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# Major Frank

By

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Translated from the Dutch

By

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London

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26 Paternoster Square

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## Major Frank.

### Chapter I.

*A Letter from Sir Leopold van Zonshoven to Mr. William Verheyst at A—.*

The Hague, March, 1865.

DEAR FRIEND,—If you are not too deeply absorbed in some lawsuit or other, come to me by the first express you can catch from your little provincial town. Something wonderful has happened, and I have great need of a friend to whom I can confide my secret. Imagine Leopold van Zonshoven, who seemed destined from his infancy to figure in this world as a poor gentleman—imagine your friend Leopold suddenly come into an immense fortune.

An old aunt of my mother's, of whom I had never heard, and who it seems had quarrelled with all her relations, has hit upon the sublime idea of playing the "Fairy Godmother" to me. By her will I am made sole heir to all the property she died possessed of. I, who with the strictest economy and self-control have barely managed to keep out of debt; I, who have never given way to youthful follies or run into excess, now see a million thrown at my head. This is contrary to the ideas of the romancing novelist, who as a rule reforms and rewards the wildest youth. I almost knocked over the lamp on opening the letter which contained this incredible news; fortunately my landlady caught it, for she was waiting for the eighteenpence which the messenger demanded for his services, and she has since confessed to me she thought that it was a case of "baliffs." I got rid of her as quickly as possible and bolted the door behind her. I felt an irresistible desire to be alone, and to convince myself that the news was real, and not a page out of the "Arabian Nights."

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After having satisfied myself of the reality of the affair, I was assailed by an indescribable confusion of ideas and impressions. My heart beat as if it would burst; I felt a rising in my throat as if I should choke; and the first profit which I derived from my new fortune was a severe headache. I am not a stoic, and I have never attempted to appear in that character. Lately all my thoughts have been fixed on some method of changing the miserable position in which I have thus far vegetated, and there seemed but one hope left me: a reconciliation with my uncle, the Cabinet Minister, who could get me an appointment as *attaché* to one of the embassies. But this would be a difficult task, for his Excellency has forbidden me his house because of some articles that I wrote in an opposition paper. How I regretted not having been able to complete my studies and take a degree, the lack of which has shut me out from so many posts open to my fellow-students.

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At the age of twenty-nine it is a losing game to compete with younger men in possession of a degree; and whilst I sat brooding over my misfortunes, suddenly the news reaches me that I am a rich landed proprietor. I ask you, cool-headed man of the law as you are, whether that is not enough to turn the brain of a simple mortal like myself? Do come, then, as soon as possible to talk the matter over with me, especially as there is one point on which I must have your advice before entering into possession of my estates. Possibly your judicial eye will make light of it, but for me it is a conscientious question, or at least a question of delicacy, which may cause my mountain of gold to crumble to dust. I will decide nothing before consulting you. In the meantime I have given my lawyer power of attorney under reserve. Here I have many acquaintances, but not one trusted friend to whom I can reveal the secrets of my bosom without the fear of being misunderstood or made ridiculous.

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And now farewell till we meet. With or without the fortune, believe me to be ever yours sincerely,

LEOPOLD VAN ZONSHOVEN.

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## Chapter II.

*Mr. William Verheyst receives an Anonymous Letter.*

By the same post the barrister, William Verheyst, received the following letter without a signature.

SIR,—We think it probable that Sir Leopold van Zonshoven will consult you on an affair of great importance to himself. May we take the liberty of begging that you will kindly assist him in any difficulties that may stand in the way of his taking possession of a certain heritage left to him, and also use your influence to persuade him not to decline any proposition which may be made him. The writer of this letter is perfectly acquainted with the intentions of the worthy testatrix, and wishes the young man joy of his fortune.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed the good-natured William, crumpling the anonymous letter in his fingers, "I fear this looks bad for Leopold. It will be hard lines if he has to forego the fortune which is thus dangled before his eyes like a bait on who knows what unreasonable conditions. I don't like this attempt on the part of some unknown persons to bribe his adviser. However, they shall find I am not to be caught in the snare. If there be any clause in the will inconsistent with law and honesty or with honour, I'll show them I have not been called to the bar to no purpose. Poor fellow, he little knows how difficult it is for me to leave home at present. Still, as I must go to the Hague before my departure to Java, I will set off early to-morrow."

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William Verheyst did as he said. He proved himself a true friend and no loiterer; caught his train, and five minutes after his arrival in the Hague was knocking at his friend's door.

Leopold van Zonshoven occupied a single large front room in a quiet part of the town. He was too poor to live in a more fashionable quarter, and too honest to attempt living above his means. And yet there was an air of elegance about the room which marked it as that of a young man of refined tastes, and proved him to be a lover of home comforts rather than the pleasures of club life. To the ordinary furniture to be found in lodgings he had superadded a good writing-table, an easy-chair, an antique, carved book-case, and several small objects of art, which stood out in bold relief against the shabby wallpaper. This, however, he had tried to hide as much as possible by hanging the family portraits all round the room, some of them in solid ebony, others in gilt frames rather characteristic of this cheap, showy age. Even the space between the larger pictures he had tried to cover with small miniatures on ivory, and photographs. The young man had evidently done his best to surround himself by the portraits of his numerous family.

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He was busily engaged at his writing-table when Verheyst knocked at his door.

"I was expecting you," he said. "I knew you would come to help your friend in need. What a strange letter I wrote you! But now I have recovered my senses again."

Then turning to his writing-table, he said—

"Look here, here's a bundle of papers soaked with ink. Though my landlady, Mrs. Joosting, saved the lamp from falling on that memorable evening, she did not notice the ink-bottle. Three articles neatly copied, numbered and ready for the press, are utterly spoiled. Nothing for it but to copy them again. Pleasant work this for a millionaire! But I have almost finished now, and the work has done me good; we shall have the whole evening to talk matters over."

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Leopold lived, in fact, by his pen, contributing to several papers, and making translations for the publishers who patronized him. Though he had not kept his terms at the university, he had talent and style, and his writings had been very successful.

"Here are the documents: the lawyer's letter, a copy of the will, the inventory of all effects, both personal and real estate; and all, so far as I can judge, in perfect order."

After a minute examination, piece by piece, Verheyst answered that he was of the same opinion.

"But," he said, "I cannot find the fatal clause you mentioned, anywhere."

"In truth, there is no such clause expressed; nor is there even a condition set down. But there is a desire, a hope expressed in this letter from my aunt; and you must read it before giving your opinion. It seems to me I must renounce the inheritance if I cannot give effect to the wish you will find set down here."

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"Is it, then, such a difficult matter?" inquired Verheyst, before opening the letter.

"Oh, that depends! My aunt wishes me to marry."

"No unfair request, since she puts you in a position to maintain a wife."

"I agree; but she has gone further and chosen a wife for me."

"The deuce! that's the worst part of the business."

"Certainly; for she does not seem to have been acquainted with the young lady herself, who seems to be a granddaughter of a certain General von Zwenken, who married my aunt's eldest sister. The young lady is at present living with her grandfather; and it would seem that my shrewd old aunt, to be revenged on the

General, has hit upon this means of leaving her fortune to her niece and shutting out the rest of the family from any share in it. Consequently I am made use of, and the fortune is placed in my hands with instructions to hasten to lay it at the feet of this 'fair lady.' Nothing seems easier or more natural. But suppose the 'fair lady' should be ugly, hunchbacked, a shrew, or a troublesome coquette. In this case, you know, with my ideas about women and marriage, I should feel myself bound to refuse the fortune."

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"Refuse! refuse!—at the worst you can propose to divide it between you."

"Now that would be acting in direct opposition to the express and formal wish of the testatrix. Read the letter and you will see."

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## Chapter III.

### *The Honourable Miss Sophia Roselaer de Werve's Letter to her Grand-nephew.*

My very worthy Nephew,—Though I am unknown to you, you are not unknown to me. I don't know you personally; but I am pretty well informed as to what you are, and what you are not. Thanks to all sorts of quarrels in our family, and the inconsistent conduct of my eldest sister, I have been forced to live estranged (and shall die so) from all my relations. My nearest relations, it is true, died years ago; the others are scattered over the world, and scarcely remember their relationship to me. Their ancestors, who have done their utmost to embitter my life, seem to have left it as a legacy to their children to forget me, and to trouble themselves as little about old Aunt Roselaer as if she had never existed. But man must think of his end. I am in my seventy-fifth year, and a recent attack of apoplexy has warned me to put my affairs in order, if I would prevent all disputes about the possession of my property, and, above all, save it from falling into the hands of those who have done so much to embitter my life. I will not suffer it to fall into the hands of a host of nephews and nieces, who would attack it like sharks, and divide and crumble into pieces what I and my forefathers have accumulated with so much care and economy. It is for this reason I have decided to appoint one of my relatives my sole heir, and you are the one I have chosen: first, because your mother's mother is the one of my sisters who has caused me the least grief. She married a man of her own rank, in a good position, with the full consent of her parents; and she could not help his falling a victim to the horrible Belgian revolution, in which he lost his life and fortune, leaving her with seven daughters, one of whom was your mother, who, I must say, troubled herself as little as any of the other nieces about Aunt Sophia. I can pardon her, however, because when she returned from Belgium to Holland an occurrence in our unfortunate family affairs had decided me to break off all intercourse with my relations. The second reason, and the chief one, why I have distinguished you above all the rest is this: I have a good opinion of your disposition and self-command. I have, several times and in divers ways, made inquiries about you, both of friends and strangers, and the information I have received has always been such as to lead me to believe you the most fitting person to carry out one *wish* which I urgently request you to fulfil, if it be at all possible; namely, to marry the only grandchild of my eldest sister, and in this way put her in possession of that part of my fortune which the unpleasant divisions in our family cause me to withhold. I wished to adopt the girl in her early youth, give her a good education, and save her from the miserable garrison life she has led: but my request was bluntly refused; and General von Zwenken, her grandfather, has recklessly sacrificed the fortune of his granddaughter for the pleasure of being revenged on me. Consequently my will is made with the fixed purpose of preventing his ever enjoying a penny that has belonged to me. On reflection, however, I have come to the conclusion that it would be wrong to punish the granddaughter for the sins of her grandparents. After my death, on the contrary, I should like her to confess that old Aunt Roselaer, whose name she will only have heard mentioned with anger and disdain, was not so very wicked after all, seeing that she has ever had the welfare of her niece at heart. If I were to leave her my fortune, I should only be playing into the hands of her grandfather, who would doubtless spend every penny of it in the same way he spent that of my sister. And so it has occurred to me, Leopold, to single you out and make you the sole possessor of all my wealth, with the request that you will make good the wrong which I have been forced to do. The question now is, whether you will be able to accomplish my desire. Difficulties may be placed in your way by the very person most interested in adopting the means I have thought out: in this case, I beseech you to persevere as long as there remains a hope of success. If, on the other hand, you raise obstacles, if you find it insupportable to have a wife imposed

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on you by a troublesome old aunt, a wife you cannot love, then I release you from this condition, for I wish at least one member of the family to think of me without abhorrence. Should the worst happen, you must consult lawyer Van Beek, who knows my intentions, if you do not wish to lose my fortune altogether. I expect better things of you, not to mention that I count upon your good heart being moved towards a young lady who has been deprived of her rights and the advantages of her birth from infancy through the ill-will of her relations. These rights and advantages a loving old aunt wishes you both to enjoy.

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SOPHIA ROSELAER DE WERVE.

P.S.—That I must sign myself simply Roselaer de Werve, and not Baroness de Werve, is the fault of the General; but his obstinacy and folly shall cost him dear.

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## Chapter IV.

“Now, what do you say to this?” asked Leopold, as Verheyst folded up the letter with a thoughtful face.

“What do I say to it? Well, that it is a real woman’s letter; the most important point being contained in the post-scriptum.”

“Ahem! you may be right; how is it possible that a Christian woman, with one foot in the grave, can be inspired with such bitter hatred of this family, and probably for what is the merest trifle.”

“What shall I say?—From the merest trifles some of the longest and most difficult lawsuits have arisen. But, for your sake, Leopold, I could wish that this lady had been possessed of better feelings towards her relations; it would render the whole business simpler. If the young lady pleases you, marry her; if not, then propose to divide the fortune between you. You will both be independent, and one can live pretty comfortably on half a million.”

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“Would to heaven she had left me thirty thousand guilders without conditions,” sighed Leopold; “then I should have none of this bother.”

“That certainly would have been pleasanter for you,” replied Verheyst, smiling, “but we get nothing for nothing; and if the old lady has chosen you to be her instrument of revenge, why you cannot do less than accept the encumbrance.”

“I don’t see it.”

“I feel sure that on her death-bed she chuckled at the idea of leaving a champion of her griefs behind.”

“That may be so; but if she imagined that for the sake of her money I should so far demean myself as to serve her evil designs, then either she was greatly mistaken in my character, or she received erroneous information about me.”

“At present, you don’t even know whether anything inconsistent with your character is demanded of you. Let me remind you that the depositions of the dead are not to be discussed, but as far as possible carried out. If after due inquiry you find yourself unable to fulfil the conditions of this will, it will still be possible for you to stop further proceedings.”

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“I have written to the lawyer in that sense. I feel it my duty to see first whether a marriage be possible. This I am bound to do for the young lady’s sake; but I should like you to pay a visit to the Von Zwenkens, and bring me word what you think of the young lady, before I make my appearance.”

“How you do give yourself the airs of a millionaire already!” answered Verheyst —“opening the preliminaries of your marriage by an ambassador. I am sorry to say I cannot accept your commission, worthy patron.”

There was a mingling of irony and offended pride in the tone of this answer, which caused Leopold to start up in surprise.

“You do not mean me to take this reproach seriously?” he asked, feeling somewhat touched by his friend’s words. “You know well enough I only asked a friendly service of one whose clear judgment I prize above my own, blinded as I now am by a confusion of contending passions.”

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"Of course. I quite understand your meaning. It was only my chaff; but, unfortunately, it is only too true that I am prevented from obliging you. To-morrow I stay here in the Hague to look after my own affairs, and then I shall have not a day, nor even an hour, to lose in making my preparations for a long voyage."

"What long voyage are you alluding to?"

"Ah! that's true; we have had so much to say about the change in your life, that I have forgotten to tell you about the change in my own. You are not the only person on whom fortune smiles. I have been offered and have accepted the post of private secretary to the newly appointed Governor-General of our Indian possessions. Besides the high salary, and the excellent opportunity of travelling to Java in such a comfortable way, my future prospects are so promising that I could not for a moment resist the temptation to go. It is much more agreeable to me than vegetating in a provincial town, on the look-out for ill-paid lawsuits or some legal appointment. I expatriate myself for a year or two, to return with all the importance of an Eastern nabob," continued Verheyst, with a faint attempt at a jest which evidently did not come from the heart, as no pleasant smile lit up his face.

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"I cannot say you are wrong, and yet I am sorry," replied Leopold, with an effort to be cheerful; "all my plans for the future enjoyment of my fortune were bound up with you—we were to shoot, hunt, and travel together."

"What about your wife?" asked William.

"My first condition would have been that she must treat my friend kindly."

"It is all the better; you should not be under the necessity of making any such conditions. Possibly you may have difficulties enough to overcome, without my standing in the way."

"Really, William, I feel inclined to refuse the fortune, and go to Java with you."

