to such lavish display. He rubbed his eyes to ease their ache and took a step forward to meet the advancing figure dressed, for some rout, in silver stuff brocaded with little roses, with creamy lace making a soft mist about the whiteness of throat and bosom and falling from the elbow-sleeves over the rounded arms. The same light that accentuated the girl's loveliness showed him a discordant note amid the rich surroundings with his disordered dust-stained clothes, the tired droop of his shoulders and his haggard face in which hope kindled anew at sight of her. He uttered a little cry.

"You—" her clear voice cut like a whip-lash. "They told me it was someone with a message of deep import. I wonder you dare come hither."

"I couldt not my message py your serfing-man gif,

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juffrouw, it vas alone for you. I am come to seek our chilt—our Annetje——”

“And what should she do here, pray?”

“I ton't know. I joost t'ink maype she has neet of a vort vis you.”

“What word from her would I hear?” Peggy demanded swiftly, blind to the anguish in his face which drowned his piteous attempts at a smile. “Oh! I know I was a stranger to you all, but you showed me kindness and I trusted you, Annetje especially—she knew why I had taken refuge among you, and she promised to keep my secret. Fool that I was, I thought it safe with her. Then I was forced out of my hiding—you, yourself came to me with the story, and the moment I was gone the tongues of your people were let loose instigated by that little cat——”

“No, no, juffrouw, so of Annetje shall you not speak. No vort has t'e chilt sait, nopoty toes she efer see, ant always to Heilke she say t'e people ton't know v'at t'ey talk of. T'at is so, peliefe me.”

Peggy snapped her fingers disdainfully.

“Oh! of course you are telling me the truth,” she mocked, “'tis a pity it does not fall in with my humor to credit it. And now that you have said your say I can very readily dispense with your company.”

She moved a step or two nearer the mirror, ignoring him as if he were no more than the chair she brushed by impatiently, spread her fan wide and half saluted the vision that faced her from its depths with a pretty show of dimples. Jan stood watching her for a moment; then he caught her gown almost roughly between his fingers, fearful lest she might vanish.

Peggy Intercedes

“ Juffrouw listen, t'e chilt—how can I tell you?—she is no more at home—she is gone——”

“ As I wish you were.”

“ Juffrouw, to your heart I haf a vort to say.”

The insistent appeal in his voice, no less than in his touch, arrested her attention. She stepped back a few paces and instantly the figure in the glass retreated also, hovering like some gay little shadow in the distance as if peering curiously at the two actors of the scene.

“ Why do you annoy me in this way? I do not know where she is, I tell you, nor do I care. She would not come here. She has wronged me too deeply—oh! deny it, deny it, if you wish—only that doesn't alter matters. I'm not one of your soft kind; I don't forgive easily and I don't forget. It's just as well for her, perhaps, that she didn't come. What could she want to say to me?”

Jan remained silent as if, with this opportunity to unburden himself, he had lost all power of utterance; he did not appear even to have heard her questions. The impatient sweep of her fan recalled him to a realization of his surroundings and he plunged into a pitiful account of what had befallen Annetje the day before. His story was uninterrupted from beginning to end, but as he finished the girl, unable to control herself longer, turned upon him in a frenzy of anger.

“ How dare you slander my cousin in this fashion?” she cried, white with displeasure. “ I wish I could have you whipped—He would not stoop to do what you have said. It's some trick on your part to force his liking for that little soft-faced she-thing, to bind him to her. He never received the letter——”

“ Put, juffertje, it vas t'ere—nailt to t'e toor, I tell

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you, for t'e people to see ant laugh at it ant her—at her, oh! my tear Kott. Ant she must go pack home—tisgracet. If I couldt kill him t'at tone t'at crime it wouldt not help her—she is proken-heartet forefer. Tear Kott! t'at proken-heartet, little v'ite face she show to us last night, so pure as any lily.”

“ My cousin did not do that thing—he is a gentleman—That was the work of a cur.”

“ Put t'e letter vas to him—only to him,” Jan protested obstinately, “ not any ot'er one couldt haf it. Impossible! See, here it is—reat you yourself ant tecite.”

Peggy seized the paper which he took from his breast and bent over it with relentless, mocking eyes; she felt little mercy for Annetje.

“ 'Tis not an easy hand,” she murmured with a contemptuous laugh, “ hmm!—hmm!” Then she began to read the contents half to herself, half aloud.

Jan crept nearer, intent on hearing, though every word of the letter had bitten into his memory as indelibly as the etcher's acid bites upon his plates.

“ A little louder, please.”

“ ‘ Dear my captain,’ ” Peggy's voice softened momentarily. “ ‘ Never you come to my garden any more, very dark is it, like the winter is here and the flowers live not. Oh! believe me, no word do I ever say about Miss Crewe—I swear it by the most holy thing to me—the thought of my mother! I say nothing. You will come some more here? So long the time is when I see you not. Please come, sir, please to come soon—right away. Good-by, your Annetje.’ ”

Something between a sob and a roar escaped from

Peggy Intercedes

Jan's throat, as grief and anger wrestled afresh within him. Peggy looked his way; the disdain gone from her glance, her face full of pity. She had taken up the letter prepared to ridicule it, but the sight of the girl's heart that showed between the lines and in every word conquered her. Her eyes were wet and tears, as a general rule, were far from their laughing depths. The truth of Annetje's denial seemed unmistakable. But even if it were false and she had disclosed the secret, what punishment could be keener than the one inflicted upon her? It was out of all sense of proportion, Peggy told herself with quickening breath. It was too dreadful. Public whipping, the stocks, the pillory—the ignominy of each and all was nothing in comparison to the disgrace Annetje had suffered. If the covering had been dragged from her body and she had been cast naked on the streets, it would not have been so fiendish an indignity as this stripping the veil from her heart and showing its inmost corners. Peggy's cheeks flamed, all her womanhood up in arms against this cruelty to one of her sex. Her anger against Annetje had merged into wrath and contempt against the man who had subjected the girl to so great an insult, yet there were tenderer feelings stirring within her, too, to defend and excuse him, to deny strenuously such an action on his part.

“Put t'e chilt, juffertje—you haf not seen her?”

The despair in Jan's voice struck across that constant see-saw of did and didn't in her breast; one minute disbelief in her cousin's innocence rode high, then belief swung in its stead. She was dizzy with the alternate thoughts.

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"Not since I left—how long ago it seems!" She faltered a moment. "Do you think she has gone to him?" she asked in a low voice.

Jan recoiled as if she had struck him a blow.

"To him, juffrouw, to him—ant he has tone like t'at to her?"

"She may excuse him, who can say? She loves him, and women don't change all in a minute. She has nowhere else to go. Heilke is right in thinking that she would shrink from being seen by the persons who had witnessed her shame." The girl was very gentle, it was Peggy at her best who was speaking.

"Vell t'en, v'at is it I can to? In t'e tark am I."

She hesitated momentarily, her face softening and growing hard by turns with the stress of her emotions.

"We'll go together and find her," she said simply. "Poor little Annetje! If she is not with him, he may be able to tell us where to seek. But first I must get something to throw over my gown. I will be with you again directly."

She returned after a short absence wrapped in a long cloak of scarlet cloth, the hood drawn low over her face. She moved with the utmost caution and, signalling him to follow, led the way along the corridor through the great door, which she opened almost noiselessly though she was less careful about closing it, out into the quiet street. The few pedestrians they met were too intent upon their own concerns to give more than a casual glance to the heavily shrouded figure attended by the old Dutchman. Sometimes, when a link-boy threw his light across her path, she cowered nearer her companion and once, when a band of sailors—on shore for a

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night's frolic—passed them and several of their number turned with the cry—'A petticoat! A petticoat!' she clung to Jan's arm like a little child. The simple dignity of his presence was sufficient protection and her tormentors withdrew with boisterous laughter. After that, she met with no other adventure.

For the most part they found the Broadway as peaceful as at high noon; the night was still young and few roisterers were abroad. The coffee-houses and ordinaries they passed were as yet slimly patronized, but through the open windows they could see the card-tables all laid out, and occasionally there came the rattling of dice and the quick slapping down of paste-board on wood where some of the most inveterate gamblers were already at play.