"Nonsense, man, pluck up your courage, and trust to those feelings of honour and delicacy of which your present scruples only afford me a new proof. She may turn out to be a pearl of a wife, this young lady whom you are requested to enchase in gold. By the way, do you know her name, or where you are to go in order to make her acquaintance?"

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"I have this morning received a letter from the lawyer in Utrecht, requesting me to pay him a visit as soon as possible, when he will give me all necessary information about General von Zwenken and his granddaughter Francis Mordaunt."

"Mordaunt! Is her name Francis Mordaunt?" exclaimed Verheyst, in a tone of surprise and disappointment.

"Yes, don't you like the name? or have you heard it before?" asked Leopold, all in a breath, for the serious looks of his friend alarmed him.

"Heard it before! Well, yes—indeed, often, as that of an English officer on half-pay who some years ago lived in my province; a man against whose character, so far as I know, nothing can be said."

"Yes, but I am speaking about the daughter. Do you know her?"

"Not personally, and it is a dangerous thing to form an opinion from gossiping reports. What I have heard may not be correct; but if it be so, I cannot hide from you what it would only disturb your peace of mind to know. Therefore, I say, make your own inquiries, seek information from people you can trust, and trust only your own observations and experience."

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"Is she deformed? Is she a fright?" asked Leopold, growing uneasy.

"No, nothing of that sort; in fact, I believe she is rather good-looking—at least, enough so to attract admirers, but——"

"Come now, never falter, man! Give me the *coup de grâce* at once. Is she a coquette?"

Verheyst shrugged his shoulders. "I have never heard it said she was; at least, it must be a strange sort of coquetry she's accused of."

"Don't keep me on the rack any longer; but tell me at once the worst you know of her."

"Oh, there's nothing that one can really call *bad*; yet in your eyes it may appear sinister enough. What I have heard is, that an acquaintance of ours, a friend of my

youngest brother, was madly in love with her, and she refused his offer in a manner little encouraging for you. According to his account she must be a regular shrew, who declines to marry on the grounds that she will acknowledge no man to be her lord and master. She so ill-treated this poor Charles Felters, the best-natured old sheep that ever went on two legs, that he has taken fright and run away—gone off to Africa, as if afraid of meeting her again in Europe. He is not only a good fellow in every respect, but what we call in common parlance a ‘catch,’ his father being the richest banker in our part of the country. I don’t wish to frighten you, but——”

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“Well, I see nothing in all this to be frightened about,” said Leopold, calmly. “That she has refused a booby who runs away for fear of a woman, only proves her to be a girl of character. I begin to think there will be something piquant in this adventure, and I prefer a lively young lady to a wearisome, insignificant girl.”

“I am glad to hear you take up the subject so pleasantly. I, for my part, should not like to be engaged in such a contest, but you are morally obliged——”

“In fact, without the obligation, your account has so excited my curiosity that I should feel tempted to undertake this conquest. Do you see this portrait of the fifteenth century? It is that of one of my ancestors who, for the honour of his lady, suffered his left hand to be cut off. He was very ugly, and whenever I was naughty or in a temper my good mother would lead me up to this portrait and say, ‘Fie! Leopold, you are like the Templar,’ for he was a knight of that order. She said I had the same fierce glance of the eyes when I was naughty, and I have since been convinced that she was right. The resemblance struck me in a private interview I once had with my uncle, the Cabinet Minister. I was accidentally standing before a glass, when he upbraided the memory of my dead father, saying he had married a wife without fortune, instead of following his (my uncle’s) example—using his title as a bait with which to catch an heiress. His Excellency saw the likeness, too; for he politely turned the conversation, and led me to his antechamber, where I am sure he gave his footman orders to say ‘Not at home’ in future, if ever I should trouble to call again. But tell me more, all you know, about my future wife.”

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“Well, she has had no education. Her manners are rude——”

“That I have gathered from my aunt’s letter; but it is not her fault, poor girl. I must try to improve her, and be both lover and schoolmaster to my wife. Who knows—perhaps I must also teach her music and dancing!”

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“At any rate, you will not have to teach her fencing, for she’s already an adept at that—at least, according to Charles Felters’ report.”

“The deuce she is!” exclaimed Leopold, laughing; “that’s almost enough to frighten one.”

“Charles was really frightened. At that time she was a very young girl, yet she was already generally known in the little garrison-town where she lived by the nickname of *Major Frank*.”

“The nickname does not sound flattering, I must confess; however, I will see if there is not some way of enrolling this major under my colours, and then she shall retire from military life to settle down as a civilian.”

“It does me good to see you treat the matter so lightly, for there is nothing for it but your making the attempt.”

“It has always been my maxim to take a cheerful view of things,” said Leopold, with a touch of melancholy in his tone; “and, alas! I have been forced to do so under adverse circumstances hitherto. And now, my good fellow, let us go and look out for some dinner. I can recommend Pyl’s Restaurant.”

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“Why not at the Club?” asked Verheyst; “there we shall meet many friends whom I wish to see before my departure.”

“I am no longer a member, my dear fellow. After my father’s death I was obliged to cut down all unnecessary expenses, as my mother had but a small pension, and I could bear retrenchment better than a person of her age. It is not the subscription, it is the company one meets which leads to extravagance, and those quiet little supper parties, the invitations to which it is impossible to refuse.”

At dinner, over a good bottle of wine, William made Leopold promise to write a full account of all that should take place during his absence in Java, and send to him by mail from time to time. We can only hope that this story will prove no less interesting to our readers than it did to William Verheyst.

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## Chapter V.

*Leopold van Zonshoven to Mr. William Verheyst.*

My dear Friend,—Whilst you are sailing down the Red Sea, I am entrusting to paper what I would not confide to any living mortal but yourself.

My fortune still hangs in the balance. Without doubt the worthy testatrix has done everything possible to insure her heritage to me; but there are moments when I feel so great a repugnance to it as to make me question whether it were not better to renounce it than to become the instrument of Miss Roselaer de Werve's vengeance on this side the grave. The idea of having to drive a grey-headed old man from his manor-house, and to render a poor young lady, who has a family claim on her aunt's inheritance, houseless, is too much for me, though a whimsical old woman and the law have done their utmost to set my conscience at ease.

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But to commence my story. The day after you left me, I went over to Utrecht to call on the lawyer, Van Beek. Perhaps in the hurry of our parting I forgot to tell you this was my intention. At such times a man often forgets the most important things he has to say.

The worthy functionary is a short, thin personage, with a tuft of hair hanging over his forehead, sharp eyes, a long, thin nose, and thin lips always closed; in fact, a perfect type of the shrewd, clever, but inexorable lawyer.

He received me seated in an armchair, clad in a grey office coat, and with a solemn white neckcloth fastened round his neck so tightly that I really was afraid it would choke him.

When I entered the room he rose to salute me with a polite bow, and only when he had learnt my name and my resolve to carry out the intentions of the testatrix did a fine smile play about his mouth—a smile which seemed to say: "You've come round, then, at last, though you appeared to hesitate at first."

After a few words as to the sudden death of his client, and her express wish to be buried as quietly as possible, without the attendance of any of her relations, he told me he had been the confidential adviser of Lady Roselaer for the last thirty years, and was consequently able to give me all necessary information with regard to her dealings with General von Zwenken, and her intentions in respect of his granddaughter.

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I should only weary you if I attempted to relate all the pitiful stories of mischief-making and counter-mischief-making with which, long before the birth of Francis, the General and Aunt Sophia endeavoured to render each other's life miserable. I now comprehend that she neither could nor would leave her fortune to such a man, and I approve of the course she has taken for Francis' sake, who would have been the greatest sufferer if her aunt had not acted with so much foresight and prudence. The General is a spendthrift, or, to put it in the mildest terms, a bad financier. His affairs, the lawyer says—and the lawyer evidently knows more about them than the General does himself—are in such a state that, to use an expression of Macaulay's, "the whole wealth of the East would not suffice to put them in order and keep them so."

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Still, does this justify my aunt's inexorable hatred? I am sure, if you saw her portrait, you would scarcely believe her capable of it: a stately dame in a rich black silk gown, with silvery grey hair under a black lace cap, and a string of priceless pearls round her neck—so she appears in a painting done in the last year of her life. And this she has bequeathed to her legal adviser, because she believed none of her relations would be able to look upon it with pleasure. On this point, I fancy, she was not far deceived. I myself, her favoured heir, honestly confess that much must happen, much be cleared up, before I can regard it with any degree of cheerfulness and gratitude, seeing I know what a Shylock-spirit once breathed in that thin, slender figure of a woman. The lawyer bore testimony to her kindness to the poor, but said she was very singular in her ways of life and thought. Being strictly orthodox himself, he accounts for all her singularities by saying they are the outcome of her great admiration of the ideas prevalent in the eighteenth century; she was an admirer of Rousseau, and actually adorned her room with a statuette of Voltaire. In fact, she had herself painted holding a volume of Voltaire's Correspondence in her hand, though she knew this would not be particularly pleasing to the future possessor of that portrait.

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"Well, well, Jonker," he continued, "since you ask me for the truth about the life



and actions of your deceased aunt, I must tell you she seldom went to church, and when she did it was to the French church, though she was not a member of it.<sup>1</sup> She gave large sums every year to all sorts of institutions; subscribed liberally to any fund for the benefit of the lower classes; but would never give a penny to the Church. If I sometimes tried to change her views on this point, she cut me short by saying it was a matter of conscience with her not to contribute to the increase of a race of hypocrites. You will understand that in my position I could not insist further on this subject. Besides, she did not make use of her riches for herself, except with the greatest economy. She occupied a small villa just outside the town of Utrecht, and her beautiful country-seat in Gelderland, as well as her magnificent house in town, were both let to strangers. She kept but one manservant, an aged waiting-woman, and a cook. The gardener who rented her kitchen-garden supplied her with vegetables, and kept her flowers in order. She had no carriage, and sometimes did not go out for weeks together. Neither did she receive company, denying herself to all visitors except Dr. D., her old friend, who made a professional visit every day, and came regularly two evenings a week with his married sister to play cards. I saw her as often as business affairs rendered it necessary, and once a month she invited me, my wife and daughter, to dinner. On these occasions Dr. D. and his sister were also invited; but I never remember to have met any one else, except the painter who did this portrait, and to whom she has left a nice little legacy. He was a young man with roguish eyes, and beautiful mustachios; and I suspect he made love to her *à la Voltaire*, for she bought drawings of him which she never even looked at. He was, otherwise, a good young fellow, with a widowed mother to maintain; and the capital she has left is large enough to permit of such a freak of fancy—”

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“Oh, certainly!” I interrupted, “I am glad that the latter days of her monotonous life were cheered by anybody. But what you have told me of her views with regard to the Church leads me to doubt whether I ought to accept her heritage, since, once in possession of it, I shall feel it my duty to make use of her money for purposes directly contrary to her wishes.”

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“I don’t think you need have any scruples; for she was very well acquainted with the character of Jonker van Zonshoven, and what might be expected of him in such matters. Yet you see this did not deter her from entrusting her fortune to you. Besides, she was liberal enough with regard to the views of other people. Her maid is strictly orthodox, and yet every Sunday a carriage was placed at her service to convey her to church; and she is left well provided for during the rest of her life. It is probable Lady Roselaer considered you the person likely to make good what she had left undone either from false shame or obstinacy. Had this not been her intention, she was a woman who would have taken measures to prevent her will being ignored, even after her death.”

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly orthodox Dutch people think that a sermon in the light, airy French language cannot be so serious and solemn as in their own tongue.

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## Chapter VI.

With regard to the Castle de Werve, I have found out that it is situated on the borders of Gelderland and Overijssel, and is surrounded by extensive woods, moors, and arable land. It is at present occupied by General von Zwenken, and formerly was in the possession of Aunt Sophia’s parents. To its possession is attached the title of Baron, with seignorial rights—rights which in our time are little more than nominal, yet to which old Aunt Sophia seems to have attached immense value. Her father, old Baron Roselaer van de Werve, had no son (a great trial for him, as you may suppose), but three daughters, of whom Aunt Sophia was the second, and my mother’s mother the youngest. The eldest, Lady Mary Ann, became, on the death of her father, the rightful heir to the Castle de Werve and the estates attached to it. This arrangement was exceedingly offensive to Aunt Sophia, who had expected her father to leave the castle to her, and at one time she had good reasons for fostering such expectations.

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Her eldest sister had been the source of much grief and sorrow to the old people. She had secretly entered into a romantic love-engagement with a young Swiss officer—then Captain von Zwenken—and considering it impossible to obtain the consent of her parents to such a marriage, she eloped with Von Zwenken, who took her to Switzerland, where they were married. This union, according to Dutch law, and in the opinion of Aunt Sophia, was illegal. The weak parents (as Sophia called them), however, at length became reconciled to their son-in-law, and when

the lost child returned to her old home in reduced circumstances, her parents received her with open arms.

In this family scene of reconciliation, Aunt Sophia imitated the eldest son in the parable. She had never been on good terms with her romantic sister; she persisted in regarding her brother-in-law as an abductor and a deceiver, who had obtruded himself on the family; charged her parents with blameworthy infirmity of purpose, and, in short, declined all reconciliation.

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The stay of the young people under the parental roof was brief; but even these few days were stormy, and sufficed to divide the family connexions into two parties, for and against the Von Zwenkens. Aunt Sophia's strong point was the irregularity of the marriage, solemnized in a foreign country. Those who disagreed with her and recognized the Swiss captain as a relation, she looked upon as deadly enemies; while those who took her side in the contest were received by Baron and Baroness Roselaer with freezing coolness. In a word, it was the history of the Montagues and the Capulets re-enacted on a small scale in the eighteenth century on Dutch territory. They did not attack each other with dagger and poison, but used the tongue for weapon. They annoyed, they insulted each other, whenever and wherever they found an opportunity; there were hair-splitting disputes, and retaliation without truce or pity; and lawsuits followed which swallowed large sums of money. A good business for the lawyers, who only made "confusion worse confounded."

When old Baroness Roselaer—who always pleaded for peace and forgiveness—shortly afterwards died, Sophia thought she would be able to exert unlimited influence over her father, as she now became the recognized mistress of the house. She even took advantage of her position, during the stay of her brother-in-law for the funeral, to make him so uncomfortable, that on leaving the house he told the old Baron he would never enter it again. Sophia was in triumph. She thought she had banished Von Zwenken from the house; but she forgot her sister's children, and the joy and pride the old Baron was likely to take in a grandson and future heir to his title and estates. Though he never talked to Sophia on the subject, he was secretly embittered against her as being the cause of this new estrangement, and his great pleasure was to visit his grandchildren; and what is more surprising, Sophia never suspected these visits.

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Try, then, to imagine the effect produced upon her when her father's will was read, and she found that the Castle de Werve, with its seignorial rights, descended to Madame von Zwenken and her children.

It is true she inherited a just share of the property; but the very part she loved best, the home of her childhood, where she had been brought up, and which she never willingly would have quitted, was taken from her and given to the man whom she considered so unworthy of it, and so little capable of appreciating the advantages attached to its possession. She felt herself slighted, and to this slight is to be attributed the restless hatred and unrelenting bitterness with which she pursued the General during the rest of her life. She declared her brother and sister had worked upon her father's feelings by cunning and intrigue; and she would never believe that the old Baron had left them the property of his own free-will, or for the sake of his grandchildren.

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It being now the Captain's opportunity, he ordered her to leave the house with all possible speed; and this was the more galling, as he did not himself retire from active service and occupy the castle as the old Baron had desired him to do. He was changed about from one garrison town to another, daily expecting to be ordered on foreign service, and therefore unable to derive much enjoyment from his possessions. His wife and children would sometimes stay a few weeks at the castle in the summer; but the former did not long survive her father. The children stayed with Von Zwenken in the garrison, until the daughter was old enough to go to a boarding-school in Switzerland, and the son to be placed under a tutor, who was to coach him for the university.

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I agree with Aunt Sophia in her assertion that Von Zwenken was not the "right man in the right place." He made no good use of his possessions; and the house was entrusted to a care-keeper, who was as incompetent as he afterwards proved himself dishonest. The old steward, who had been dismissed to make room for this stranger, was immediately engaged by Aunt Sophia to stay in the neighbourhood and keep her informed of all that happened at the castle. For though she had removed to another province in which her own estates were situated, she could neither separate her affections nor her thoughts from her old home.

Sometimes the Captain, who had now obtained the rank of Major, would come with a party of friends for the shooting, but he never seemed to observe that the whole place was going to rack and ruin. Further, he was always in want of money; and when his daughter married an English officer, Sir John Mordaunt, he was

obliged to sell a considerable part of his estates, so as to be able to give her the portion of the fortune left her by her mother.

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He had already several mortgages on the property, and as his son led a wild life at college these went on increasing from year to year; until, when at last on obtaining his colonel's pension and the honorary rank of general he was able to retire to the Castle de Werve, all he could call his own was the house, garden, and surrounding grounds.

Aunt Sophia, on the contrary, whom it must be confessed was a sharp, clever woman, had in the meantime doubled her fortune, besides inheriting largely from a rich cousin who had taken her part in the family quarrel.

As the proverb says, "hatred has four eyes," and so she, making use of the information obtained from the old steward, appointed a lawyer to buy up on her behalf all the land sold by the General. This lawyer had further instructions to advance money on the mortgages, and to exact the interest with the greatest promptitude. In this way my aunt became so well acquainted with Von Zwenken's money difficulties, that she could calculate the day, nay, even the hour, when he would be at her mercy.

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At last, imagining the favourable moment had arrived, she sent a lawyer to offer him a much larger sum for the castle and the seignorial rights than any one else would be likely to give, seeing that she was secretly in possession of the surrounding estates.

The General's answer was to this effect: "He would not sell the seignorial rights at any price; and as for the castle, he had promised his deceased wife to keep her sister out of it at all costs, and he would rather see it fall about his ears than that Miss Sophia Roselaer should ever set foot inside it again."

Poor man, he little knew how much she had him in her power, and all the precautions she had taken. Otherwise he would have reflected twice before sending such an answer. Something suddenly occurred which obliged him to mortgage even the house itself—the cause is a mystery—and now Aunt Sophia might have been revenged; but for some inexplicable reason she countermanded her orders to Van Beek, who does not himself know why. Just before her death she sent for him to change her will, and it was on this occasion she made me her sole heir.

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## Chapter VII.

I was invited to stay to luncheon by my lawyer, and I accepted the invitation.

In the course of the conversation Van Beek said—

"The country seat, Runenburg, will be at your disposal on the 31st of October next; but the house in town is let till the May following, and the tenants would like to stay on, if it be agreeable to you. They are very respectable people. How am I to act in the matter?"

I stared at him in surprise and perplexity. Such a strange feeling came over me. I who have never possessed a stick or a stone in my life (in fact, I always felt it a relief when the quarter's lodging bill was paid), now I had to decide about a house in town and a country seat.

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"I think, Mr. Van Beek, everything had better remain as it is until the question of my marriage with Miss Mordaunt is settled."

"The Jonker forgets that that condition is not binding."

"I look upon it as binding, though such may not be the legal interpretation of the will."

"Would you not like to see the house whilst you are in Utrecht? It is beautifully situated, and well worth a visit, I can assure you."

"No, thank you, sir; but I should like to see the house in which my aunt lived: from its surroundings I may be able to obtain a better idea of her character."

"Oh, with pleasure, Jonker! I thought I had already told you," began Van Beek,

somewhat embarrassed, "that the old lady had bequeathed it to me, on condition her maid should occupy it as long as she lives. It is a splendid legacy; that I do not deny. But consider, I have served her thirty years in all kinds of business, some of which cost me much trouble and loss of time. And I may remind you that there is no extra money set aside for my expenses as executor, whilst I am recommended to assist the heir in every way, and to serve him to the best of my ability by my counsel."

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"My dear sir," I rejoined, "it was to be expected that aunt would treat you generously. It is not my intention to dispute any of her bequests. It will be a sort of pilgrimage for me."

"We will drive there at once after luncheon. It is only half an hour's distance from the town."

I must confess the interior of my aunt's dwelling did not enable me to gather any new ideas of the strange personage who once occupied it. The old waiting-woman received us with coolness, and chanted the praises of her late mistress in pious terms. The young cook shed a torrent of tears, and was evidently astonished not to see me do the same; whilst the man-servant eyed me askance, as if he feared I had come there to cut off his legacy. The house was furnished in a moderately comfortable style, most of the furniture being of the good solid sort common in the reign of King William I., though there had been an attempt to imitate the style of the First French Empire. There was only one sofa in the house, and one armchair *à la Voltaire*, in which Miss Roselaer reposed herself for just one hour after dinner every day. She must have been a clever, active woman up to the very last.

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"She was always making up her accounts or writing," said her maid, "when she was not either reading or knitting."

"And what did she read?" I asked.

"Mostly 'unbelieving books'—those in the bookcase there; sometimes, but very seldom, the Bible."

The "unbelieving books" were French, German, and English classics. I pointed out to Van Beek that I should like to possess this small but well-selected library. All the books are beautifully though not showily bound, and they bear marks of assiduous reading. Among the "unbelieving books" are the works of Fénelon, Bossuet, and Pascal, peacefully assorted with those of Voltaire and the Encyclopædists, whilst Lavater, Gellert, Lessing, and Klopstock find a place by the side of Goethe and Schiller, and the plays of Iffland and Kotzebue.

This was the first moment of unalloyed pleasure I have felt since I came into my fortune, when I once more cast my eyes over the library and beheld it with all the pride of ownership. I involuntarily put forth my hand to snatch up one of the volumes, as if I thereby wished to signify I was taking possession. Van Beek smiled and twinkled his cunning little eyes; but the maid, who was standing by, looked at me as though I had committed a sacrilege.

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"I should rather have thought the Jonker would have preferred my lady's Bible," she said.

"I should certainly like the Bible as well as the other books, Mrs. Jones—that is to say, unless you wish to keep it yourself as a memento."

"Oh no, Jonker! such a worldly, new-fashioned book I would not have in my possession. I can't look upon it as God's word; and I could never understand how my lady found edification in it."

"What's the matter with the Bible?" I asked Van Beek as we left the house.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. It is an ordinary States-Bible, only not printed in the old-fashioned German type."<sup>1</sup>

Upon my word, I thought aunt must indeed have been pretty liberal-minded to have put up with so bigoted a servant for so many years.

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The next day I set out for the small town of Zutphen, which is within an easy drive of the Castle de Werve.

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<sup>1</sup> The strictly orthodox party in Holland will only make use of the version of the Bible approved by the States-General in the seventeenth century; the bigots insist upon its being printed in the German characters in use at the time when the first copies were issued.

## Chapter VIII.

Castle de Werve, April, 1861.

You see, my dear William, I have entered the fortress.

But to resume my narrative. Van Beek gave me a letter of introduction to his friend Overberg, a lawyer in Zutphen, and I called upon this worthy man of the law as soon as I arrived in the town. This Overberg was the agent of my old Aunt Roselaer in these quarters, and it was through his good management of her affairs that she gradually obtained possession of Von Zwenken's property, as the General usually borrowed money of Overberg. After all, the General was more fortunate than if he had fallen into the hands of usurers, who, speculating on his weakness, would have ruined him in a much shorter time. Overberg had advised the General to accept the offer of his sister-in-law—with what result you already know. For this reason he recommended me, if I wished to obtain a kindly reception at the Castle, not to present myself there as the heir to Miss Roselaer's property; such an introduction being calculated to raise a prejudice against me from the first. Therefore I decided to present myself as a relation anxious to make the acquaintance of the family.

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Seizing the opportunity, I began to question Overberg about Miss Mordaunt.

"I have only spoken to her once," he said; "the General always comes to see me in person. She is never seen in the town now. Once, indeed, whilst the General was still commandant of the garrison here, she came to consult me on a matter personal to herself, but that is a long time ago."

The good-natured lawyer, though ignorant of my matrimonial plans, doubtless read disappointment in my face, for he resumed, as if to excuse the meagreness of his information—

"You see, sir, the General then lived in grand style; and a wide distinction was also made in society between the military and the *bourgeoisie*. I was a widower, my time fully occupied, and I seldom went into society. Since my second marriage, however, we have parties and dinners enough—and that reminds me my wife has a *soirée* this evening; several young ladies who know Miss Mordaunt are invited. Will you spend the evening with us? You can leave tomorrow early for the Werve. I will introduce you to the company as a gentleman looking out for a villa in our neighbourhood; for as you know, in a small town like ours, it is necessary to give a reason for your appearance among us, otherwise one will be invented—and such inventions are not always of a flattering kind. I can easily give the conversation a turn so as to cause it to fall on the family Von Zwenken, and you need only keep your ears open."

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This idea took my fancy; I accepted the invitation with pleasure, for a little society would help me to pass the evening more agreeably than I could spend it at my hotel.

We dined quietly *en famille*, and Overberg and his wife—hospitable, jovial people—seemed to me to belie the French verse—

"De petits avocats,  
Qui se sont fait des sous,  
En rognant des ducats."

Mr. Overberg is a shrewd, clever lawyer, who perfectly understands his business and the way to treat his clients politely and persuasively; he always discourages lawsuits, recommends delay and an attempt at an arrangement, and thus quietly brings about the desired result without, as it were, seeming to interfere. Aunt Sophia respected him highly for his discretion and foresight, though she took care never to let him see through her intentions, since he was not the man to take sharp and decisive measures. For any such business she employed Van Beek, who is a man to carry out the law to the letter, without feeling any pity for the sufferer.

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It was therefore in keeping with Overberg's character that he recommended me to temporize with the General, to give him time to pay his debts, and not to drive such an old man to despair, though he was a *foreigner*. The good man little knew he was preaching to one who already shared his views, and whose inmost wish was to deal as gently as possible with Von Zwenken.

I must acknowledge that what I heard at the *soirée* did not make a favourable impression on me. The past life of the young lady must have been a singular one, if

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there be any truth in the gossip I heard about her. I know much must be set down to slander in a small town, where people are at a loss what to talk about when not criticising their neighbours.

But, however, you must judge for yourself from what follows.

Among the ladies to whom I was introduced was a charming young widow with jet-black eyes and lively features; she is a niece of the Roselaers, I am told, and at first I felt very sorry her name was not Francis Mordaunt, the niece-elect of Aunt Sophia. However, when Overberg had drawn her out a little on the subject of the Von Zwenkens, I felt exceedingly glad to think our acquaintance would not extend beyond the present evening.

I began to feel a most intense hatred against her, so unmercifully did she attack poor Francis.

"Yes, they had been well acquainted when her grandfather was commandant of the garrison, and she herself had visited at the house of the Colonel. But no, friendship had never existed between her and the young lady; she was too eccentric and ill-mannered. Just imagine, Jonker, she came to our house one evening when she knew there was to be dancing and music. Yes, she dropped in, as *nonchalant* as possible, in a dark merino dress, fastened up to the neck, with a turn-down collar and a silk neckerchief—just for all the world like a boy. And her boots—they might have belonged to some plough-boy. Upon my word, I believe there were *nails* in the soles; a non-commissioned officer would not have been so rude as to enter a *salon* in them."

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"Perhaps she had made a mistake about the evening," I said, by way of excuse.

"Certainly not! She received her invitation a week beforehand. Surely that was time enough to get a ball-dress made. And it was not because she hadn't got any other dresses; for two days afterwards she came to a house where we were invited to spend a quiet evening, *en grande toilette*, a low dress (as if she expected to be invited to dance), and resplendent with jewellery and diamonds. Now I ask you if that was not done to annoy us and to wound our feelings?"

"It seems to me she took more trouble to do honour to the ladies than she had taken to please the gentlemen."

"The truth is, she was not at all complimentary to the gentlemen," rejoined a thin, elderly-looking spinster of an uncertain age, dressed in an old-fashioned style, who I should have thought would have been the last person to come to the defence of a sex that had so clearly neglected her.

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"And the gentlemen—no doubt they reciprocated her *nonchalance*?" I asked. "It is very probable she was left in the company of the elderly ladies all the evening to increase the number of 'wall flowers.'"

"Yes! but it was because she wished it," replied the widow. "She would be sure of partners, though she were never such a fright. All the young officers are, as a matter of course, obliged 'to do the amiable' to the granddaughter of their colonel. Moreover, Francis Mordaunt is mistress of the art of attracting or repelling as it pleases her. Notwithstanding all her strange whims and caprices, she is never at a loss for a partner, and the moment she enters any ball-room she becomes the observed of all observers. The gentlemen flock round her; she is flattered, flirted with——"

"Yes, flirted with, I grant you; but not respected, I'm sure," interrupted the elderly spinster. "It is chiefly done to draw out her smart repartees, and the unladylike answers which have made her so famous (or rather infamous)."

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"In fact everybody is amused at her scathing replies."

"Which the ladies are afraid of," said a gentleman, half jestingly, half reproachfully, "for as a rule they are as true as they are sharp."

"As a rule she makes the gentlemen the butt of her raillery."

"How strange then, indeed, that the ladies take her part so little!" I could not help remarking.

"That is *not* strange, Jonker! The peculiar manner she has adopted to render herself noticeable is just the one our sex cannot suffer. In all her victories we saw a defeat; the good tone was lost."

"And how did the party pass off for Miss Mordaunt in that curious dress?" I inquired, for I had less interest in carrying on a *combat d'esprit* with the vicious

little widow than in drawing out a more complete sketch of Francis' character, though it might be coloured by slander.

"Just as she wished it, I believe. In the early part of the evening she was somewhat neglected, and this was evidently her wish, for she did nothing to prevent it; on the contrary, she had told the hostess that she had resolved not to dance, in such a loud and decided tone, that it would have been absurd for any one to invite her afterwards."

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"She's cunning enough," put in the elderly spinster. "She only said that lest afterwards she should feel ashamed of herself at the close of the party, in case no one invited her to dance."

"In fact, it requires more moral courage than the gentlemen in these parts as a rule possess to lead out a lady dressed as she was," interposed the widow again.

"It appears that the custom of not sparing us gentlemen is catching," whispered an officer, who had been introduced as Captain Sanders.