The man and girl went rapidly forward, without a word to each other, until they reached Crown Street, into which they turned and walked a short distance west. Then Peggy stopped in front of a moderate-sized brick house and arrested her companion's progress by a hasty touch. The windows on the second floor were oblong patches of light and, through their parted curtains, the spectators had a glimpse of a meagrely furnished sitting-room with a solitary, dejected-looking figure lounging over a table. Peggy felt her heart beat tumultuously. It was the first time she had seen Bellenden since that long-ago day in Annetje's garden and, angry as she told herself she ought to be with him, she was conscious only of a great delight at this moment which swept all other considerations aside. She knew he had been abroad both that day and the previous one; she knew also that he was too proud to come to

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her home until she sent him word. If she sent him word! What would not that mean to him and her? That very evening the balance had swung well to the side which spelled both Bellenden's happiness and her own, but a little touch on Jan's part had swung it back irrevocably. She choked down the thought.

Acting under her hurried directions, Jan rapped several times on the door which, after a long period of waiting, was opened by a surly looking man who held some dirty cards in one hand, as if he had been interrupted in the midst of a game. He admitted them without a word and, after indicating the upper room with a comprehensive sweep of his thumb, he went back along the way he had come, leaving Jan and his companion to mount the stairs, or not, as they saw fit.

Bellenden, who was trying to amuse himself with an old number of "The Spectator," heard the approach to his floor with the utmost indifference; the house held other tenants and he was looking for no company. He was almost entirely recovered of his wound, though his whole person wore an air of lassitude and his face was white and haggard as a result of his sufferings both mental and physical. As the steps paused at his threshold he turned to throw an inquiring eye at the intruders. Jan was in front, his features blazing with hatred, but after the briefest glance Bellenden, seeming scarcely to recognize him, looked past him at the woman's figure which, heavily cloaked and hooded though it was, bore an indisputable appearance of quality. In a moment he was on his feet and across the room.

Peggy Intercedes

“What fresh folly is this?” he demanded in an angry voice as he put his hand roughly on the girl’s shoulder. “Why will you so disregard consequences?”

“La,” Peggy retorted, flaring up in her turn at the reproof and authority in his manner, “’tis not for any pleasure the sight of your face can give me, I warrant you, but for a vastly more important matter. Pray have the civility, sir, now that I am here to allow me to enter.”

“Stay where you are,” he commanded shortly, “at least until I have drawn the curtains. Then you may come in and be very welcome, Peggy,” his voice softened, “even though I know it is not right for you to be here.”

She would not allow herself to be appeased by any tenderness on his part, but remained testily on the threshold while he screened the windows and removed the candles to a greater distance. When he had finished she advanced into the room, unloosening her cardinal and throwing back its hood. He devoured the fairness of her face with greedy eyes, and she flushed a little beneath his gaze, though she met it defiantly enough at first. Then her own glance wavered and fell.

“All this to-do to save a girl’s name from gossip,” she sneered, for the sake of saying something to quiet the gladness that filled her heart at this evidence of his care of her. “’Tis a thousand pities that you did not observe the same precautions toward that other girl. Her name is as much to her as mine is to me. For my own part, knowing what my errand is, I care not if the whole world should see me here. I am come to learn some-

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thing about Annetje Ryerssen. Tell me where she is and I will be gone immediately."

"If you were a man I should know how to answer you, but because you are a woman I find it a more difficult matter. I have not seen the lady you mention, madam, for weeks."

Jan uttered a bitter, wordless cry and covered his face with his hands. He had moved aside to let Peggy enter and then had taken up his position near the closed door, he was somewhat removed from his companions, who were within a few feet of each other, as if his grief set him apart from them.

"You will say next that you have not heard from her?"

"Whatever I say will be the truth."

"So this is the home of all the virtues? Very pretty—very pretty."

Bellenden did not take any notice of the slow, impertinent stare with which Peggy glanced around the four walls of his room.

"Whatever I say will be the truth," he repeated. "Though I confess it mystifies me, notwithstanding my slight acquaintance with your vagaries, that you should take up cudgels in behalf of one who has done so much to injure you. Both you and I, madam, have a long score to settle with this same Annetje Ryerssen."

"Then I think you have settled it—shall we say satisfactorily?—from your stand-point, that is," Peggy cried sharply. "For myself I would never stoop to your methods, not even if she had injured me a thousand times more deeply than she has, I would scorn to use them. Vent your spleen as you like, sir, but don't dare

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to say it was done in my behalf. What, treat a girl like that, hold her up to contempt, use her own hand to testify against her? Oh! gallant conduct, worthy of a gentleman and a soldier. Disgraced as Annetje was in the sight of those people, I warrant she was a far nobler figure in their thoughts than the man who, forgetting his manhood, subjected her to that treatment.”

“ You are speaking in riddles,” he interrupted hotly, though his voice dragged with pain, “ I do not understand you. Perhaps you will have the goodness to make your meaning clear.”

She did not answer him but took the letter from her dress and tossed it contemptuously upon the table. He leaned forward and, picking it up, read it through slowly, read it again, and still again; then he raised a wondering face to the two pair of watchful eyes.

“ First you come here demanding Annetje’s whereabouts, then you give me a letter from her. I confess I stand in need of some more definite explanation.”

“ Put t’at letter, sir—it is yours already? ”

“ Yes, it is mine, it belongs to me. I do not know how it came into my cousin’s keeping.”

Jan choked over a torrent of indistinguishable words and leapt toward the speaker, his fist upraised. But Peggy, with a quick, catlike spring, caught his arm before it could descend upon the man who stood regarding them both in apparent unconcern for himself.

“ There, there, Jan, one moment—let me speak. Let me tell this gentleman how I came to be in possession of property which he shows us he prizes so highly.”

“ Go on, madam, I am all attention.”

She poured forth her scorn rapidly, her cheeks flam-

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ing, her accusations winged with bitterness. A short silence followed her words broken only by Jan's labored breathing; even the sound of her cloak falling from her shoulders to the floor was increased tenfold by the absolute quiet of the room.

"That you could suppose me guilty of such conduct, Jan Praa, I can readily understand," Bellenden said at last. "I know how sincere your devotion to Annetje has been, and is, and to have her treated in such fashion is enough to drag the very sun from the firmament. It is enough to blind you to any fair estimate of a man's honor. This letter was written to me, it bears my name—hence you may be excused for thinking I scorned it as it was scorned. But until this moment I never saw it, believe that, or not as you choose. It is the truth! May I be blasted where I stand if it is not so. Who held this up to public ridicule, I cannot guess, but I will leave no stone unturned to discover and punish the person who has dared to fix this blot on her and on me as well." He went a little closer to the old man.

"Even if you believe me," he said in a lower voice, "you will not find it easy to forgive me for what my thoughtlessness has wrought, since it is now so inextricably woven with this wrong. It is true that, until a few weeks ago, I passed many an afternoon with Annetje in her garden—my visits unknown to the domine. Yet never for a moment have I loved her, nor have I treated her with less respect than I should make the test of a man's conduct to my own sister. This I swear by all that is holy. It was just a pastime for me, I thought it the same for her. In the face of this, however," he touched the letter gently, "such a justification as mine

Peggy Intercedes

casts small glory upon me and for that reason I feel very guilty, though innocent, indeed, of what you accuse me."

Jan eyed him doubtfully, at a loss what to think or say. Bellenden had the appearance of a man speaking the truth, and the unsparing fashion in which he blamed himself did something to lessen Jan's wrath toward him, though he had neither the heart, nor the tact, to admit as much. Bellenden stood waiting for some word; even anger would have been preferable to the silence which, filled by his own condemning thoughts, was unbearable. He looked almost wistfully at the old man, seeing only him in the room. He seemed to have forgotten the girl's presence but, as she moved, he turned in her direction and stared coldly at her letting his glance wander over the graceful, slender figure in its pretty show of finery. Suddenly a spasm of pain contracted his face.

"I can find excuses in plenty for Jan Praa's censure," he cried with quick scorn, "though I can find none for you. I have suffered your injustice before, but I will not suffer it now. By heavens! you shall take back your accusations." He stepped swiftly to her side and seized her wrist, his fingers closing around it like a vise. "Look at me," he commanded, between his teeth, "do you hear? And tell me if, in your heart, you believe the charges your lips have made."

She kept her eyes persistently lowered, the flush deepening along her face and throat under his stern regard which seemed to penetrate to her very soul. He tightened his hold.

"Look at me."

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"Sir, sir, like a pirt tefenting its young she tefentet you; no vort of plame vouldt she hear. Two wrongs ton't efer make a right, juffertje, ant because t'ere once haf peen misunterstantings ant sorrow apout t'e letter is no reason t'at t'ey shouldt pe again. Up, ant speak."

Peggy gave a low laugh for answer, but she would not lift her eyes; she tried instead to free her hand.

"You hurt me," she murmured.

"Not so much as you hurt me," Bellenden returned in a swift whisper, and though he loosened his fingers a trifle he did not relax his hold. "One word to confirm what Jan has said—bless him!"

"Two words—forgive me."