I silently bowed, for I wished to listen to Mrs. X., who continued—

"Finally, however, when the *cotillon* was called, she must join, and the unfortunate leader of the dance had to sacrifice himself. Lieutenant Wilibald, her grandfather's adjutant, was obliged to take her in tow, mustering up all his courage. After showing a good deal of resistance, which appeared seriously meant, she allowed herself to be led out, but did nothing to lighten her partner's unpleasant task. On the contrary, she was so recalcitrant, so inattentive and so awkward, that she often caused confusion, and her partner had the greatest difficulty to rectify her mistakes. Indeed, the polite young officer was pitied by the whole company, and the more so because it was known that he was sacrificing himself to a sense of duty; for he was engaged to a charming young lady who had been prevented from attending the ball by a recent death in the family."

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"Pardon, madame; permit me to say that your representation of the facts is not quite correct," interrupted Captain Sanders, in whose favour I immediately became prepossessed on account of his serious and earnest look. "Allow me to set you right as to facts, for I am a friend of Lieutenant Wilibald's, and I know he would be sorry if what you have said should go forth to the world as truth. It was by no means a disagreeable task for him to lead out Miss Mordaunt in any dress she chose to appear in, for he was too much in love with her to notice such small matters as dress. Yes, I venture to say, if it had depended on him alone he would not have married the woman he has; but he was forced by circumstances, and Miss Mordaunt did her utmost to promote the marriage and to put him in possession of a fortune."

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I inwardly thanked the Captain for his chivalrous defence of the absent, and I would gladly have taken him by the hand and done so publicly, but that this would have prevented my hearing more on the subject of Francis.

"And has Miss Mordaunt been married since?" I asked, trying to put the question as disinterestedly as possible.

"Why, no!" cried the elderly spinster with a triumphant smile. "So far as we know (and we know pretty well everything that happens in our circle), she has never had an offer."

"Ah! that is very strange; a young lady who seems to be possessed of so many attractions," I observed.

"That's not at all strange," interrupted the little widow, in a coquettish, sentimental tone. "It was never difficult for her to attract admirers and flatterers for the moment, but it is only by the heart that a woman wins true affection and esteem; and, with the Captain's permission, no one could ever believe Francis Mordaunt to be in earnest, for she has no heart—she never cared for anything but horses and dogs."

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"You forget her grandfather!" pleaded the Captain.

"Well, yes, she has been his idol; but this very fact has turned out her ruin."

"How are we to understand that remark, madame?" asked Overberg, whose jovial face grew serious.

"That he has left the girl far too much to her own whims and fancies."

"What shall I say, *chère amie*? He was afraid of her." (It was the elderly spinster who again began the attack.) "He could roar at his officers, but he was afraid of a

scene with Francis.”

“Excuse me for once more contradicting you, miss. Colonel von Zwenken never roared at his officers—this I know by experience; but it is true he was conspicuous by his absence when Francis Mordaunt went into society. He suffered her to go out when she liked, and with whom she liked. Alas! he sat at the card table in his club whilst Francis by her thoughtlessness and certain peculiarities in her character, was rendering herself a victim to calumny and envious tongues.”

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“Bravo, Captain! it’s noble of you to defend the absent.”

“I am only sorry I cannot do so without blaming another absent person; but what I say is known, and well known, in this circle.”

“As well known as the eccentricities of Major Frank. Whatever Captain Sanders may say, we are not making her conduct appear worse than it is; we are only speaking of it as it struck us at the time.”

“That everybody must acknowledge,” said an old lady, who had thus far listened with sparkling eyes. “Only remember what talk her conduct gave rise to when she met the stranger staying at the ‘Golden Salmon,’ by appointment, unknown to the Colonel, who had forbidden the man his house! Did she not set all our ideas of good breeding at defiance by walking in the plantation in open daylight with a perfect stranger.”

“In fact, I am assured she pawned her diamonds to pay his hotel bill. She even wished to sell them, for she asked a friend of mine to buy them.”

Overberg’s healthy, blooming face turned pale; but he said nothing. The Captain, however, spoke again—

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“It is only too true she would risk all to attain her ends, if she had once set her mind on a thing.”

“And that for a person who went to a third-rate hotel—did not even give his own name, as it was said afterwards; and who certainly was a sharper or a coiner.”

“If such had been the case, the police would have looked after him sharp,” interposed Overberg.

“That is my opinion also,” said the Captain; “and I think Wilibald Smeekens was right. He said it was some one who had formerly committed a breach of military discipline, and whom she out of pity wished to assist in getting out of the country.”

“Ahem! out of pity,” said the old lady. “Young ladies should be careful how they show such pity—carrying on an intrigue. I can assure you that at the time it was a question whether we ought not to banish her from our society.”

“But no one dared to pronounce the sentence of banishment,” said the Captain, “for fear of the Colonel, who had it in his power to refuse the military music for the balls and open-air concerts in summer. And this he certainly would have done if he had known what was hatching against his granddaughter. But the ladies were more prudent; they pulled poor Francis to pieces behind her back.”

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“With this result,” added the elderly spinster, “that of her own accord she almost entirely withdrew from our society.”

“No, there is another reason,” said the widow, with a significant shake of the head; “it was not our treatment, but her own conscience which pricked her after that affair with her coachman.”

“Yes, you are quite right; that was a sad affair,” assented the Captain, to my painful surprise.

The honourable man, who had evidently combatted calumny and slander, was now silenced. I wished to ask what had happened, but the words stuck in my throat; I felt as if they would choke me. The postmaster, however, who had just entered the room, put the question, which the tongues of the ladies were quivering with impatience to answer.

“Unfortunately, no one knows the exact particulars,” began the elderly spinster, whose shrill, sharp voice made itself heard above the rest; “but it is generally believed she wished to make her coachman elope with her. Possibly she might have succeeded, but the man was already married, and when that became known —”

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“She pitched him off the box whilst the horses were going at a furious rate,” put in the old lady, with a demoniacal smile of pleasure.



"Others who are supposed to know, say she struck him dead with the whip," added the little widow, who must have her say. "Horrible! most horrible!" she continued, turning up her eyes with mock sentimentality.

Yes, horrible indeed, thought I, when both young ladies and old vie with each other in a wicked desire to give the *coup de grâce* to one of their own sex who has erred, or, may be, only taken one false step in life.

"I have been told," murmured another voice, "that she fought with him; and the horses taking fright, he fell from the box under their feet."

"However it happened, the truth will never be known, for he now lies in the churchyard."

"Yes, now you've got the truth without any figures of speech," jested the widow; "and with him the crime is buried, and hushed up for ever."

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"With your permission, ladies, had there been a question of anything of that sort, the law would have taken its course," observed Overberg; "and I know for certain it was never brought before a court."

"That I can believe," answered the widow. "The magistrate is a great friend of the Colonel's, plays cards with him every evening, and to palliate the affair, and silence public indignation, he made an official visit to the commandant's house. Francis Mordaunt was examined, and, as might be expected beforehand, came out of the affair snow-white—at least, according to the magistrate's report," added the widow, with a satirical shrug of the shoulders.

"But, madame," interposed Overberg, evidently growing angry, "do you mean to say you suspect the impartiality of the magistrate?"

"I suspect no one; I only tell you how the affair ended—namely, that it was hushed up, and the relations of the coachman bribed to keep quiet. Such people are easily frightened. One thing, however, is certain, and that is, Major Frank has not dared to show her face in our circle since; and besides this, it seems to have been the cause of her grandfather retiring from the service."

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"He had attained the age to be put on the retired list," said the Captain; "and with his pension he obtained the honorary rank of General."

"Be that as it may, the General retired from the world to Castle de Werve," observed the old lady.

"Where, now, Major Frank has the command," put in the spinster.

"And spends her time in riding and shooting," added the little widow, turning up her nose superciliously.

"I venture to contradict the latter part of the assertion with regard to the shooting," said Overberg; "for the General has not renewed his shooting license and has leased the shooting over his own estates to a client of mine, who, however, leaves the hares and partridges in perfect peace."

This latter remark led to a long conversation amongst the gentlemen about the shooting and fishing in the neighbourhood, whilst the ladies set to work to sharpen their tongues on other absent victims.

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## Chapter IX.

Notwithstanding all my efforts to appear calm and unconcerned, Overberg observed that the hard judgment passed on Francis had made a deep impression on my mind. Taking me aside, he whispered in my ear—

"We will talk this subject over to-morrow morning before your departure; in the meantime don't let it trouble you. You know the proverb: 'The devil's not so black as he is painted.'"

It was easy for him to talk; but, alas! he knew not yet the reasons I had for being so deeply interested in this young lady.

I passed a restless night. In the morning, when the carriage I had ordered over-night drove up to the door, I was still debating in my own mind whether I should

go to the Werve, or tell my driver to take me to the nearest station and return to the Hague. After a few minutes, however, Overberg made his appearance, and accosted me in the following words—

“I believe I have guessed your noble intention, which is to make the acquaintance of Miss Mordaunt, and, if she please you, to remove all difficulties in the most amiable manner possible. I cannot tell you how praiseworthy, how wise and sensible, your plan seems to me; but what surprises me is that the testatrix never suggested it to you, she being a woman of such clear and sound judgment in matters of this sort.”

“She has given me such a hint—I will no longer try to conceal it from you—and it was my intention to follow her advice. But what I heard last night has quite changed my mind on that point.”

“Nonsense! Never let gossip have any influence over you. Remember that people living in a small town are possessed by the evil spirit of slander, and furthermore, that they express their opinions in a very crude manner.”

“That’s all well and good; but in a small town where every one is known by his neighbour, people would not dare to calumniate and slander each other without grounds.”

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“I will not attempt to contradict your statement; but let me remind you that certain uncommon occurrences and eccentric acts on the part of a young lady may be explained in different ways, and why should you believe the worse account of them, coloured as it certainly is by envy, hatred, and malice. I willingly confess I could not contradict all that was said about Miss Mordaunt last night; my business has always been with her grandfather, who speaks of her in the highest terms. For this reason I could not foresee that the ladies would be so severe on her conduct. Otherwise I should have avoided the subject, and made inquiries for you of people less prejudiced and more trustworthy.”

“Do you know any such people here?”

“Such people can be found. Why, in my professional career, I have so often seen the most wicked accusations burst like a soap-bubble when submitted to the touchstone of cross-examination, that now I believe nothing which I have not seen with my own eyes, or for which I have not proofs equal to the same.”

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“Then with regard to the diamonds, you have some certain proofs?” I asked.

“You are right; I was engaged in that business. The young lady required more money than the goldsmith was willing to advance on them; and they were never offered for sale unless he took such a liberty during the hour he had them in his possession. In her difficulties she came to me, her grandfather’s lawyer. I obtained the money from Miss Roselaer, as I always did for the General, and she refused either to take the diamonds or accept the interest on the money she lent; consequently the diamonds are still in my possession.”

“And do you know for what purpose this money was required?”

“It was to assist a person who dared not apply to the General (and, between you and me, the General had not a penny to assist any one with). What the relationship between them was I am unable to say. The stranger only stayed four days in the village, and I did not see him myself. Of course I have heard the flying reports. Some people say he was dressed like a gentleman, and had a gentleman’s manners; others, on the contrary, describe him as a rogue and a vagabond, who got drunk in the lowest public-houses in the place. This latter account may also be true, for, as you know, a woman’s sympathy is often bestowed on the most undeserving creatures.”

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“With regard to the coachman, you must allow her womanly sympathy does not show itself in a favourable light,” I interposed, with a certain bitterness in my tone.

“I am unacquainted with the facts of that case. Still, I fancy it is far from such a bad case as the amiable ladies made it out to be; and in your place I should not suffer it to interfere with my projected visit to the Werve. Miss Mordaunt has been accused, in my presence, of brusque manners, imprudent behaviour, and so forth; but she is renowned for her plain and straightforward dealing, which has brought her into disrepute with her female friends, they preferring to say the most impertinent things in the blindest tone possible. I am sure you will find out the truth if you ask her a plain question. Besides, a single visit will not commit you to anything, and an interview with the General to arrange matters will be absolutely necessary.”

There was no refuting Overberg’s line of argument. I confessed to myself that it

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would be unfair on my part to form an opinion until after a personal interview and further inquiries. So, accepting his advice, I stepped into the carriage, and ordered the driver to take the road to the Castle de Werve.

The morning was raw and cold, without sun, and the air was so heavy that I did not know whether to expect snow or hail. At the toll-bar my driver made inquiries about a short cut through a lane planted with poplars, which would bring us out near the “fir wood.”

As the country was very monotonous, and there was nothing to attract my attention, I sank into deep thought, and began arranging a plan for my conduct on first meeting with my cousin, a little speech to be made when I was presented to her, and so forth. But then it occurred to me that our best-laid schemes are generally thrown into confusion by the circumstances of the event: how much more likely was this to be the case in dealing with such a whimsical person as Francis? Accordingly, I gave up all such ideas as preparing myself for the occasion, resolving only to keep cool and act according to circumstances.

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In the midst of these thoughts the carriage suddenly came to a standstill, and the driver pointed out to me that the lane terminated in a half-circle—he had taken the lane on the wrong side of the wood. Whilst speaking we heard a horse galloping behind us, and in another moment it shot past us like lightning.

“That’s Major Frank!” said the driver.

“Major Frank,” I repeated, in a tone of anger and surprise. “Whom do you mean by that?”

“Why, the young lady of the Castle. They call her so in our village, when she comes to see the boy.”

Cutting short the conversation, I ordered him to find his way to the Castle as soon as possible. A few minutes later, however, he had got his carriage on such marshy ground that he was obliged to request me to walk until he could lead his horse on to a firmer place.

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## Chapter X.

Once on my legs I took a view of the surrounding country. We were on the outskirts of the wood, and separated from the ploughed cornfields by a half-dry ditch, luxuriantly overgrown with all kinds of marsh plants. On our right was a heath; on the left potato fields. There was not a soul to be seen, and on consulting my watch I found it was just twelve o’clock. Consequently all the farm labourers had gone home to their midday meal.

Suddenly we heard a peal of resounding laughter quite close at hand, only the sound seemed to come somewhat from above us. I looked up in the direction of the undulating heath; and on the top of a sand-hill, overgrown with grass, stood the person who was enjoying our perplexity.

“Major Frank!” exclaimed the driver in his shrill tone of voice, his astonishment and annoyance causing him to show little respect.

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It was indeed Francis Mordaunt herself who was mocking us. Really, I could never have anticipated such a reception.

As she stood there, some feet above me but still pretty near, I had a good view of her; and I cannot say that this first sight reconciled me to the person who had already caused me so many disagreeable emotions. Perhaps it was not her fault; but she was dressed in such a strange manner that at first sight I was doubtful whether a man or a woman stood before me. She had gathered up her riding-habit in a way that reminded me of Zouave trousers, and she had, besides, put on a wide cloak made of some long-haired material—which was doubtless very useful this sharp, cold spring day, but which, buttoned up to her throat, was not adapted to show off the beauty of her form if she was really well-shaped. Her head-gear consisted of a gray billy-cock hat with a soft, downward-bent brim, ornamented with a bunch of cock’s feathers negligently fastened with a green ribbon—just as if she really wished to imitate the wild huntsman of the fairy tale. And then, because it was rather windy, she had tied a red silk handkerchief over her hat and fastened it under her chin. She wore no veil. As far as I could judge of her appearance, she seemed to be rather delicately built and slim, with a fine Roman nose. Still, I was

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not in the humour to be agreeably impressed by a face convulsed with laughter, and bandaged up as if she had the toothache. Her laugh sounded to my ears like a provocation, and rendered me little inclined to be courteous to a woman who had so evidently forgotten all feminine self-respect.