"Freely. Come, sweet, just one look."

"La, you men are never satisfied," her face dimpled, then suddenly grew very grave. "Let me go, Cousin Bellenden," she cried, but not ungently, so he could take no offence, "I came hither seeking poor Annetje; you must help us if you can. She has been from home all through the day and Jan has sought her out to Greenwich——"

"So proken-heartet vas t'e chilt, Kott knows v'at has pecome of her."

"You don't think——" Bellenden began sharply, then his voice broke.

"I ton't t'ink not'ings—only gone away is she."

"What does the domine say?" Bellenden demanded.

"Surely he did not believe that black thing of me."

"Not'ings he knows yet of t'e letter ant Annetje—to him ve keep quiet. He has trouples so teep, so pitter, as nefer vas. Put it grows late. I must t'e chilt seek——"

Peggy Intercedes

“ I will go with you and on the way you can tell me what has befallen the domine. It will be best to go directly to the parsonage, for Annetje may have returned during your absence, though first I must take my cousin to her home——”

“ No—no—no—I will not go back there. The domine helped me in my need and if he is in trouble I may be able to help him a little. You will not hinder me? ”

Bellenden wrapped the cloak around the girl, smiling into her beseeching eyes as he fastened the hood beneath her chin.

“ Have your way, child, I can refuse you nothing.”

She put her hand timidly on his arm as they quitted the room ; Jan, somewhat in advance, had already begun the descent of the stairs.

“ Jack,” she breathed.

He bent toward her, a great happiness in his face.

“ Mischief—Torment—Sweetheart——”

“ No, no, forget everything, only that once you promised to serve me in any way I desired—with your time, your heart, your life.”

“ I remember—they were not mere words.”

“ Then when Annetje is found, you will make her your wife.”

He recoiled a step.

“ You ask too much,” he said with a bitter laugh.

“ She loves you, and think what her life will be with those narrow people always crying her down ; she can never rise above their suspicions and their taunts without your aid. Think of the degradation she has endured and besides, you owe her some reparation for this indignity——”

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"I owe her none—'twas not of my doing—I will not marry her."

"For my sake, Jack."

"It is for your sake that I cannot do as you ask—I love you."

She turned from him slowly and moved to the stairs.

"Between us both we have brought nothing but sorrow and trouble to that father and daughter," she said sadly. "Jan told me, long ago, that the domine's parishioners were angered by my stay in his house; that he might even lose his church in consequence; and now this stigma laid upon Annetje he must suffer as well. Oh! try to right the wrong—It is in your power——"

"It is easy for you to ask this of me," he interrupted savagely, "because my love is nothing to you."

"Is it so easy for me?" She paused, with her hand on the stair-rail and turned her face over her shoulder, looking steadily at him where he stood some paces back of her; the light from the room shone full into her up-raised eyes. "Would it make it any easier for you to know that it is hard for me—the hardest, bitterest thing I have ever done—or could ever do?"

He uttered a sharp cry and moved unsteadily toward her with outstretched arms; she put up her hand to keep him away.

"If I had not thought I could trust you I would not have told you this, but because I rely on your honor I let you see into my heart, and I know you will respect what you have seen. Think of Annetje Ryerssen's heart exposed there to that crowd of curs and be very merciful to her."

"Peggy you ask too much," he cried again.

Peggy Intercedes

“Not more than you will do.”

He waited a long minute ; they both waited.

“No,” he said at last, “not more than I will do.”

She did not trust herself to look into his face again, but bent swiftly and touched his coat-sleeve with her lips. Then she ran down the stairs and joined Jan in the door-way.

XXIX

THE ANGEL OF THE DARKER DRINK

It was growing light, though it was still some time before dawn; everywhere the gray sky bent above the gray land, and in the east the morning star, its fires undimmed, kept watch over the sleeping world. A half-awakened bird, stirring in the eaves, let fall a drowsy cheep and from a distance, mellowed into a silver note, came the crowing of a cock. Then deep silence seemed to rush in on the extinction of these small sounds as if Nature imposed quiet upon her creatures of tree and field and stayed breathless herself to witness the miracle of the new day's coming.

In the hush Annetje stepped out upon the kitchen porch and closed the door cautiously behind her. She stood for some moments, awed by the great stillness, her face turned toward the garden where indistinct shapes rose out of the mist melting vaguely into one another. The perfumes of the dreaming flowers came to her like a message, calling with an insistence she could not resist. She moved toward them with extremest care, but light as her footfalls were, and powerless to arouse the inmates of the house, they did not escape the hearing of the old watch-dog. With a low growl he bounded up from his slumbers and ran swiftly after the dim, receding figure, his menacing note changing to a sharp woof of delight as he overtook the girl. She

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knelt down, her arms stretched wide to welcome him, and dragged him close to her breast, stilling his glad cries with little soft whispers. So for a few minutes they remained close together in that big, silent world with love speaking low between their hearts.

It grew lighter. Near-by objects stood out more clearly; the trees and bushes took on their own forms and back of her the house became a definite shape. The star paled slowly before the surer, nearer approach of dawn.

Annetje looked up at the increasing brightness with dilating eyes. It was so pitiless—it seemed to mock her. She pushed the dog aside with an impatient touch and sprang to her feet, taking her way swiftly through the garden. Hollyhocks, drenched with dew, rose tall and straight on either side of the path; beyond them the tiger lilies showed blurred outlines, their glowing, freckled cups unseen; then came the phlox, not ready yet to bloom, and the little lane of sweet peas with each blossom “on tiptoe for a flight.” She knew the whole array only too well, but she would not pause anywhere though, as she passed, like fairy voices the fragrance of the growing things called out to detain her: ‘Here am I, lavender—’ ‘here am I, sweet marjoram—’ ‘here am I, lemon-balm—’ no cry too tiny to escape her hearing.

Something stronger than her resolution, however, made her crouch down by the side of the heart-shaped bed and lean across its low border. In the growing light she could distinguish the flowers perfectly. The pansies of the earlier year were gone and, in their stead, tufts of sweet alyssum gleamed up at her with friendly,

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little white faces; china pinks and clove whispered a welcome with their spicy breaths and the mignonette, too, had its own message of gladness. She pulled some of the blossoms and bent over them with murmuring words and kisses before she put them into her dress then, without another glance, she fled through the rest of the garden to the little gate which friendship, playing at love, had often opened and which had so recently been closed by another hand.

She did not realize until she set it ajar, so preoccupied was she with her thoughts, that Joris had followed her and, before she could detain him, had run past her into the lane. She ordered him home sternly. Usually obedient, for the dog's part is always to love and serve without seeking to understand, Joris was mutinous on this occasion. He would not go back but couched at her feet, his head pressed close against his paws, his eyes raised to her face. It was his way of begging for a favor. She prodded his side cruelly with her foot, hating him for forcing her to do such a thing and hating herself the more for doing it. He would not heed her commands, instead he lay motionless, entrenched in his revolt, looking at her mournfully and submitting without a groan to the unaccustomed blows which were rained upon him. She tried to drag him back, but he was very heavy, and she unusually weak, so that her efforts availed hardly to stir him. She desisted finally and sank down at his side, her tears falling unchecked upon his face.

"Oh! I have hurt you," she wailed, "forgive me, old dear heart, forgive me. But won't you understand that I can't take you with me? You must go home.

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Ah!" she broke off with a shrill cry, looking wildly around. "It's morning—it's morning—I cannot stay——"

The day had come at last—triumphant, rose-crowned—it's fore-runners, with their slender lances of gold, pricking through the heavy purple clouds, rending them apart and leaving everywhere a trace of red to mark the march of conquest. Sky and earth throbbed with brightness and the loveliness of dawn found an echo in the voices of happy birds. From the laburnum bushes within the gate a robin tinkled out its thin, sweet song of midsummer and across the lane, right in front of Joris whose mind was on other matters, an impudent squirrel frisked, eager to seek his breakfast.

Annetje followed the flash of his audacious tail with an indifferent glance that suddenly became attentive and fixed upon a long, motionless object which, half hidden in the grass, had been disturbed by the animal's progress. She was on her feet in an instant and ran to the spot to see if her eyes had deceived her, but there, to support their testimony, lay a piece of rope heavy with rain and dew, yet offering her a means of escape. She picked it up with a cry of relief and strained it backward and forward to test its strength. The rope had been used by Larry to tie his horse the day of Peggy's departure and he had neglected to put it in the chaise when they had driven away. To find it at this moment, however, caused no wonderment on Annetje's part. She did not question anything, satisfied only to recognize in it a speedy deliverance out of her trouble. For stay she could not, and to go with Joris as com-

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panion would be to balk the purpose that had grown steadily within her through the long hours of her anguish, and which could not now be put aside.