"Listen," I cried—"listen for a moment, you who are rejoicing so much at your neighbour's distress. You would do better to direct us on our way."

"There is no way. I should have thought you could see that. Any one who enters this wood except with the purpose of driving round it, does a very stupid thing."

"And you?"

"I?" she laughed again. "I jumped my horse over the dry ditch yonder. Imitate me if you feel inclined, though I fear with your horse and carriage it will not be quite so easy. But where are you going to?"

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"To the Castle de Werve."

"To the Werve!" she repeated, descending the hill and approaching me as nearly as she could on the opposite side of the ditch. "What is your business at the Castle, sir?" she inquired, in quite another tone, no longer speaking like a "somebody" to a "nobody."

"To pay a visit to General von Zwenken, and his granddaughter, Freule Mordaunt."

"The General no longer receives visitors, and what you have to say to his granddaughter you can address to me. I am Freule Mordaunt."

"I can scarcely believe it; but, if so, may I request Freule Mordaunt to appoint a more suitable place than this. What I have got to say cannot be shouted across a ditch in the presence of a third person."

"Then you must drive back to the toll-bar. There they will direct you to the village, from which you can easily reach the Castle, if your visit is so very urgent."

"In order to give you time to get home and deny yourself to all visitors, my little Major," I thought to myself. "But now's my opportunity, and I will not let it slip me."

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So, giving orders to the driver to go on to the village and wait for me there, I took my stout walking-stick, fixed it as firmly as I could in the muddy bottom of the ditch, and reached the opposite side I scarcely know how.

"Bravo! well done!" cried Francis, clapping her hands with delight.

As I approached I raised my hat, and she saluted with her riding-whip.

"This is an amusing adventure, sir," she said, again laughing; "if you still wish to go to Werve you must cross the heath."

"Is it a long walk?"

"No, it is much shorter than by the high-road, but as you don't know the way, you run the risk of getting lost again."

"You forget that I have a claim on your company for the rest of the way."

"A claim! how do you make that out?"

"Miss Mordaunt promised me an interview; is it strange that I should seize the first occasion that offers?"

"I don't even know the way myself. My horse has lost a shoe, and I have left him at the game-keeper's, so I shall have to get home as well as I can without assistance. Have you really business at the Castle? I can assure you the General has an aversion to visitors!"

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"I wish to make his acquaintance and yours, as I am staying in the neighbourhood, and I, remember, I am related to the family Von Zwenken by my mother's side."

"So much the worse for you. At the Castle relationship is a bad recommendation."

"That I have already heard; but I am not a Roselaer, I am a Van Zonshoven, Freule—Leopold van Zonshoven," I said, introducing myself.

"I have never heard the name before. However, as you are not a Roselaer you perhaps stand a better chance of a kind reception. But is it quite certain you do not come to trouble the General about business?"

"In that case I should have sent a lawyer, with orders not to inconvenience Miss Mordaunt."

"Then you would have done wrong," she rejoined, becoming serious. "The General is over seventy, and has had a life full of trouble; and I will not try to conceal from you that he has many cares and difficulties to contend with even now. It is for this reason I desire you to tell me without reserve the object of your visit. Perhaps I can find some means——"

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"I protest to you that my greatest desire is to assist you in sparing your grandfather all annoyance."

"The sentiment does you honour, but it leads me to doubt your relationship, for it is contrary to all our family traditions."

"There are exceptions to every rule, as you know, and I hope to prove myself an exception in your family traditions."

"Then you shall be welcome at the Werve also by exception, for as a rule we admit no new faces."

"That's a pity; for I cannot think it is *your* wish to live in such isolation."

"Quite my wish!" she interposed, with a certain haughtiness. "I have had sufficient experience of mankind to make me care little for their society."

"So young, and already such a misanthrope—afraid of the world!" I observed.

"I am not so very young—I am turned twenty-six; and the campaign years, as grandfather calls them, count double. You may speak to me as though I were a woman of forty. I have quite as much experience of life."

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"Ladies talk like that when they wish to be contradicted."

"Ladies!" she cried, with ineffable contempt. "I very earnestly request you not to include me in the category of beings commonly denominated ladies."

"In which category must I put you? For, to tell the truth, at first sight I did not know what to call you."

"I believe you," she said, with a little laugh; "for to any one who does not know me I must appear very odd. But, tell me, what did you take me for at first sight—for an apparition of the wild huntsman?"

"An apparition! Certainly not; that's too ethereal. I took you for a sad reality—a gamekeeper suffering from toothache."

She seemed piqued for a moment, her cheeks coloured, and she bit her lips.

"That's rude," she said at last, and glanced at me with scintillating eyes.

"You asked for the truth," I rejoined.

"So I did; and you shall find I can endure the truth. Give me your hand, cousin; I think we shall become good friends."

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"I hope so, cousin. But don't be generous by halves: let me touch your hand, and not that rough riding-glove."

"You are a fastidious fellow," she said, shaking her head; "but you shall have your way. There."

And a beautiful white hand lay in mine, which I held a minute longer than was absolutely necessary. She did not seem to perceive it.

"But call me Francis; I shall call you Leo. The endless repetition of cousin is so wearisome," she said frankly.

"Most willingly;" and I pressed her hand again.

"Your driver will have told you he recognized Major Frank."

"That's but too true; and don't you, Francis, consider it a great insult that people dare to call you by such a name?"

"Oh, I don't mind it in the least! I know they have given me this nickname. I am neither better nor worse for it. I know, also, that I am pointed at as a Cossack or a cavalry officer by the people round, and am stared at because I dress to suit my

own convenience, and not according to the latest fashions.”

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“But a woman should try to please others in her way of dressing. In my opinion, a woman’s first duty is to make herself agreeable. Can we not show our good taste even in the simplest and plainest attire?”

She coloured a little.

“Do you imagine, then, that I have no taste at all, because I have put on this shaggy cloak to protect me from the east winds?” she demanded sharply.

“I do not judge from that single article of dress; I am referring to the *ensemble*, and one gets a bad opinion of a young lady’s taste when she wraps up her face in an unsightly red handkerchief.”

“Which gives her the appearance of a gamekeeper with the toothache,” she interposed, with a quick, bold air. “Well now, that’s easily remedied, if the wind will respect my billycock;” and hereupon she untied the handkerchief and unpinned her riding-habit.

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## Chapter XI.

As she stepped forward, the long train of her riding-habit added to the beauty of her slender figure. Now, indeed, I could see that she was not ugly, though she had done her best to render herself unattractive. It is true her features were sharp and irregular, but neither rude nor coarse. In her face there was an expression of haughtiness and firmness, that spoke loudly of conscientious strength and independent character. It was clear that she had struggled and suffered a good deal, without allowing it to rob her of her natural cheerfulness and good spirits. Her large blue eyes expressed an open-heartedness which inspired confidence. That they could gleam with indignation, or glow with enthusiasm, I had already experienced.

She walked along with considerable difficulty, for her dress caused her to trip at almost every step. I offered her my arm, but she refused it. Suddenly she stood quite still and said—

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“Forgive me, Leo, for the unmerciful way in which I laughed at you, when I saw the ‘mess’ your driver had brought you into. I was not laughing at you personally; but I am always so tickled when I see the so-called ‘lords of creation’ making themselves ridiculous, that I could not restrain my laughter.”

“Oh, I bear you no malice, Francis, on that account; but how is it you are so embittered against my sex?”

“Major Frank,” she answered, “has but too often had occasion to study the character of men.”

“That is to say, that after over-confidence in the brilliant uniforms which have proved deceptive, Major Frank has decided to revenge herself on civilians as well as military men.”

“You are quite mistaken. Major Frank is acquainted with all the ranks from corporal to general; and in civil life she has had an opportunity of studying men wearing court dress, decorations, and orders. And this is the conclusion she has come to: that discipline is the best means of bringing out whatever good there is in a man, whilst at the same time it keeps the evil within bounds.”

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“What you say is not very encouraging for your future husband, Francis.”

“My future husband!” she cried, with a bitter laugh. “Now I see you are a perfect stranger in these parts, Leopold. But you need not trouble yourself about me; I shall never marry.”

“Who knows? Circumstances may induce——”

“Me to take a husband,” she interrupted, growing indignant. “Listen, Leo: you know nothing about me, and what you think you know will have been told you by slanderous tongues. Therefore I will not take offence at what you have said; but I request you not to think so meanly of me as to believe I would sacrifice my name and my person on the altar of Mammon, and make a *mariage de raison*—the most

unreasonable and immoral union that can exist."

"Many a proud lady who once thought as you do, Francis," I answered, "has been induced by the counsel of her friends to change her state of 'single blessedness,' which is such a mark for calumny and lies——"

"And you would have me take a husband to serve as a shield against these?" she cried, vehemently. "No, Leopold van Zonshoven, when you once know Francis Mordaunt, you will find she does not fear calumniators, and that she disdains to seek protection from them in the way you recommend!"

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"Forewarned is forearmed," and I now understood that it behoved me to proceed cautiously. Still I determined to try a ruse of war. Looking her steadfastly in the face, I said—

"And suppose my visit to the Werve were expressly for the purpose of seeking your hand in marriage?"

"My hand! It is not true you come with such a purpose!" she exclaimed in a bitter tone.

"But let us suppose it to be true; what would your answer be?"

"If I thought you came with any such intentions, I should simply leave you where you are, in the middle of the heath, to find your way to the Werve as best you could. There's my answer."

And she started off as fast as she could go.

"Listen, Francis," I said, rejoining her. "If such had been my object in visiting the Castle, your answer would not stop me. I am obstinate enough myself; but, as I would not willingly wound the feelings of any lady (pardon me the use of this word), I should take good care not to make her an offer in such a brusque manner, and, above all, not until I had some hopes of receiving a favourable answer."

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"Be it so; but I must tell you I see neither wit nor humour in your kind of pleasantry."

In another instant a gust of wind carried away her felt hat, and then her net, causing her golden hair to fall over her shoulders in rich profusion. At this moment I thought her worthy to sit for a Madonna. I could not believe my eyes, or rather I could not remove my eyes from her, so much was I struck with wonder and admiration. She doubtless read her triumph in my looks, and seemed for an instant to enjoy it. Decidedly, then, she had not lost all the feminine instincts, though the time of their duration was short on any single occasion.

"Well," she said, "you are very polite. You stand as if you were nailed to the ground, instead of running after my hat."

I did not suffer her to say this twice, but, running after the ugly old hat, caught it just before it could disappear in one of the sand pits. She followed me, but unfortunately caught the train of her riding-habit in a bush, which tripped her, and caused her to fall with her beautiful locks of hair amongst the briars. At first she refused all assistance, but in the end she was obliged to let me disentangle her hair—a circumstance which annoyed her much more than the accident itself. I knelt beside her, and heaven knows with what care I loosened one lock after the other. This, however, was a work of time, as she was very impatient, and her struggles were every now and then undoing the little I had accomplished.

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"Now you see into what a predicament your precious advice has brought me; how much more practical my own arrangement was! The handkerchief looked inelegant, if you like, but it would have prevented me this trouble. Why did I swerve from my principles? Why was I led astray by other people's ideas?"

At last I could say, "You are free!" at the same time holding out my hand to assist her in rising. But no, she would have no further aid from me; and bounding up like a hart, requested me to walk on in front whilst she arranged her dress. She was not long about it, and when she overtook me the hateful handkerchief was tied round her hat again, and I had lost my right to protest against it.

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She now took my arm of her own accord, and said gaily, "This I do, Leo, to recompense you for being so generous as not to revenge yourself by laughing at me in my distress."

"Laugh at you, Francis! I was frightened."

"There was not much to be frightened about; but I was really afraid you would

mock me and pay me back in my own coin.”

As we walked on we continued to discuss the subject of female propriety, she claiming the right to live according to her own ideas, without any regard for public opinion; I maintaining that reserve and gentleness are more becoming in a woman, from every point of view, than trying to set public opinion at defiance. She, however, interrupted the conversation by pointing out the Werve to me as soon as we came in sight of it.

“Now,” she said, “I request you to tell me plainly the object of your visit to the General, before I introduce you to the house.”

“I have already told you: I wish to make the acquaintance of my mother’s relations.”

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“I shall feel better satisfied,” she rejoined, “if you will promise me not to trouble the poor old gentleman about business matters.”

I had no difficulty in conscientiously giving such a promise. Then Francis continued—

“I must also warn you the General is not alone. We have a certain Captain Rolf, an old pensioned officer, quartered at the Werve; he is of rude manners and ill-educated, for he has risen from the ranks; but he has a good heart, and my grandfather could not do without his company. Our way of treating each other may surprise you, perhaps annoy you. Even when I was a child he called me his colonel, and flew anywhere at a wink from me; and he does so still, though his movements have been rendered more tardy by his stiff legs and rheumatism. Fishing is his favourite amusement since he has been obliged to give up shooting. I employ him as my gamekeeper; and when the cook is ill, he prefers frying a beefsteak and making the soup himself, to going on short commons. In fact, he is a gastronome, and since he obtained his pension his whole time seems to be occupied with the grand question: ‘What shall we eat to day?’ And, alas! grandfather is no less interested in the same subject, so that most of their morning conversation is about the dishes to be prepared for the dinner.”

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As we drew near the manor-house Francis gently withdrew her arm from mine, and stepped on sharply as we heard the clock in the village church-steeple strike one, saying—

“I know I am being waited for impatiently, and half the garrison will have turned out in search of me.”

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## Chapter XII.

The Castle de Werve presented all the appearances of ancient opulence; but also of dilapidation dating from a long time back. There was the feudal drawbridge, immovable through long disuse, leading straight to the large gate, full of those iron rivets used in olden times as a defence against the attacks of the hatchet and pike. But the wood itself was rotting, and the rusty hinges could scarcely sustain their accustomed weight. In the tumbledown walls I could see loopholes large enough for a giant to creep through.

The house had been rebuilt in the time of the Stadtholder William III.—King William III. of England—and the rich, solemn style then in vogue had been adopted. There was a sort of rotunda in the centre, kept, relatively speaking, in better repair than the rest of the building, flanked by two wings, which seemed uninhabited, and in fact so neglected as to be uninhabitable. Most of the panes were cracked or broken, and only in some cases had the broken glass been replaced by gray paper. The aloe-trees, set out to ornament the front of the house, were planted for the greater part in cracked or broken vases.

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As Francis had remarked, before I could follow her into the house “half the garrison turned out” to salute us in the person of the Captain, whom I immediately recognized from the description I had had of him. He wore a blue jacket and trousers, a waistcoat buttoned close up to his chin, and the military black-leather collar, which he had not yet been able to dispense with. The William’s Order<sup>1</sup> adorned his breast; and he stood erect in spite of his stiff leg, which obliged him to support himself with a stick. He had placed his cap jauntily and soldier-like on one side of his head, and his entire bearing called up the idea of a military man only



half at his ease in civilian dress. Though deep in the fifties, his hair is still jet black, and the length and stiffness of his mustachios, *à la Napoléon*, indicate a constant use of cosmetics. His face is very red, his eyes brown and bold, his features rude, and his thick red lips and short round chin give him a sensual appearance. He had in his mouth a long German pipe, from which he puffed clouds of smoke, and after a military salute he accosted us in these words—

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“Well, Major, what’s this? Have you made a prisoner? or is this some one to be quartered on us?”