She went back to the motionless dog, her eyes averted from his loving glance, and passed an end of the rope through the leather strap which formed his collar. It was the last indignity love could offer, or receive. Never, in a long life, had Joris known the gall of bonds. He had been free as air, free to go, to come, to follow—unrebuked. The faith and affection, meted out to him, had met their counterparts in him though, on his side, they reached a far loftier stature for memory and gratitude were always with him. He was perhaps a little slow in comprehending her action now, since he had only the past to go by, for he lay very still and once he thumped his tail upon the ground half-playfully, and once he ran his tongue out and licked her fingers as they made the knot firm. He did not seem to understand.

She stood away from him and dragged the other end of the rope to a tree, binding it around the trunk and tying it fast, her hands trembling, yet relentless, at the same time. So she could hurt love too, hold him up to scorn, deride his weakness. A dog's heart—or a girl's—what were they for unless it was to suffer through too much loving? All through the scale of creation, from the higher to the lower, injury ran, the stronger inflicting it upon the less strong, the less strong in its turn on a weaker, the weaker on a weaker still. A chain of endless suffering—power misapplied and abused!

Yet she told herself there was some excuse for what

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she had done. It was imperative that she should so act. The fault was his, since he would not understand and obey her. He understood her at last, and got to his feet straining at his bonds. It was only a play, to his thinking, though hers was the face of heartbroken despair. He strained a second time, a third, bringing all his strength to the action, but the rope held firm; he confessed himself beaten with a low whine. She stood, eying him a moment in sorry triumph, then—victor though she was—she knelt to him—the vanquished one—and took his head between her hands.

“Oh! Joris, my Joris, forgive me—look at me, deep down into my very heart and see how I love you, even though I hurt you this way. By and by someone will find you and will set you free—won’t you be patient till then, Joris boy? Oh! I cannot stay here—I cannot—just as you would be free of this, so must I be free of what drags me down, and in my own fashion.”

She covered his face with kisses then relinquished it and stood up—turning to go, but swift as thought she bent again and kissed his neck where the knot of rope bit against his skin.

“Forgive me, forgive me, and good-by.”

She left him then, running with her head bent, her hands covering her ears to keep out the clamor of his protesting voice. She did not glance back for a last look and yet, for a long time in the gathering brightness, she would have been able to see his lonely figure making those futile leaps in air.

By degrees she slackened her pace, not so much from fatigue, though she was quivering under its lash, as from the fear that if she chanced to meet anyone her

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haste might arouse surprise and perhaps suspicion. It was as yet early day and the streets and lanes were empty of all human life, but already, in some of the humbler homes that she passed, the folk were astir; the clang of opening shutters, or doors, and voices calling to unseen persons gave evidence that the world was waking to its tasks once more. The sounds filled her with dread, yet made her outwardly more circumspect. In a little while the streets would be full of people—people who would stop to sneer at her as she went by, and to point her out in derision to one another.

Under the stress of this thought she crept swiftly forward, not running, but walking at a quick pace; she dared not loiter. Part of the way her route lay within view of the East River, gleaming like silver in the new risen sun, the wharves filled with shipping, whose serried masts clove the sky with their sturdy points. Now and again the voice of a sailor in the rigging calling to a fellow-sailor reached her on the clear, fresh breeze and once a burst of laughter sent her cowering nearer the earth, as if it had fallen like a blow upon her bare flesh.

For the most part, however, she paid scant regard to her surroundings, her mind was filled with two sights and two alone. Her letter fixed against the church door in the cruel sun—and Joris bound and helpless back there in the lane. Love crucified in both instances, love mocked at! When she remembered the one, she must remember the other. Yet the extremest bitterness she suffered was for her action to Joris, for her heart, as his, was ready to forgive the insult the loved one had inflicted, but she could not pardon herself. She felt

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no resentment against Bellenden; she was too crushed by his treatment to cry out against it even. That he had justified to himself his punishment of her she was most sure, he would not—could not—have imposed it else. So she reasoned, knowing that Joris, in his turn, must think that though she had treated him so mercilessly she had but acted according to her best wisdom—he could not tell why! Nor could she any the easier find an explanation for Bellenden's conduct. Only she was willing to exonerate him from blame; she would not doubt him. Love must pardon and trust unreservedly if it is to remain love to the end.

Queen Street reached, she walked a trifle slower; in this quarter there was small danger that she would encounter any acquaintances, as the residents were mostly fashionable folk of English origin, but the fact gave her scant comfort. To her mind the whole world knew her story and here, or elsewhere, voices would not be lacking to swell the chorus of reproach against her. The hum of life had begun everywhere. Apprentices lounging to their work passed her with curious glances, a man driving some cows to pasture called out a "good-morning" to her, but the salutation so terrified her that she hurried on without a word, leaving him to gape after her white, grief-stricken face and to think no particular good of her; children, running out to play, eyed her with wonderment and once a dog frisked about her feet and gave a new wrench to her heart. Almost fainting with fatigue and despair she yet kept on unflinching, and before long the street brought her out into Bowery Lane.

She turned away gladly to where the green of hills

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and lowlands beckoned, experiencing, for the first time in many hours, a feeling of relief. Everything was very calm and still around her; there were no sneering faces or voices to be encountered anywhere; nothing but the great, sweet quiet of the mother earth and the peace of the high, blue heavens waited for her with their encompassing content. The leaping silver of a brook flashed in her eyes and the tinkle of its voice greeted her merrily; bright flowers nodded a recognition from marshy places; long grasses waved their blades softly, like so many friendly hands, and on every side there was a note of welcome in the gush of bird song. She crept on reassured. Presently, just before her, the Collect gleamed from out the sedges on its shores, its still surface holding a picture of the surrounding trees and the soft summer sky.

She looked at it curiously. How placid it was with the bit of heaven in its grasp! It did not seem possible that in its bottomless depths there dwelt great sea-monsters, terrible of aspect, yet such had been seen by solitary individuals. She gave a little shudder and glanced apprehensively about as the old legends flitted through her mind. And there were other stories as well—stories of those dead sachems who used to preside over the village on the pond's western shore and whose spirits came back night after night to revisit the glimpses of the moon. Many a loiterer near the spot at such times had heard the dip-dip of ghostly paddles, though not a ripple could ever be seen on the crystal waters. Even in the light of day she could not keep the growing fear out of her heart.

She stood fighting with herself. Back there in her

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home those blue waters had offered such an easy escape from all her troubles. The thought had come to her, at first the merest suggestion, then with a force she could not resist, as she tried to readjust her plan of life to meet the morning's demand. Poor little broken plan! She could not go through life day after day—day after day—to old age perhaps, with that intolerable, undying ache in her breast, facing scorn, shamed in the sight of men. It was impossible. Death was easier—preferable far! All the beauty had gone out of her world—it was very dark.

Why should she fear? What was there to fear? She stepped a little nearer, and looked around with a more intrepid glance. From the shores of the pond the hills stretched upward clothed with trees, bushes and long trails of blackberry vines, birds darted in and out of the tangle of green undaunted, and above the sky watched. There was nothing to fear—the place was full of the very peace of God. Outside in the world, where cruel things were said—and crueller, thought, and done—where Love went broken-hearted, and Faith and Trust could not live, there stayed the things to tremble before, but not here—oh! not here.

She cast about for ways and means. After just the first it would not be difficult. The waters would take her to themselves so gently, she would know nothing more. It was very simple. She hesitated, looking again at the hills all about, at the green earth, at the vivid, kindly sky and suddenly her whole soul was in revolt. With death so near, that she could almost hear the trailing of the great, shadowy wings, all the strong love of life and for life, which is in every human being,

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rose in her and tried to overwhelm her purpose. She drew her breath in with a deep gasp, and moved to the bank seizing the bough of a young tree firmly with her hands. As she waited to swing herself free there was a strange, panting noise almost at her side and the sound of hurrying feet, with nothing human in their tread, coming closer—and closer. She turned giddy; sky, earth, water became an indistinguishable blur before her eyes. On the moment she was filled with a shivering dread of the unseen. All the traditions of the horrors of the pond seized upon her afresh; she trembled from head to foot and half let go her hold then, with a quick rush of courage, she swung herself out. The sapling bent with her weight and slipped back to its place—void of all encumbrance; the waters opened smilingly to receive her. It was not so hard!

She rose to the surface, struggling a little, and reached out vainly toward the shore that seemed so near and yet was beyond her grasp. Oh God, how bright the sun was on the trees—how beautiful the world! Something large and dark splashed in the water a short distance away, she glanced helplessly in its direction—the light was growing dim——

“Why—Joris—Joris—” she breathed. Then the arms of death closed round her and drew her tenderly down.