“A visitor for the General, Captain,” replied Francis, stepping past him, and giving me a hint to follow her.

“Had a deuced bad luncheon! Waited half an hour for the Freule; the eggs too hard, the beefsteak like leather, his Excellency out of humour—and all this because the Freule takes it into her head to ride out at inconvenient hours, and return on foot to the fortress leading the hero of this pretty adventure in triumph behind her,” growled the Captain, in a half-angry, half-jesting tone, as he followed us.

Francis turning round said—

“All this, Captain, is because your Major—you understand me, *your Major*—has had the pleasure of meeting with her cousin, Jonker Leopold van Zonshoven; let that suffice you, and if you have any more complaints, put them in your report-book.”

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After this I followed Francis through the vestibule, where a servant received us with a military salute, and showed us into an immense drawing-room hung with embossed gilt leather. Here the General was taking a nap in a high-backed easy-chair. Francis entered the room softly enough, but the loud heavy step of the Captain, who thought fit to follow us, awoke the sleeper with a start.

Instead of the *pourfendeur* I had conjured up in my fancy from old Aunt Roselaer’s accounts, I perceived a little, thin, grey-headed old man, the traits of whose face showed him to be a person of superior breeding, wrapped in a very threadbare damask dressing-gown. His nose was long and straight, his lips thin and pale, his eyes of a soft blue, with an expression of lethargy or fatigue. His white, dry hands had very prominent veins; and he wore a large signet-ring, with which he kept playing in a nervous, agitated manner all the time he was speaking.

Francis introduced me in her own peculiar way—

“Grandfather, I bring you Jonker Leopold van Zonshoven, to whom you must give a hearty welcome, for he is a curiosity in our family.”

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“In our family! Jonker van Zonshoven—ah! yes, I remember, I understand,” he said, in a surprised and embarrassed tone, which proved his recollection to be of the vaguest; but he bowed politely, and offered me his hand, which I shook cordially.

“Sit down, Jonker,” he said, pointing to a chair behind which the Captain stood as if he intended to dispute the place with me.

Francis rang the bell, and asked Fritz if the luncheon were still on the table.

The servant, with a surprised look, answered—

“It is half-past one.”

“Right, Fritz. It is the rule of the house: he who is not here at roll-call is not expected. Bring a plate of cold meat and bread into this room.”

“And a glass of port-wine for the gentleman,” put in the Captain.

When Fritz had left the room, the Captain came and stood straight before me, saying—

“Pardon me, Jonker, I must have a good look at you. There must be something peculiar in a young man who has so quickly found favour in the eyes of our Major.”

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I hesitated about giving him the answer he deserved in the presence of the General; and, besides, Francis had warned me he was a man of no education.

However, the General, speaking in a soft yet authoritative voice, said—

“Rolf, there are jests which may pass amongst ourselves, but you seem to forget we are not now alone, and you are wanting in respect to Miss Mordaunt.”

"Because I call her Major in the presence of a relation of the family! Excuse me, your Excellency, but you ought to have given me the watchword beforehand. I shall not forget again."

"It is no good, grandfather," said Francis; "at his age we cannot break him of his bad habits, though we might expect him to be respectful to the granddaughter of General von Zwenken, in spite of his having taught her her drill when a child. And now, as you have asked for the watchword of the day, Captain, attend: it is this, 'Politeness to my visitor.'"

It became clear to me that the Captain had long been indulged in his vulgar familiarities, and that I ought not to attach too much importance to them. As soon as Fritz brought in the port-wine he filled three glasses brimful; presented the first glass to me, then one to the General, and taking up his own, said in his rough, good-natured way—

"The health of our commandant, and a welcome to you, Jonker!" apparently thinking this the best amends he could make.

As soon as Francis had taken a slight repast she left the room, and, at a hint from the General, Rolf did the same.

Now that we were left to our two selves, the General, drawing himself up with dignity in his chair, said—

"A word with you, Jonker, if you please."

I bowed assent.

"But be so good as to move your chair nearer to me; I am a little deaf."

I complied with his request.

"Pardon me for asking you a question which may seem somewhat out of place. Is this the first time you have met my granddaughter?"

"The first time, General;" and I rapidly sketched an account of our meeting and walk to the Castle.

"Well, I am glad of it," said the old man with a sigh of relief. "My granddaughter is possessed of many excellent qualities, that I can truly say; but she has her peculiarities. At times she can be very brusque, and she has a foible for braving the laws of good society, and setting all the world at defiance, which has made her many enemies. It occurred to me she was now trying to make amends for some misunderstanding which had arisen between herself and you."

I assured him this was not the case, and that I felt my kindly reception to be the more flattering since Miss Mordaunt was not accustomed to flatter.

"Then explain to me," he continued, "your relationship to the family, for, though I remember having heard of a Van Zonshoven who was related to my deceased wife, it is so long ago——"

"My grandmother, General, was a Freule van Roselaer."

"She married a French nobleman, if I recollect aright?"

"A Belgian, General: Baron d'Hermaele."

"Well, yes, it was during the French occupation of the country under Napoleon I.; and in those days one did not pay so much attention to nationality. Our disagreement with Freule Sophia prevented our making his acquaintance. He settled in Belgium, and I heard afterwards that Baron d'Hermaele stood in high favour at court in the reign of King William I."

"This court favour cost him his life," I added, "for he remained faithful to his king during the Belgian Revolution; his castle near Larken was pillaged and burnt by the populace, and he himself cruelly murdered whilst defending his wife and children."

"Another fact out of those sad and confused times which I so well remember. My men were burning with rage to punish such rebels and brigands, but, alas! they were kept inactive. What became of the widow and children?"

"She returned to Holland with one son and seven daughters, of whom the eldest married my father, Jonker van Zonshoven. I am their only son."

"Then I am your great-uncle, Jonker."

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"I have made the same calculation, General, and it is for this reason——"

"You don't come to talk to me about family affairs, I hope?" he interrupted, growing uncomfortable. [101]

"But, my dear uncle, we can speak of family affairs without their necessarily causing unpleasantness."

"Hum! Well, you are a Van Zonshoven, a stranger to all the pitiful feuds which have separated me from the Roselaers. Whole treasures have been thrown away on the lawsuits they have brought against me. Francis and I are both still suffering from such losses. Look here, if you bring any painful news for Francis, or any humiliating tidings for me—I know that even the validity of my Swiss marriage is contested—I beseech you, be generous, spare her as long as possible, for she is ignorant of this fact. Perhaps, old and broken though I be by trials, I can ward off the evil day a little longer; but be sincere and tell me plainly——"

"I assure you, General, my chief desire—as I have already told Miss Mordaunt—is to save you every kind of trouble I can. I wish simply to draw family ties closer, and my most ardent desire is that a Van Zonshoven may have the good fortune to heal the wounds caused by the Roselaers."

"Many things are necessary! Much money! As we soldiers say, gold is the sinews of war—and, pardon me if I make a mistake, the Van Zonshovens are not rich." [102]

"You are not mistaken, General. My grandmother and her children had to live on the pension allowed the widow of Baron d'Hermaele, and this pension ceased with her life."

"And did the king do nothing for the daughters?"

"What would you expect from him, uncle? The only son was promoted and rewarded, but he died in the flower of his age. It was impossible for the young ladies to keep William II. in constant recollection of their father's loyalty. Besides, we decided not to petition or supplicate for favours, preferring to rely on our own energies and self-help. This principle was instilled into me whilst I was young."

"You surprise me. But is there not a Van Zonshoven Minister for Foreign Affairs in the present Government?" asked the General. "He must be a rich man, I fancy. What is your relationship to him?"

"He is my uncle; but I esteem him little. He is married to the coffee-coloured daughter of a rich Java merchant—for her money, of course. She is neither intelligent, amiable, nor educated; and indeed, has got little from him in return for her money except the right to bear his name and title." [103]

"A pitiful *mésalliance*, certainly! But for you the consequences are a rich and childless uncle?" he observed by way of a query.

"Yes, and he is already old. But, unfortunately, I am estranged from him, for I consider it beneath my dignity to beg favours from him."

The General shook his head. "There spoke the blood of the Roselaers."

"No, General, the Van Zonshovens are not vindictive, but proud. Though poor, I have always prized my independence above all things. I have lived soberly, and never indulged in pleasures above my means; consequently I have not been forced to sacrifice my liberty, which, to tell you the truth, is dearer to me than my patent of nobility."

"Bravo! bravissimo!" resounded in my ears from the bottom of the room; and it came from the deep, clear voice of Francis, who had been entering the room as I spoke these words.

"You see, Jonker," said the General, somewhat fretfully, and knitting his brows, "your style of speaking has touched my granddaughter's weak side. Her dreams are of independence, and her illusion is to be indebted to nobody." [104]

"Not my illusion, grandfather. My principle is rather to be poor and independent, and appear so; and rather to suffer privations and make sacrifices, than be guilty of meanness for the sake of supplying imaginary wants and desires which we ought manfully to resist."

The General bit his lips, shut his eyes, and sank back in his chair, as if he had received a blow from a club; but unwilling to acknowledge a defeat, after a few seconds he raised himself up and said to Francis—

"I allow that you far surpass me in bearing privations; but it would be well for you

to learn a little self-restraint. At my time of life it is hard to bear reproaches. I cannot change my way of living, though I confess you deny yourself much for my sake.”

“Come, come, grandfather, you know my words sound harsher than I mean them; but you cannot expect me to approve what angers me—such self-restraint I shall never learn.”

“That’s unfortunate,” replied the General in a bitter tone; “for what will Leopold think of us if he must listen to such reproaches at every turn.”

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“He will think, uncle, that he is on a visit to a family which is above dissembling to deceive him, and he will esteem such frankness as an honour and a privilege—”

“Well! that’s an advantage you’ll enjoy to your heart’s content, Jonker, if you stay here long,” interrupted the Captain, who had again entered the room. “Our Major has the praiseworthy custom of speaking her mind without respect of persons; and when she’s displeased, it is ‘parade and proceed to execution,’ as we say in the courts-martial.”

“Had pardons not been heard of, Captain,” retorted Francis, half in jest, half in earnest, “you would have been dismissed the service long ere this.”

“That only proves my long-suffering and patience, Miss Major; you know I permit you to treat me like a corporal would a raw recruit. I would not bear from the Prince Field-Marshal what I have borne from you.”

“Captain,” said the General, who had been listening nervously, “Captain, I thought I had given you to understand that I desired to be *en famille*.”

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“And I, General, not guessing the conversation could be so entertaining for you, came to propose our usual remedy against low spirits: a game at piquet.”

“Thank you, Captain, no cards this afternoon; I am anxious to talk to my nephew.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Victoria Cross of the Dutch.

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## Chapter XIII.

Francis ordered Rolf off in search of her riding-whip which she had lost on the heath in the morning, making sure this would keep him out of the way for a time.

“It’s no easy matter to find such a thing in the sand,” he growled, as he limped off.

“But, you know, I want it very much, and if you can find it you will do me a great pleasure,” Francis called after him.

“Well, since I need not be on *duty* with the General, I will do my best,” he answered.

“You are a cruel despot,” I could not help saying to Francis. She smiled and coloured slightly.

“Oh, Jonker, this is nothing!” sighed the submissive vassal; “when Miss Major was a child, you should have seen what I had to do and suffer.”

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“Just so,” replied Francis; “then you spoilt me, and hence your penance is so hard. Give me your hand, my good Rolf; I won’t promise you absolution, but a truce for to-day.”

The old soldier took the hand held out to him, and I saw a tear sparkle in his eye, which reconciled me to him in spite of his vulgar familiarities. He, ashamed of his weakness, tried to hide it from us by a prompt retreat.

Almost immediately afterwards he entered the room again, and approaching Francis he said—

“I know I disturb you, Freule, but it is better that I come instead of Fritz. I met the driver who brought the Jonker, at the gate, and he wishes to know at what hour our visitor intends leaving.”

Whilst hesitating about my answer, I overheard him whisper to Francis—

"I have passed the turkeys in review, and there is one just ready for the cook, but not to-day: I am sorry for *le cher cousin*."

I hastened to say—

"There is nothing I should like better than to spend the day here; and as for the dinner, I prefer to take pot-luck with my friends."

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"Well, of course you will stay to dinner, Leopold," said the General, eyeing Francis, who had not yet given her consent.

After some hesitation she said, in a decisive tone—

"We will dine early to-day; order the carriage for seven o'clock."

"You shame me with such meagre hospitality," interposed the General. "Why not invite your cousin Van Zonshoven to stay the night; he can leave early to-morrow morning?"

"Sleep here, grandfather! But you don't understand; really we are unprepared to lodge visitors."

"What!" exclaimed Rolf, with a loud laugh, "we could lodge half a company."

"Half your company!" Francis cried bitterly; "but you forget that Jonker van Zonshoven is accustomed to the luxuries of the Hague."

"To a modest chamber on the second floor, Francis; and he can sleep comfortably on a mattress of straw, if well wrapped up."

The old man was again visibly affected, and murmured gently—

"This is another caprice of yours, Francis."

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"If you are determined to stay," responded Francis, with a cold and sorrowful look at me, "I will try to find you a room where there are no broken panes. Come, Captain, never mind about the whip to-day; you must now act as my quartermaster. Forward, march;" and taking him by the arm, she led off her willing slave.

When we were once more alone, the General began—

"Believe me, she means well and kindly towards you; but as we don't reckon on visitors, you have taken us by surprise, and that's what vexes Francis. It is so difficult to procure anything in this out-of-the-way place."

"Every lady has her faults and her little caprices," I interposed.

"Yes, but others can hide them better under a little polish. Francis cannot understand our social laws; unfortunately she has not had an education suitable to her rank and station. Her own mother she never knew; and my son-in-law, Sir John Mordaunt, did not understand the kind of training necessary for a Dutch lady of position."

"Don't despair, General; who knows what effect a good husband will have on her!"

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"That's just my difficulty, Jonker; Francis would refuse to marry any man she suspected of such intentions."

"You are right, grandfather," exclaimed Francis, who had again entered the room. "Major Frank will never give up her command to an inferior; she can only endure slaves and vassals around her, and the sooner Jonker Leopold understands this, the better for him, if he has intentions of conspiring against her freedom."

This was said half jestingly; but I replied, quite seriously, that I thought Major Frank would do wrong to refuse a good husband.

Francis reddened to the roots of her hair, and then grew pale, as she answered with a forced smile—

"Well, you are not a dangerous suitor. As the General will have told you, Miss Mordaunt can only accept a very rich husband; and I think you have already acknowledged that the Van Zonshovens are not among the people who pay the highest amount of income-tax."

"But Francis!" exclaimed the General, deprecatingly.

"Well now, dear papa, that's the standard by which people are judged nowadays, and you would wish Major Frank to be sold to the highest bidder, if sold she must

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be. But come, Leopold, let me show you the grounds before dinner. Grandfather can go with us, for the wind has gone down and the sun come out, so that it is quite a mild spring afternoon."

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## Chapter XIV.