So Joris found her in their embrace, requited her act of cruelty to him by one of loving service, brought her back again to the earth and its ways, her body at least—her soul was free. Only he could not know that.

XXX

THE NEW DAY

Jan led the way into the kitchen, his companions following. They had come round the house, thus avoiding the front door.

"Is the child home?" he demanded in a tremulous voice of the darkness.

"She is not with you? Merciful Powers! I thought, because you were so long gone, you had surely found her. Well, then, you are trying to trick me; I heard other steps than yours. Come you in, Annetje, my little one, I've made you some cinnamon cakes——"

"She is not with me—would to God she were! I have brought Captain Bellenden and Miss Crewe."

Heilke did not utter a sound at this piece of information, nor did she stir from her corner.

"They will help us seek the child. Get a light, woman, na—na—in a time like this we can't turn aside sympathy."

"If it hadn't been for them," Heilke muttered in her own tongue, "this evil wouldn't have come to us. They are at the bottom of all the trouble—we want none of their sympathy."

"There, there, woman," Jan interposed wearily, "let be. The captain says he had no hand in the business

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of the letter; he had not seen it until Miss Crewe showed it to him—and I believe his word.”

“Ay,” Heilke returned bitterly, “I suppose he says true as far as the nailing up of the letter goes, at least. Little Petrus Bickers and Gysbert Arentse were here not long since to say that they saw Adrian de Hooge do it with his own hands early Sunday morning—with his own two hands, they swear. There’s a dirty trick for you! Said I not true, Jan Praa, that he’d a grudge against our child? Oh! you can never deceive me.”

Though she continued to speak in Dutch, as if to mark her disapprobation of the intruders, both Peggy and Bellenden had gained sufficient knowledge of the language during their intimacy with the family to understand her meaning.

“Then Mr. Adrian de Hooge will answer for his conduct to me,” Bellenden cried savagely. “Tell me where he may be found——”

“To-morrow vill I show you, sir, ant t’at glatly, put for to-night t’ere is Annetje to seek.”

“Jan is right, Jack; everything else must wait. Where is Joris?”

Heilke set down the lighted candles upon the table and turning, looked at the girl with the old animosity kindling in her glance, then she faced Jan and addressed him as if the others did not exist.

“All through the early day, as you know, was Joris absent, never once did I see him. He came back some time ago and in at the door there, running like a young dog. I’ve always said he put on his lameness for the sake of an extra bone—oh! you can’t trick me. Frisky and fawning was he and jumping up against me so

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that I needs must drive him off. Then out he went like mad into the garden."

"He misses the child," Jan said brokenly.

"Perhaps—" Bellenden began, the next moment he stopped abruptly for the dog, coming again to the door and hearing voices, hurled himself frantically into the room and fell upon Jan uttering short, sharp barks.

"Do you miss her, boy?" the old man asked, putting out his hand to fondle the restless head. As he did so, the bit of rope dangling from the dog's collar caught his eye. "Joris bound?" he cried in a voice of thunder. "Whose doing was that?"

"I tell you until now I have not seen him."

"And I tell you he's been bound—tied—our Joris tied."

Peggy knelt down on the floor and called the dog to her. He eyed her mistrustfully for a little space before he went slowly up and licked her hands.

"He freed himself," she cried, excitement quivering in her voice. "Look at the rope's end, and his collar is torn almost in two—and see his poor neck where he strained to escape. Good fellow—good fellow! Where is Annetje?"

The animal gave a low howl, hobbled to the door and gazed out into the night, then came whimpering back and dragged at her skirts.

"Get some lanterns," Bellenden said gravely. "We will seek her with Joris for guide and find her too. Come, cheer up, man, cheer up."

He waited, while the necessary preparations were being made, looking down without a word at the girl

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as she caressed the dog; when everything was in readiness he took the proffered lantern and went swiftly up to the kneeling figure.

“You will wait here for our return?”

Her lips framed yes, but she neither spoke, nor glanced at him; she bent and kissed the dog's head.

“Bring her back, Joris,” she whispered softly.

“Take us to Annetje, sir,” Bellenden commanded. “Find Annetje!”

The dog gave a quick bark, turned sharply and limped to the door, looking anxiously over his shoulder to see if he was being followed. When he perceived the two men close on his heels he leapt out into the night and they hastened after to keep up with him.

Left to themselves the women did not alter their positions for some minutes, except that each bent forward slightly to listen to the receding steps. Heilke was the first to turn her eyes from the open door and the obscurity beyond to her surroundings. She let them rest coldly upon her companion still kneeling in the little circle of light, her cloak lying disregarded upon the floor, her face full of indefinable sadness. Peggy, sensible of the unfriendliness in the glance, got to her feet quickly and went quite close to the old woman, touched by her appearance of suffering into forgetfulness of any resentment which she might cherish against her.

“They will bring Annetje back safe,” she cried with the confidence of youth, “they must bring her back.”

Heilke retreated a step or two, deriving no apparent comfort from the other's hopefulness. A muscle throbbed almost painfully in her cheek at the mention

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of Annetje's name, but otherwise her features remained grim and forbidding.

"T'at vill ant must are vorts for Kott to speak, juf-frouw, not for us. Put to Domine Ryerssen you vill like to go. I pray you not'ings say of t'e chilt to him, he ton't know—yet."

"No, I will not go to the domine. Let me stay here with you—I will be quiet, if that pleases you best. And yet sometimes just to know, if only for a moment, that another grieves with us in our sorrow—oh! not so deeply as we grieve, but comprehending us a little—is often like a soothing hand laid upon an ache. You and I are very far apart, but I should like to come near enough to say 'I am sorry for you.'"

Heilke stiffened in every line of her body, then, as the meaning of the girl's words penetrated through the hard crust which she usually presented to the world, a deep quiver ran through her frame. It was like the writhing of some mighty tree before the fury of the storm, its helplessness so much more pitiful than the weakness of lesser growths. She tried to conceal her emotion, but her voice shook despite her efforts, yet she spoke with a certain simple dignity.

"Kreatly it hurts v'en t'e worltd points at one you lof ant folks, no petter as t'ey shouldt pe, spurn t'at one unterfoot; no pitterness is t'ere like unto it! Sit, juf-frouw, since you vill not to t'e domine go." She was silent a moment then she burst forth again, "In efery-poty's mouth t'e story is, ant eferyv'ere t'ey t'ink shame of her—my chilt."

"Have patience! When my cousin makes known what part Mynheer de Hooge has played in this vil-

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lainy the people will make amends. Oh! he'll punish the coward well, I promise you."

"Ay, let him," Heilke cried with great fury, "let him." Then her voice dropped to a wail. "Put t'at vill not Annetje help, v'en t'e tofe's ving is proke nefer any more toes it fly again; it must keep close to kroundt. Ant I t'ink v'en she marry t'at man she vill pe happy as nefer pefore—fool—fool t'at I vas! Put, juffrouw, till joost now is he tifferent; prout always ant lofing to rule—or he't not pe son to Mevrouw de Hooge—put not pat. Vell, t'en, who can say from t'e outside if rotten t'e apple is? Nopoty. Koot ant pat must t'ey pe gatheredt in. To Adrian de Hooge maype t'at plackness of heart nefer comes v'en all t'ings go as he vish—some men are like t'at, please t'em, ant antgels are t'ey all t'eir tays, cross t'em—ant tefils t'ey pecome. So strange is life! He hat kreat lof for Annetje, put v'en he is come pack from Firginia, v'en you are first here, I see a change in his looks ant nefer he speaks vis her—I say it is because of t'e kossip about you ant t'e domine's pik-heatetness, ant also is he angry apout t'e young mens' coming. He t'inks Annetje vill not lof him any more, so he vaits ant punishes her like you know—ant maype—" Heilke's voice grew shrill as the new thought occurred to her—"maype it vas he t'at sent t'e message to t'e domine."

Peggy uttered a sharp cry.

"You can't think he would do such a thing? Say he loved Annetje and was jealous of my cousin, there was no need to hurt the domine. Jan told us as we came along— It was too cruel—too cruel. Oh! that poor, good old man what he has suffered."

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Heilke's rugged face became transfigured with gentleness; it was like the sun breaking through the clouds after a day of storm.

"Ay, v'at he has sufferedt! You say fery true. Vell, t'en, let us t'ank Kott pecause t'ere is One t'at un-ter-stants petter as ve to; like as a fat'er pities his children so vill He pity him ant haf mercy upon him."

The words, direct, simple, free from doubt, were the crystallization of a humble faith. Prone to condemn all shortcomings as Heilke usually was, and an adept at pointing out the duty of others, she had no censure to make upon the domine's conduct. She was ready to leave him to the tenderness of an all-seeing God, whose ways are not as the ways of men.

The two women in the silence that followed were brought very close in their thoughts of Cornelis Ryerssen, the one—throbbing with the memories of many years, the other—with her little record of a few weeks, yet both meeting on the common ground of sympathy for him in the trials he had undergone. It occurred to Peggy, after a little, that her companion was ignorant of the fuller details of the domine's story which she and Jan had learned that evening and she broke the quiet to tell of Bellenden's acquaintance with Katrina de Vos.

She spoke simply as to a child, with constant reiterations, for Heilke, bewildered by this new communication, did not seem able to grasp the meaning of even the most ordinary words. Not for a moment, however, did Peggy lose patience, though she was generally intolerant of interruptions; very gently, very tenderly, did she give the account of that other woman's life, her

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own renunciation of happiness making it easier for her to comprehend the sufferings of others.

Heilke listened in open-mouthed astonishment, forgetful of the happenings of the present in that record of the past; but every little while she let fall faint ejaculations and deep sobs, and when the end had been reached for the third time she sat staring dumbly before her. Her love for her young mistress, which had amounted almost to worship, had been kept alive through the years by constant reference and remembrance and the domine's revelation, coming like a bolt out of the blue, had not dispelled it. It had shaken her heart to the core, but the old, adoring faith was still there, broken a little, yet not destroyed. Oftentimes it is difficult to give up the old faiths; even though they be proved undeserving we cling to them—not so much for their sakes, perhaps, as for the sake of what they once have been to us. Better, far better, than the empty niche is the old idol, though its feet be of clay. We love it despite its unworthiness—even for its unworthiness, God knows!

The room was very still. The tall eight-day clock in the corner ticked loudly, as if glad to hear the sound of its own voice in that deep quiet, and the night wore on. Occasionally Heilke, stirring under the stress of the different emotions in her breast, uttered a few words in her own tongue, disjointed reminiscences about the dear, dead mistress, chidings to Annetje, or quick commands, as if the girl were present and once, fully aroused to the meaning of the slow-dragging hours of suspense, the old servant cried out wildly about the screeching woman of Maiden Lane and trembled vio-

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lently at the possibility of Annetje's encountering the ghost. Peggy put her hand soothingly upon Heilke's and coaxed her back into quietness, not mocking at her superstitions as she would have done the day before, but making them, even to the distraught fancy, seem like shadows that vanished speedily. The old woman did not speak, but she patted the girl's arm with her coarse, work-worn fingers; after a moment she leaned forward and touched a fold of the glistening brocade half in admiration, half in awe.

"Pret-ty, pret-ty," she said with the heartbreaking pathos of the old become like a little child, then she settled back in her chair, weariness showing in every line of her face and figure. For a time she fought against it, trying to preserve her old dauntless demeanor, but the body was too weak to obey the commands of the iron will and at last even the will faltered.

Presently, attracted by the huge bobbing shadow upon the wall, Peggy turned to find her companion almost asleep. There was something repulsive in the relaxed countenance and the head falling inertly from side to side; something unlovely in the open mouth and blinking eyes. Yet the girl, with that new insight which the last few hours had bestowed upon her as an inalienable gift, perceived nothing of this, tuned as she was to pity and helpfulness. To be weak and to be in trouble were henceforth sure ways of finding Peggy Crewe's heart. She stooped quickly and rolled her cloak into a makeshift pillow which she slipped behind the old servant's head. Heilke stirred and opened her eyes, as if to rebuke the touch that brought her back to a knowledge of her troubles, then—soothed almost

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instantly by the increased comfort of her attitude and the lulling note in the quiet voice—she laid her tear-stained face against the improvised cushion and, in the dreamless sleep of exhaustion, forgot for a little while the existence of grief and shame.

There was no sleep for Peggy, and no wish for it on her part. Despite the loneliness and strangeness of her position, despite her fatigue, she felt that it was good for her to be in the simple kitchen during those dark hours before the dawn. It was a time of spiritual rebirth. Amid just such surroundings she became a new creature. The old domineering, arrogant self slipped away and in its stead there arose another Margaret Crewe—one more compassionate, more womanly, stronger in the strength that makes for character in remembering the needs of others. She looked out to meet the light of the new day with brave, sweet eyes. The long vigil was over—it was morning again.

After a little she left her chair and went to the door, glancing around at the freshness and beauty of earth and sky and, as she waited there, Bellenden came up through the dew-impearled garden. At sight of him she uttered a glad cry which died instantly, as the meaning in his haggard face forced itself upon her with uncompromising directness. The sound of her ejaculation and the increasing light aroused Heilke, and when he reached the house both women were waiting for him on the porch, the younger with her arm thrown protectingly around the other's shoulders. So they remained for some minutes after he had delivered his painful news, clinging mutely together; Peggy outwardly the more shaken of the two. Then Heilke

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moved away. There was no outlet for her grief. She came to a sudden standstill and looked longingly at her companions with burning eyes that held no tears, her white lips moving—yet uttering no words.

“The domine—” she managed to articulate at last.

“You mean he must be told before—before Jan comes?” Peggy said softly. “You would like us to tell him?”

The old woman nodded assent and stepped back into the house almost gladly, the others following her, Belenden bringing up the rear. In this order they went along the hall to the study door which, as usual, was closed. But the domine was always an early riser and often at his books before the others of his household were astir and, knowing this, Heilke sought him here. She motioned to Belenden to knock, then pushed his hand jealously aside and struck the panelled surface in his stead—struck it again when, after an interval of waiting, there came no summons from within.

“It is so early,” Peggy interposed, “perhaps he is still above-stairs.”

Heilke did not heed her, but turning the knob she set the door wide. “He is here as I knew,” she took a step forward into the room, “Domine!” Her voice had lost its confident triumph and was wonderfully gentle, “Domine!”

He did not answer. He was leaning back in his chair with closed eyes, apparently sleeping after the fatigue of the night, for the burned out candles showed that he had been sitting there through the long watches busy with books and papers. His folio was open before him

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and several closely written sheets had fallen from it to the floor.

"Domine," the voice sharpened, but more with fear than with impatience.

Bellenden stepped swiftly past the trembling woman and went up to the quiet figure. After a long minute he moved back with lowered head.

"The domine does not hear you—will not hear you again—he is dead."

A half smothered cry came from the girl at the door, but Heilke, uttering no word, crept close to her master and stood gazing down tenderly at the still face with its faint, inscrutable smile as if the eyes that had looked upon the great mystery had been satisfied, knowing no fear. All sorrow, all worry, seemed to have been smoothed away as by some angel's touch and, in the light of the new day, only a beautiful peace remained.

"No—no—no—" the old woman cried as she fell on her knees beside the chair, "just gone home—beyond the fret and heartbreak of this life—gone home to God."

XXXI

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It was an odd trio that waited on the steps of the De Hooge mansion and, as the door swang back, the serving-man stood, round-eyed, gaping at the new-comers. Two of their number were not unknown to him. Indeed, there was hardly a person in town, no matter of what nationality, who was not more or less familiar with little Petrus Bickers and his constant companion Gysbert Arentse—yoke-fellows as they were in all the mischief a-foot. But after a wrathful stare in their direction, for their temerity had hitherto consisted in loudly banging the heavy knocker and not in waiting to be detected in the act, the man let his attention wander to the other member of the group. He caught his breath with a quick gasp of astonishment. The tall English officer was an utter stranger to him, prepossessing at all times in appearance, on this particular occasion his pale stern face, full of an indomitable purpose, and his proud bearing materially increased his air of dignity.

On the instant, even to the servant's slow wits, it was evident that, in some way, the visitor was connected with the trouble and distress which prevailed in the parish of the Garden Street church, and had become widespread among the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the town. The domine's story had carried consterna-

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tion everywhere, and censure and opprobrium had been quick to leap forth in many quarters, though among the humbler folk there was uttered no least word of blame; perhaps the remembrance of the old man's many kindnesses to them made it an impossibility to convict him of any deep wrong. For the moment he was nearer to them a thousandfold because of his fault; he was a man like themselves, suffering and sinning where they would have suffered and sinned. They had no condemnation to offer.

Annetje's disgrace, however, had raised up champions in her defence on every side. Despite her light behavior which seemed an indisputable fact in the minds of all, the bitterness of her punishment called aloud for vengeance with an intensity not to be withstood.