We directed our steps towards the back of the Castle, passing by the aviary, which had fallen into decay like its surroundings. The Captain had, however, turned it into a poultry-walk, and held undisputed sway over the turkeys with which he had stocked it. The General, who had come out against his will, leaned on the arm of Francis, and I walked by her side. Ascending a small rise in the grounds we came to a summer-house, whence we could obtain a splendid view of the surrounding country—a sweep of undulating heath as far as the eye could reach. Francis said this was her favourite place in the grounds, and that she never grew tired of the charming prospect; but I could see that her grandfather's thoughts were occupied about something quite different from the picturesque view. All the farms in the neighbourhood, and all the woods around, formerly appertained to the lordship of the Werve; and all these ought to have descended intact to his granddaughter, to whom he would not leave a foot of earth.

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"By the way, nephew, what has become of the six other Miss d'Hermaeles, your mother's sisters?" asked the General, breaking the silence briskly.

Francis burst out laughing.

"Grandfather beginning to take an interest in the fate of six young ladies all at once! That's too much! But he wishes to know, Leo, whether you have a chance of inheriting anything from a rich aunt," she said, displaying a quickness of perception peculiar to her. "Isn't it so, grandfather?"

I hastened to answer—

"Three of them died long ago; two others made good marriages, but they have children of their own; and one, Aunt Sophia, is maintained by the rest of the family, I contributing in proportion to my means."

"Aunt Sophia," repeated the General; "had the d'Hermaeles the foresight to make Sophia Roselaer godmother to one of their children?"

"It is possible," I answered, "but I don't know for certain; my mother seldom talked to me about her relations."

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"At any rate it appears to me she has been made heir to the property of that mischief-loving woman, Miss Roselaer," continued the General; "and probably you, Leopold, were not informed of the death, nor invited to the funeral any more than ourselves? As far as I am concerned I expected such treatment; yet I cannot understand that she should allow her hatred to deprive the only granddaughter of her eldest sister of the property."

I now felt myself on dangerous ground; but Francis came to my rescue by saying, in a tone of pleasantry—

"Neither did I ever expect anything from her; and yet, who knows, if I had liked—I have only seen her once in my life; and though as a rule people are not prepossessed in my favour at a first interview" (hereupon she gave me a malicious look), "she seems to have had no reason to complain of me;—in fact, if I had only cultivated the acquaintance, probably at this moment my name would be in her will for a good round sum."

"What! you have seen the old gossip?" interrupted General von Zwenken, "and you have never told me of it. When and where have you met her?"

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"At the beginning of this year, when I went to Utrecht on certain business about which it is not necessary to trouble cousin Leopold."

"She never likes to hear her good deeds spoken of," the General murmured to me.

"Oh, it was only a simple duty I had to fulfil; I had to consult the celebrated Dr. D. about an unfortunate woman who had lost her reason. At his door I had an altercation with his man-servant, who wished to put me off till next day under the pretext that the hour for consultation was passed, and that his master was taking

his luncheon with visitors. However, I insisted upon his taking in my card, and finally I obtained admission to the dining-room. Dr. D. politely invited me to take luncheon with them, and introduced me to two elderly ladies, one his sister, and the other his sister's friend. As I was very hungry, I accepted without ceremony. I was soon sensible that his sister's friend was observing my every motion with sharp, penetrating eyes. Her conversation was amusing. She was lively, and criticised persons and events cleverly, though with unsparing severity. This was just to my taste, and excited me to the contest, till, from repartee to repartee, we got almost to a dispute. It was my great-aunt Sophia in person, as I afterwards learnt; and just fancy her mixing up her own name in a malicious manner in the conversation, and then asking me if I knew her, and what my opinion of her was! I simply answered: 'I had heard her spoken of; that there had been quarrels between her and my relations, but that I did not think it fair, on my part, to attack her behind her back in the presence of strangers.' She answered that she approved of my conduct. The doctor, who had for some time been appearing ill at ease, now invited me to go to his surgery. After the consultation I met the old lady in the passage; she invited me to accompany her as far as the house of a friend, where her carriage would await her. I consented, but now I was on my guard, as I knew who she was; and when she invited me to spend a day with her I declined \_\_\_"

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"It was imprudent and impolite," interrupted the General.

"It was acting in conformity with the spirit of all your dealings with her, grandfather. I said I could not spend a single hour longer in Utrecht than business demanded. Before she could say more, a band of students, of that class better known outside the lecture-room than inside, began to form a circle round us, and treat us to a piece of by no means flattering criticism as to the style of our dress. It is true I was negligently dressed, far behind the fashions; and aunt's bonnet and shawl gave her much of the appearance of a caricature. I felt my blood boil, and yet I retained sufficient calmness to tell these seedling lawyers, authors, and clergymen they ought to be ashamed of themselves, as their conduct was worse even than that of street Arabs. My words took effect; one or two dropped off in silence, others stepped aside, and one of them even attempted to stammer out an apology. We were near the house of lawyer Van Beek, where Miss Roselaer was going; and as we took leave of each other she warmly pressed my hand, thanking me for my protection and presence of mind, but added that 'such conduct was scarcely ladylike in the public streets.'

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"It might have been more becoming to swoon, but such farces are not in keeping with the character of Major Frank.

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"If I had known the story would amuse you so much, grandfather, I would have told it you three months ago; but I was afraid it would be disagreeable to you to hear I had seen Aunt Sophia."

"And you have never since heard a word of Miss Roselaer?" demanded Von Zwenken, fretfully.

"No; but I have reason to suppose she wished to oblige me. I had to make arrangements at Utrecht for the proper nursing of my poor patient. The most important point was the money, and at the time I had very little; but the same evening I received a letter from Dr. D., informing me a rich friend, who desired to remain unknown, had promised to pay all the expenses. So here you have my reasons for surprise that Aunt Sophia should have included me in hatred of the family; for the rich unknown friend could be no other than herself."

The General muttered between his teeth—

"Oh, from that woman you might expect anything!"

To me this account was as a ray of light. Aunt had changed her will, after this incident, in favour of Francis, and not, it was clear, for purposes of revenge. Now I felt more bound than ever to win the love of Francis, and to marry her; and I confess my inclinations were tending in that direction. Her straightforward, upright character, her original and piquant style of beauty, were already beginning to act like a charm upon me; still it would be well not to precipitate matters, and I controlled a desire which came over me to demand her hand on the spot. There were also mysterious events in her past life which required clearing up. Besides, I had to consider how it would be possible to change her aversion from marriage, the male sex, and social life in general. And I was convinced if she once pronounced the fatal word "No," my suit was hopeless.

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## Chapter XV.

Fritz, who came up at a trot, after the usual military salute to Francis, interrupted our further conversation. He addressed her in the following words—

“Freule, the Captain sends to inquire if you have thought of the sauce for the pudding, and if you will let him have the key to the pantry?”

Turning to me she said—

“Excuse me, Leo—duty first and pleasure afterwards; my worthy adjutant reminds me I have duties in the kitchen.”

In a moment she had tripped away out of sight, and the General, rising, said—

“I must also go and dress, for I never dine in my dressing-gown.” Then calling to Fritz, he said, “Show the Jonker to his room, if it is ready.”

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“Certainly, General; I have taken up his bag.”

“So you have brought a travelling-bag?” asked the General, with a smile, and giving me an inquiring look.

“What shall I say, uncle; did I take too great a liberty in reckoning on an invitation for a few days?”

“Certainly not, my boy!” he replied frankly; “a change is very welcome to me—only try to make it all right with Francis.”

Fritz led the way up a broad oaken staircase to the first floor of the left wing, the very one which had struck me as the least habitable. I was shown into a large room that had once been well furnished, but which now appeared rather sombre, as all the shutters were closed except one, and this was only left ajar. I asked Fritz to open them, telling him I was fond of plenty of light.

“Sir, Freule gave me orders to keep the shutters closed, otherwise there would be too much light, for there are no blinds.”

“Never mind, man; open them for me.”

“Yes, but there will be a draught; we never have guests, and therefore the broken window-panes have been neglected, and there is no glazier in the village.”

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I dismissed the good fellow, whose fidelity to his mistress was evinced by his reticence.

When I had opened one shutter entirely so as to obtain sufficient light, I found the room contained a large old-fashioned bedstead, with red silk hangings; a splendid couch, the covering of which was torn in several places and the horse-hair peeping out—then, even worse, I found it had lost a leg; moreover, there was not a chair in the room I dared seat myself on without the fear of coming to grief.

In the middle of the room was a marble-topped table, standing on its three gilt bear-paws; but it was cracked in several places, and the mosaic star in the centre had almost disappeared piece by piece. A simple modern washstand, of grey painted wood with light green borders, had been placed just under an oval rococo mirror, and formed a striking contrast to these neglected antiquities.

From my window I was enjoying a view of the beautiful country of Guelderland, and forming plans for the renovation and embellishment of the fallen greatness around—always provided Francis consented—when I heard the second dinner-bell, and hastened downstairs, having been warned that the General still kept up his military habits of punctuality.

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I was very curious to see whether Francis had dressed for dinner, how she looked, &c. But, alas! my hopes were disappointed. Her beautiful hair was loosely confined in a silk net, which seemed scarcely capable of sustaining its weight. She had not changed her dress, and had only thrown over her shoulders a small faded shawl, which served to hide the white and slender form of her neck. She perceived my disappointment; in fact, her beautiful eyes regarded me with an air that seemed to say—

“Make up your mind that I am totally indifferent as to the impression I may produce on you.”



Otherwise she performed her part as hostess with exemplary zeal and great ability. She served the soup, carved the meat, and even changed the plates herself—as Fritz seemed to consider his duty done when he had placed the things on the sideboard. To my great surprise, the dinner was abundant and even *recherché*.

After the soup, which was excellent, roast beef with choice preserved vegetables was served up—“surrogate of the *primeurs*,” as the General expressed himself; then partridges in aspic and a *poulet au riz*, followed by young cabbages with baked eels, which, the Captain said playfully, had only gone into his net for my sake. As *plat doux*, we had a pudding with the wonderful sauce Francis had been called into the kitchen to make; and to wind up, a complete dessert. It was difficult for me to reconcile all this with the idea of people living in straitened circumstances. [125]

The different kinds of wine, furnished in over-great abundance and variety by the Captain, who acted as butler, completed the luxuries of the table. The wines were of the best brands, and my host and his aide-de-camp took care to call my attention to them. My habits of abstinence obliged me to exercise great moderation, and I could plainly see that they were disappointed at my want of enthusiasm.

Neither the crockery nor the table-linen was in keeping with the luxury of the courses. The former was French china, dating from the same period as the furniture and the golden leather tapestries, and had evidently suffered a good deal from rough usage and servants. It was cracked, riveted, incomplete; and modern blue ware had been purchased to supply deficiencies, thus enhancing its splendour and emphasizing the contrast. The large damask tablecloth, that represented the marriage of a Spanish Infanta, had certainly done duty when Aunt Sophia ruled as mistress of the establishment. It was exceedingly fine but worn, and the rents had not always been neatly darned. As for the silver, the speed with which Francis sent the forks and spoons to the kitchen and ordered them back, proved to me that the dozens were not complete. On the other hand, there was an abundance of cut glass, to which the Captain directed my attention lest I should overlook it, adding, however— [126]

“I do not attach much value to such things. Many a time during the campaign I have drunk beer out of a milk-pail, and champagne out of teacups; and I did not enjoy it the less for that.”

“Provided the cups were not too small,” interrupted Francis.

“But the General,” continued Rolf, without noticing the remark, “the General would rather go without Yquem than drink it out of a common glass; and as our Major (I mean Freule, the commander-in-chief) always manifests the greatest indifference in this respect, I have charged myself with the care of the General’s wine-cellar.” [127]

I neither liked nor approved the tone of the Captain’s observations; but Von Zwenken said nothing. Francis did not, however, fail to retaliate in her vehement way.

“Fie, Captain!” she interrupted. “Are you afraid Jonker van Zonshoven will not observe how great your merits as quartermaster are? If every one in this house would follow my *régime*, and drink clear spring-water, your zeal and care for the wine-cellar would be superfluous.”

I had already noticed that she drank nothing but water. The General now came to the Captain’s aid with a French expression: “Le luxe, c’est le nécessaire.”

He had drunk a good deal, and his pale cheeks were growing rosy. Francis rang for Fritz to hand round cigars to the gentlemen, and then retired to the drawing-room in spite of the furious looks of her grandfather. As the door was open, I could follow her movements in the large mirror which faced me. I saw her throw herself on the sofa, wring her hands, and bite her lips as if to suppress her sobs. The General soon dozed off, and the Captain applied himself to the cognac bottle, as he said it was necessary to warm up his stomach after eating cold fruit; so I walked over towards the drawing-room, trying to hide my cigar. Francis was disconcerted at being surprised in her disconsolate mood; but she composed herself, and said, with an attempt at a smile— [128]

“You may smoke here, cousin, if you wish to have a talk with me.” [129]

"I am not in the habit of smoking in the presence of——" (I had almost said ladies).

"Nonsense! I am not so fastidious; and you know that quite well. Shall I make you some coffee? The gentlemen yonder do not take any; they smoke and drink till——"

I interrupted her with—

"I want nothing but to talk confidentially with you for a quarter of an hour. Will you grant me that favour?"

"Certainly; take the easy-chair and sit down opposite; that is the best position for a talk."

I obeyed, and she began—

"Tell me, first of all, do you now understand why I do not like receiving company?"

"Perhaps. I venture to suppose that you wish to simplify the way of living, and that the gentlemen do not approve of it. And visitors cause expense."

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"Now, indeed, it *is* clever of you to guess after what you have just seen!" and she laughed a merry laugh. "I see I must explain matters. But let us talk about yourself, Leopold; that will change the current of my thoughts—and they want changing in my present state of mind. You see there my constant and daily society," she continued, looking towards the dining-room. "They have now reached the topmost point of their enjoyment—the General asleep with a cigar in his mouth, and the Captain absorbing his *quantum* of cognac. Afterwards he will fill his German pipe, totter off to the billiard-room, and smoke and sleep till tea-time. Come, now, as we have a full hour before us, confess yourself. Why have you not studied for a barrister?" And she fixed her large eyes on me as if she suspected that I had been rusticated.

"Simply because my good father died too soon."

"A good father always dies too soon. Even a bad one who neglects his child is a great loss. Yours left nothing?"

"Except a widow with a very small pension—too small to maintain me at Leyden, and therefore I left after one year's residence, as I wished to earn my own living and obtain comforts for my mother, who was in very weak health."

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"I admire you for that, Leo; a man who is not selfish, and can make sacrifices for his mother or his wife's sake, is a rarity. It does me good to hear such men still exist."

"Now, Francis, give me your confidence. Perhaps I can assist you in your troubles."

"Don't attempt the impossible, Leopold," she replied in a tone of profound sadness. "However, as I believe you to be loyal and generous, I will be explicit with you; and if I am deceived in you, as I have often been in others, one deception more or less cannot make much difference in the grand total. When my grandfather had obtained his pension we came to the Werve, as it was urgently necessary for us to economize. His rank as commandant in a small fortified town had necessitated our living in grand style. He had to invite the mayor and other dignitaries to his table, as well as his own lieutenants; and let me acknowledge we had both got into the habit of living in abundance and of being very hospitable; consequently we had nearly always an open table. Owing to many events and painful family circumstances, our fortune with the last few years has shrunk so visibly that it was impossible to continue our old style of living. And grandpapa at last saw things as I did. We retired to the Werve; we did not want company, and we severed ourselves from all parasites at one stroke."