The information which the two boy witnesses were not slow to produce had a benumbing effect temporarily upon their hearers, though it served to divert the attention from Bellenden into other channels. After the first surprised and indignant refutation of the children's testimony, their words gained credence with lightning-like rapidity. And even before Heilke was aware of the part Adrian de Hooge had played in regard to the letter, men were turning from him in aversion in the streets though, wrapped as he was in his own self-satisfaction, he did not perceive their scorn. He had his usual following; there was small danger that the number of sycophants would diminish while his riches remained.

The servant's eyes gleamed as he took in the situation; he knew little love for his master that day. Though the morning lacked an hour of noon the news

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of Domine Ryerssen's death had already reached the household in Gold Street and several of its members had also witnessed the sad passing of Annetje—as Jan, with the aid of some men, conveyed her body home, Joris trailing dejectedly along in the wake of the little procession. Mute as the girl was forevermore her woes cried trumpet-tongued for vengeance, and some echo of those cries must have sounded in the man's hearing and made him fling the door wide to admit the stranger and his companions.

“Where is he?” Bellenden demanded. “Take me to him at once, I will not be denied.”

The servant made a gesture of comprehension and turning led the way along the spacious corridor, with its rich plinishings, to the door at the rear which opened on the garden. He set it ajar with a firm hand and stood back while the guests passed through, then he followed them running to precede the officer.

“It is not necessary to announce me,” Bellenden said savagely, impeding his progress. “I see your master.”

Adrian de Hooze was standing a short distance beyond them, his back turned to the house, his hands thrust in his pockets and his body bent a trifle above some object on the ground which seemed to hold his undivided attention. He had returned a short time before from his counting-house, earlier than was his custom, but the news of the double affliction in the Ryerssen family had made all idea of business impossible. The grief, as grief, did not touch him, he knew no least throb of sorrow, nor did remorse prick through his callous bearing. The pitiful tragedy at

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the Collect left him dry-eyed, and even smiling a little. If he felt any regret at all it was because Annetje's sufferings had so speedily passed away. He would have had them prolonged indefinitely through the years; the thought that she might terminate them by her own act had not occurred to him. Still, powerless though he was to hurt her further, he gloated over the fact that he had gained his ends. His vengeance was sweet as honey in his mouth. He swaggered home with a gay exterior and, his mother being absent at a neighbor's, he betook himself directly to the garden there to while away the time until the dinner hour.

The brilliant masses of bloom on every side seemed to fling out their rich color and perfume in welcome, though he had but an indifferent regard for their beauty. He broke a late rose from its stem in passing, crushed it momentarily against his face and then dropped it with a laugh, and gathered another flower, despoiled it of its leaves and cast it in quick distaste after its predecessor. His mood was one of wanton destructiveness. As he gazed slowly about, malignity sharpening his features, his attention was attracted by a bird that, startled by his approach, had whirred up from a nearby bush. It was but newly fledged and he watched it idly as it fluttered timorously upward and hovered a moment around a neighboring branch before it settled in fancied security amid the leaves. Then he stooped and with a cautious movement possessed himself of a handful of stones. He rose to his feet again and sent one skimming through the air at the little, soft thing poised beyond him. It struck the tiny wing spread in sudden alarm to gain a safer haven and the bird

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dropped earthward. De Hooge chuckled aloud and moved slowly forward to where it lay—a mass of palpitating feathers. He prodded the small object with his foot and, as he twitched it now this way, now that, bent lower the better to hear its faint cries of pain.

The sound of the opening door and of steps on the gravel came as an interruption to his pastime. He turned from his tiny victim and confronted the newcomers. For a moment he stood, with fallen jaw, staring into Bellenden's face, his own going white with rancor as he recognized the Englishman; then his gaze strayed from him to the two boys and the half-frightened, half-defiant servant.

"I left orders that I did not wish to be disturbed," he snarled in his own language, "I have no concerns with this gentleman, no acquaintance with him and no desire of an acquaintance——"

"Neither is the acquaintance desired on my part," Bellenden interposed hotly. "Oh! I understand you, sir. But you shall not be rid of me until I have placed my mark upon you so that, to the longest day of your life, John Bellenden shall be a name that will live in your memory."

De Hooge looked quickly about. Between him and the house stood his enemy, the wide-eyed, alert boys and the servant, through whose familiar exterior unfamiliar signs of revolt gleamed boldly. The master's glance darkened, then went on. Beyond and around him stretched the garden—of fair size, but no maze—the paths were straight and unobstructed, good for flight, yet equally good for pursuit. He was not much of a runner and though he might lead in the chase, double on

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his tracks and so reach the house, there was always the chance of being overtaken and routed. The gleam of a scythe in the sun in an adjacent meadow caught his eye and, nearer at hand, the sound of a spade throwing up earth was a welcome note to his hearing. He put his fingers to his mouth and whistled shrilly.

"Balthazar," he shouted, "Oloff—hi boys! Hans—Michel—hither directly—make haste."

He moved back a few steps to the tree, from which the little bird had fallen but a short time before, keeping his gaze fixed on Bellenden's face, an easy smile growing about his lips. There was an interval of silence, broken only by the noise of the approaching men as they came running up from different directions in answer to their master's summons. A fifth, hearing the excitement, had joined the others, racing breathlessly in their wake with an impetus that sent him sprawling headlong against the house-servant and almost overturned him. De Hooge gave a loud laugh as the two men regained their footing and glowered angrily at each other; then he flicked a twig from his coat-sleeve, glanced superciliously at Bellenden and laughed again—waiting a little.

The men stood gazing at him, panting and crimsoned from their run, waiting, in their turn, for his further instructions. He studied their mute, questioning faces briefly.

"Some of you take my gentleman in scarlet there and throw him into the street," he ordered. "Trundle him out in your barrow, Paul, dump him in a ditch—anywhere—anywhere—so that you free the garden of his loathsome presence. Do you hear me?" he cried

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shrilly as no one moved. "Out with the vermin at once."

Bellenden drew his hand from his breast, and something showed dark in the clear light of noon.

"One moment," he called in a voice of thunder, "the man who obeys that cur and so much as touches me, or interferes with my purpose, shall have a taste of this for his pains. I don't speak your language, but this little trusty friend shall be my interpreter."

He lifted his hand as he spoke and fired into the air—there was a loud report and a trail of smoke rose like a soft little cloud into the blue, floating gently up and up. He lowered his weapon with a smile.

"There's more of that waiting here, but I swear to you the next shots shall find their home in your breasts if you thwart me. Now, will you heed your master?"

A hasty scuffling of feet was his only answer as the wild-eyed, trembling men huddled closely together. The stranger did not speak their tongue, but they understood his; had he been of their own kin his meaning, enforced as it was by such an object-lesson, could not have been plainer.

"You cowards!" shrieked De Hooge. "You cursed, beggarly cowards—I'll have you flogged to jelly. How dare you disregard my orders? Put that villain out."

Bellenden held his pistol steady.

"Paul—my good, brave giant Paul—show us your mettle and shame these dastardly knaves. Only drop that scarlet play-soldier into your cart and wheel him away and I'll double your earnings——"

"And I'll double your sufferings, good master

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Paul," Bellenden interrupted, "if you try to carry out the bidding of that popinjay. Come, choose between us."

"At him—at him—" yelled De Hooge.

The great burly gardener stood his ground for a moment debating the question then, before the blazing eyes of his master, he retreated slowly step by step. Bellenden drew a trifle nearer.

"Bravo, my man," he cried with a quick smile. "This is not your quarrel and I have no wish to shed innocent blood. My business to-day is to punish that poltroon, because he is a villain and a murderer—a murderer as black as the blackest that ever overcame his victim with steel, or poison," he paused a moment. "Do you understand me?" he cried sharply. "Try—see I will make it plain— You knew the domine's little daughter? Well, she is dead—dead by her own hand—but as true as there's a God in heaven she was driven to seek her death by that wretch there. Some of you have heard, perhaps, how she was shamed on Sunday, how the little letter she writ was nailed upon the church door for all the world to jeer at. He put it there—your master, who calls you cowards—who, out of his generosity, gives you the name he bears himself. These boys saw him nail it up, if you want other testimony than his face."

"It's a lie," sputtered De Hooge with white lips, "a damned lie. He did it himself because he was tired of the drab."

Bellenden's infuriated cry was drowned in the vehement clamor the boys let loose and the coarse invectives showered by De Hooge upon his accusers. The

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men remained grimly apart with grave, impenetrable faces, but letting no word escape them.

“Silence!” Bellenden commanded, making himself heard above the din. “You’ve had your say, lads, and time presses—it’s my turn now.” He moved close to the group of servants. “I ask you to give me fair play and I offer you no bribes. I appeal to you as men. I ask you to stand aside while I punish that false, foul-mouthed cur. Do you understand me?”

“Ve to—ve to,” Paul cried.

There was a low growl among the others, then one of their number said slowly:

“So v’ite like t’e Holy Tofe vas she—t’at little *meysje*—Kott rest her soul. To as you vill, sir, ant Kott ait you!”

Bellenden gave his pistol into the keeping of the boys and unfastened the sword from his side.

“Take this also,” he said clearly, “I’d not mar its brightness with one drop of that craven’s blood.” Then he sprang toward his enemy.

De Hooge swept the silent house with his eyes. It offered him no refuge and flight, with that agile figure in pursuit, was beside the question. He pressed back against the tree, sick with apprehension and terror, and suddenly the remembrance of his adversary’s wound in the recent duel smote through his mind like a lightning’s flash. His vision cleared, his strength returned, swelling back into his veins, a tide of energy which must sweep all weaklings aside in the flood of its fury. With a howl of rage, like that of some maddened beast, he hurled himself upon Bellenden with such tremendous force that, for a moment, he almost overpowered the

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slighter figure which trembled beneath the shock like some tree caught in the grip of a mighty tempest. To the onlookers it seemed as if the outcome of the encounter was not to be long delayed.

De Hooge, perceiving his advantage, uttered a loud cry of triumph, but even as it rang out upon the air Bellenden rallied from the collision and his arms closed like a vise about his antagonist. On the instant the two seemed molten into one hideous, shapeless mould as, locked in that implacable embrace, they writhed and swayed backward and forward beneath the trees, tripping and stumbling in their endeavors to throw each other to the ground. They were not men—but monsters strung with hatred and lust of revenge beyond and below the capacity of beasts—their eyes starting from their heads, their faces distorted with passion out of all human semblance.

Despite Bellenden's recent sufferings he was more than a match for his enemy. He was a skilled wrestler, whereas De Hooge had had no training to stand him in good stead in this his extremity, and his muscles were flabby and inert in comparison with the firm, clean brawn opposed to them; neither could his danger, nor his animosity, help him at this time, though they afforded him a certain amount of expertness. Unable to do anything with his fists he used his teeth, biting like an animal, yet gradually he was forced to the earth and pinioned by an iron strength. There, from his lowly position, he shrieked for assistance, mingling his cries for aid with the most fearful threats and imprecations.

Bellenden regarded the supplicant contemptuously for a moment, the next, as if incensed at the unceasing

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din, he closed his fingers about the throat of his foe and held them there with a deepening pressure until an ominous gurgle recommended mercy on his part. Then he withdrew his grip and watched the natural color creep back into the livid countenance.

“So,” he said, “now that you’ve got your breath again you’ll use it for something else besides bellowing like a calf, or I’ll know the reason why. We want a word or two from you, Mynheer de Hooge. Come, confess that you nailed the letter at the church door. Speak in your own tongue, sir, I’ve no desire to hear mine from your lips—speak, that these men may hear and understand you.”

De Hooge maintained an obstinate silence, glaring venomously back into the disdainful face above him.

“Speak,” ordered Bellenden, his fingers closing again on the other’s throat.

“I—I did it— Take off your hands—you’re—you’re choking me— Oloff—Michel——”

“And you sent that message to the domine?”

Even under the deadly pressure of those relentless fingers, even under the blaze of shrivelling scorn in the watchful eyes, a gleam of satisfaction lighted up the abject features of the vanquished man and something like a laugh escaped him.

“I did,” he said slowly, then in a louder key—“I did—I did——”

Bellenden took his knee from his enemy’s breast and sprang to his feet, spurning the prostrate form in a new access of fury. De Hooge, relieved of his weight, stirred a little but before he could rise Bellenden, who had seized a whip from one of the boys, beat him back

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to the ground again. Over and over the lash descended like some live, insatiate thing eager for the taste of blood, curling, as if with a hundred greedy tongues, about the victim while he writhed in the grass presenting now his uncovered head and face, now his defenceless body to the attack. A man no longer, but just a slaving, sobbing creature calling upon his servants, his mother, the vengeance of the smiling, blue heavens—and calling in vain.

There were no other sounds but his cries, the singing of the whip and Bellenden's quickened breathing. The spectators remained perfectly impassive; not one of the servants lifted a finger, or made the slightest effort to go to his master's rescue. They had all suffered through the years from his arrogance and tyranny, but in that moment, deep though their wrongs had been, they were deaf to his pleadings from no personal grievance. His treatment of the domine and that little flower-faced girl had rendered them utterly inexorable.

Wearied out at last Bellenden's arm fell powerless and the whip dropped from his nerveless grasp. He went quite close to the huddled-up, quivering figure and looked down at the pitiable spectacle.

"Now get you out into the highway and show yourself for the hero you are," he sneered, "or skulk at home behind your mother's petticoats and these men shall go forth and testify of this morning's work. Oh, the scars will heal, I warrant you! Unguents and salves and Mammy's nursing will make another manikin of you, but no unguents—no salves—will ever heal your reputation. Go where you will, when you will, the story of your villainy will precede you and follow after

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you. And even if, as the years go by, your blackness shall be forgotten of men, know this, Adrian de Hooge, you will not forget it yourself. It will come between you and your pleasures, between you and your griefs—the memory of that broken-hearted old man—the sight of that broken-hearted little girl. I leave you to your own punishment, a bitterer one than I could ever devise for you.”

He turned on his heel and passed from the garden to the street, the boys following him in rapt adoration as if he were some god. At the gate he encountered Mevrouw de Hooge, returning from her morning's gossip, and stepped back to allow her to enter. As she availed herself of his courtesy she glanced askance at his disordered dress, and instantly some premonition of his identity flashed through her mind.

“ You,” she cried, bridling with passion.

“ I am but just come from an interview with your son, madam,” he interrupted with a low bow, “ and Gad! I've never so enjoyed myself in my life. I have the honor to wish you a very good day.”

He moved off, taking his way back to his rooms, his exultation deadening his weariness and filling him with a buoyancy of spirit that made him forget the sorrow of the previous night. The mood lingered after he had refreshed himself and repaired his toilet and, under its dominion, he was eager to find Peggy whom he had not seen since the early morning when they had stood together in the domine's study.

His first thought was to seek her in her own home, but almost immediately the realization came to him that his duty lay at the parsonage where he might be of some

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service to Heilke and Jan. He went directly, therefore, to the old house going around to the kitchen whose door, as usual, stood wide.

As he entered, he perceived that the room was unoccupied and, despite the brilliant sunlight, cheerless with that mysterious sense of loss which creeps into every chink and cranny at the approach of death. He stood waiting for a few moments oppressed by his own helplessness, then he went along the passage-way very softly, walking on tiptoe in order not to disturb that deep, dreamless sleep where the little sounds of the world never come.

The door of the study was closed, but the one leading into the parlor was ajar. He peered in cautiously. Through the window the sun slanted in across the red velvet chairs unrebuked, and fell in a golden shaft upon the couch in the centre of the room where Annetje lay, like some beautiful snow image, only her hair gleaming with its rare sheen above and around the pallor of her peaceful face. There were great masses of blossoms everywhere; the garden had been rifled of its treasures for her, to whom its sweetness and bloom had no further interest. As Bellenden waited, Peggy, who had been moving about intent upon some task, went close to Annetje's side and paused there with lowered head, while Heilke, a few feet away, crouched on the floor with her face hidden.

He passed through the door noiselessly and joined his cousin; she looked up at his approach and then down again, stooping to readjust some vines with trembling fingers. He did not speak—could not speak—but Heilke, made aware in some subtle way of his coming,

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glanced up in her turn. The next instant she flung her arms in jealous protection across the motionless, flower-decked figure and strained herself against it as if in protest. The grief was hers—hers alone!

Half comprehending the sacredness of the old woman's sufferings, Bellenden drew Peggy very gently from the room. Together they went along the corridor back to the deserted kitchen; then the girl put her hand on his where it rested on her arm and unloosened its clasp. Her eyes were very misty.

"Not yet, Jack," she said brokenly, "we must wait a little—I can't be happy yet."

But even as she spoke she knew that happiness was both his and hers, that the world was still a beautiful place to live in—the world where pain and sorrow form the shade of living, as pleasure and gladness form its shine.

Oh! mystery of life, where one must go in sadness all his days, and another know only the beauty of joy. Riddle beyond our poor finite solving! And yet, it is no slight thing to look upon the face of Truth, to strive after what crowns humanity—honor, strength, nobility of purpose—to know that the soul triumphs over death, and everywhere and always Love is eternal.

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