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"I counted on the kitchen garden, the orchard, and the home farm (which in those days still belonged to the Werve) providing for all our wants; and I cherished a secret hope of saving money, so as one day to make some repairs and raise this castle from its state of decay."

"At first everything went on tolerably well. We came in the summer-time. We both needed rest; the splendid and varied scenery enticed us out on long rides and drives; in fact, everything combined to make us enjoy our solitude. But, alas! the autumn came with its long evenings and chilly days; the General suffered from rheumatism and could not mount his horse. Then weariness overmastered him like a plague, and I tried music and reading in vain. He is not fond of music, and he

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does not care for reading. He cannot bear to see me with a book in my hand, unless it be an illustrated book to ornament the drawing-room table. When I had read the paper there was nothing more to say. I played dominoes with him and *piquet-à-deux*. I could hardly do it any longer; but he never had enough of it. He grew fidgetty and melancholy, began to languish, and was less and less satisfied with our simple way of living. I could not bear to see him so cast down, without the means of helping him. Just about this time one of his former comrades, who had also obtained his pension, invited grandfather to visit him in Arnheim. I thought it would be a nice change, and encouraged him to go. He was quite happy and quite at his ease there, and stayed the three winter months."

"And you?"

"I stayed at home. They had forgotten to invite me; and when they thought of it, it seemed to me such a formal invitation that I made up my mind to decline it, as I had before reflected it would save a great deal of expense in ball dresses and other ways of squandering money which such visits necessarily bring with them."

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"Yet, even here, a little attention to dress would not be out of place," I interposed, seizing the opportunity to tell her my opinion on the subject.

"Oh, it does not matter for me. I can speak as a certain French woman *du temps que j'étais femme*. That time's past; what does it matter how Major Frank dresses?"

"Major Frank," I replied, "should wear a uniform suitable to her rank and the position in which she finds herself. That is no coquetry, it is only decency—seemliness."

"But, Leopold," she cried, feverishly beating the devil's tattoo with her little foot, "since I have been here I have bought nothing new, and part of my wardrobe I have given away to the daughter of a poor officer, who had obtained a place as governess in a rich family, and had scarcely the wherewithal to clothe herself decently. Now, cousin, that you are initiated into the mysteries of my wardrobe, you understand why I could not come to table in a ball costume. But don't trouble me with any more of your silly remarks about dress; let me continue."

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"My grandfather returned from Arnheim, cured of his melancholy and more deeply in debt than ever. His stay, even with a friend, had cost him much money in dress. He had had to order a new general's uniform, as he could not go into society in that of a colonel; then there were fees to servants; and, worst of all, that abominable high play which is the curse of our nation. In short, on his return he was obliged to sell the home-farm, and even this did not bring in sufficient money to satisfy his creditors. This time my grandfather solemnly vowed he would never enter society again, and he has kept his word; but he soon fell into a black melancholy, from which he is only just recovering."

"Rolf, a brave soldier, but one who, in spite of his merits, would never have obtained the rank of officer without grandpapa's protection, called upon us. He was a sort of servant in the house before I was born, making himself generally useful as only soldiers can. His sister was my nurse, my mother having died soon after I came into the world. Unfortunately, she had neither education nor character to fit her for the task. With the best intentions, she thoroughly spoiled me, a work in which she was assisted by her brother, Sergeant Rolf, who would sooner have thought of disobeying his colonel than of opposing any caprice of his 'little Major,' as he already called me. Well, when he got his pension as captain he stayed here a few days, and his company seemed to be a welcome change to grandfather; and perceiving that a third person would be an agreeable addition to our society, I proposed to him to take up his quarters here, as he could live on his pension in one place as well as another. My proposition was eagerly accepted, and I took the command, as he expresses it, whilst he did his best to cheer up the General, and the winter has passed less monotonously than I anticipated."

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"Meantime Rolf has inherited some property in North Brabant, and now he insists upon paying his quota towards the housekeeping expenses, to which I have consented for the General's sake, because he is so fond of delicacies. But you don't know how I suffer when I see them rivalling each other in the pleasures of the table, and think of the humiliation and abasement of my grandfather——"

Fritz entered with the lamp, and asked if Freule had not rung for the tea. The General and the Captain followed. The conversation languished over the tea-table, and Francis became silent; when suddenly the Captain exclaimed, pointing to her hair—

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"Ah, the lioness shakes her mane to frighten us!"

"It's true," she answered coolly; "excuse me, gentlemen."

And away she went to her own room.

"It is curious how Francis has these attacks of *nonchalance*," muttered the General.

"And just now, when we have a visitor whom she herself brought," assented the Captain.

But to change the subject the General proposed a game at cards.

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## Chapter XVII.

The Captain arranged the card-table, whilst Fritz removed the tea-things. We took our seats, and the General, as I thought, fixed the counters tolerably high.

The old man seemed to undergo a thorough change the moment he held the cards in his hand. His dull, sleepy eyes brightened with intelligence and sparkled with enthusiasm. Every limb moved; the tips of his fingers trembled, and yet they still held the cards firmly whilst he examined them to calculate, with mathematical precision, what was wanting in ours. His pale cheeks flushed a deep red, his nostrils expanded or contracted according to the chances of the game; and the melancholy man, who usually sat with his head bowed down as though overburdened, was of a sudden seized by a spirit of audacity, of rashness, of foolhardiness, that not seldom gained him splendid success, and reminded me of the saying, "Good luck is with the rash man." It certainly is with the audacious player.

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As for myself I made many blunders, which greatly amused my companions. I had already lost a considerable sum, when the door opened and Francis appeared in evening costume.

I threw down my cards on the table to offer her a chair. The General, who sat with his back to the door, looked at me angrily, whilst the Captain cried—

"Our Major in full dress."

"What strange whim is this?" growled the General, with difficulty suppressing his anger, for he had an excellent hand of cards this time. "The whole day you have gone about like a Cinderella, and now——"

"The fairy has come, and I appear as a princess," replied Francis.

"And the famous glass slipper is not wanting," I said, admiring the beautiful little slippers peeping out from under her dress.

"Perhaps; but I will take care not to lose it."

"Why not?" I asked, looking fixedly at her.

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"Because I will not make the romance of an hour a question for life."

"All you are saying to Francis may be very gallant and witty, nephew," cried the General, "but it is not polite to leave the card-table in the midst of a game."

"If the Freule would join us we could play quadrille," said Rolf.

"Thanks, Captain, I prefer playing the piano, if it does not disturb you."

Her playing was like herself, fantastic and *bizarre*; gradually, however, it became sweet and melancholy, and moved me almost to tears. My thoughts were with the music, and I lost every game afterwards. The General was furious, and let me perceive it. I was about to pay my debt, when Francis entered precipitately, and said in a decided tone—so decided, indeed, as to displease me—that I should not pay. I answered in the same tone, and to cut short all arguments I placed the money on the table. She then tried to snatch out of Rolf's hand the note I had given him. I told her I thought her interference very unbecoming.

"Oh, very well; it's all the same to me if you wish to be plundered."

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And with this she returned to the piano; whilst the General, who seemed to gloat

over his gains, remained silent during this little scene. It gave me a painful insight into his character. I pitied the old man, who played not for amusement but for the sake of money, and would take it in large or small sums from a poor relation or a richer man.

But at the same time, as I went to join Francis at the piano, I thought my money well spent in discovering the General's weakness, which had so influenced his granddaughter's past life.

"Will you play?" she asked, brusquely.

"I don't feel disposed."

"As you like," she said, turning to the instrument and striking the keys as if she would break them.

I took up an old newspaper and pretended to be reading it.

In the end she played a prelude, and then began the air of Bettly in the *châlet*—

Liberté chérie,  
Seul bien de la vie,  
Règne toujours là!  
Tra la, la, la, tra la, la, la!  
Tant pis pour qui s'en fâchera!

I threw aside the paper, and, approaching the piano, I whispered—

"Do you remember how this charming little opera ends?"

"Certainly, like all other pieces suitable for the theatre; but in real life it is just the contrary, and I like reality."

Fritz came to announce supper. The gentlemen were cheerful, the Captain noisy and jovial; Francis only gave short and dry answers, and showed me her ill-humour by only giving me the tips of her fingers when she wished us all good-night.

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## Chapter XVIII.

Unromantic though it may sound, I must confess to having slept well on the first night I spent under the roof of my mother's ancestors. Sleep surprised me whilst I was reflecting on the strange and incomprehensible character of Francis. Proud, generous, noble-hearted, quick-witted, beautiful—and yet with all her charms (which I could feel had already begun to work upon me) spoiled by a detestable education, by the manners of a sutler and a rudeness of the worst kind. And then, in addition to all this, there was the question of her past life which I had heard painted in such black colours. It seemed doubtful whether Major Frank could ever become Lady Francis van Zonshoven.

When I awoke the sun was streaming through the one window whose shutters I had purposely left open, with the intention of taking an early morning walk. I crept silently down the stairs so as not to awake anybody, but I met Fritz in the vestibule, and he made his military salute in silence. The hall door was wide open. I took the direction of the home-farm, where I hoped to obtain a glass of new milk, and draw the tenants out a little about the inhabitants of the Castle—one in particular.

I had not gone very far before whom should I see coming from the farm but Francis herself, with a basket of fresh eggs.

After a moment's hesitation I asked—

"Are we again good friends?" For I had an idea she would have taken another path if she had seen me a little sooner.

"I never knew we had ceased to be so," she answered, colouring a little.

"Hem! Towards the close of the evening, in spite of what you may say to the contrary."

"Say, rather, in spite of myself. Believe me, Leo, I was not morose out of caprice; I

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was troubled and anxious. I saw my manner displeased you, but I was afraid that to flatter grandfather's weakness you were suffering yourself to become his dupe."

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"And even in that case I could not permit you to interfere."

"You had told me you were poor, that you must economize, and then to squander your money in such a way in our house—it seemed to me like card-sharpping."

"No, no; nothing of the sort. But supposing it had been, you have tact enough to understand that it was beneath my dignity to take the money back."

"That's true, I am of your opinion; but I warned you beforehand that my manners were bad."

"I think it less a question of bad manners than a certain arrogance, a certain despotism——"

"Well, then, pardon the arrogance, the despotism," she said jestingly; "still, if I confess you were in the right and that I deserve correction, will you on your part acknowledge that you are making somewhat too much ado about a little mistake?"

"But you, who are so proud, how can you suppose that a man will consent to be protected by a woman?"

"Again you are right, Leopold; such a man would be like so many others I know."

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"Pardon me, Francis; our friendship is like a tender plant, and we must cultivate it so as to prevent its taking a crooked turn."

"If you regard our friendship in such a serious light," she resumed, whilst a slight blush suffused her cheeks, "I will capitulate on condition that our little quarrel of last night be forgotten and forgiven."

I felt myself under the charm again, and seizing her hand in a transport of joy, I covered it with kisses.

"Leo, what are you doing?" she cried, pale and with tears in her eyes.

"Sealing the bond of our friendship."

"Leo, Leo! you know not what you do," she said softly; "you forget to whom you are speaking—I am Major Frank."

"I will have no more of Major Frank; my cousin Francis Mordaunt must suffer me to offer her my arm." And taking her hand again, I gently drew her arm within mine. She submitted in silence, with a singular expression of dejection on her face.

"I feel it will do me good to talk to you for once in this way, though it may be the first and only time. Where are you going, Leo?"

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"To the farm yonder; I see you have been there already for eggs; let me carry the basket for you."

"No, thank you. I had not reckoned on the eggs, but the good people insisted upon my taking them; I went to see a patient."

"A patient! Do you play the doctor?"

"I do a little of everything; but the patient in question is a dog, a dear, faithful creature, my poor 'Veldher,' who has broken his leg, and will suffer no one to touch him but myself. Another trouble I have brought on myself; and yet, if the others could be remedied as easily!" she said, with a profound sigh.

She became pale as death, her lips quivered, and, withdrawing her arm from mine, she stood still, covering her face with her hands as if she would force back the tears already rolling down her cheeks. I remained by her side, and after a pause I said, with gentle earnestness—

"Tell me what has happened, Francis; it will be a relief to you and ease your mind."

"Yes," she resumed, calmly, "I must confide my sufferings to some one, but not now. I will not spoil our morning walk by calling up such a frightful scene. I can myself scarcely understand how it is possible that I, who cannot bear to see dumb creatures suffer, have to reproach myself with the death of one of my fellow-men."

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"I beseech you to tell me all, trusting in me for my sincerest sympathy."

"Not now," she cried; "what good would it do? It would only embitter the few

minutes we have to spend together.”

“May I help you with a word it seems to cost you trouble to pronounce? Is it not a certain unfortunate incident with regard to your coachman?”

“Just so, that’s it,” she replied, assuming her defiant and bitter tone. “If you wish to know more about it, ask the people at the farm—they know all the particulars.”

“I shall take good care not to go making inquiries into your secrets behind your back, Francis.”

“My secrets!” she exclaimed, her voice quivering with indignation. “There is no secret in the matter. It is a question of a dreadful accident, which happened on the public high-road in the presence of a crowd of spectators attracted by the noise; but the occasion was not lost to set public opinion against me. Was it not Major Frank, who never acted like anybody else—Major Frank the outlaw! It would have been a pity to let such an opportunity of blackening her character pass. I ought to have reflected that you would have heard the story; and very likely you are come here ‘to interview’ the heroine of such a romantic adventure. It would be a pity you should lose your pains. There’s the farm—go straight on and ask the people to tell you all about the affair between Major Frank and her coachman Harry Blount; both the man and his wife were witnesses. And, Jonker van Zonshoven, when they have satisfied you, you may return to the Werve to take your leave, and return as you came.”

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And off she ran, without giving me time to answer, leaving me in a state of terrible confusion.

One thing at last seemed clear to me; I had lost her for ever. Should I follow and overtake her? She appeared resolute to tell me no more. Yet I must know more! I could neither stay at the Werve nor go away until my doubts were cleared up.

I went on to the farm, and was soon served with a glass of milk. The farmer’s wife seemed to know all about my visit, and thought it quite natural for the Freule to send me there for a glass of new milk. She was loud in her praises of the Freule, said her equal was not to be found in the whole aristocracy, “so familiar and kind-hearted, but at times flighty, and then she goes off like a locomotive”—she pronounced it “*leukemetief*.” But it would be impossible for me to reproduce her Guelders dialect; and, to confess a truth, I had myself sometimes great difficulty in understanding her.

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She showed me the farm and the dog, a splendid brown pointer who allowed me to stroke him, probably for his mistress’ sake. Once the good farmer’s wife had loosened her tongue, she rattled away with great volubility—

“Yes, she was sorry the General was no longer their landlord; but Overberg was not a bad fellow—he had made many repairs, and even promised to build a new barn which the General would never consent to. It was a pity for the man! A good gentleman, but he took no interest in farming; the whole place must have gone to wrack and ruin if the General had not agreed to sell it before it was too late. The Freule was sorry, for she liked farming; she had learned to milk, and talked to the cows just as if they were human beings. And horses—yes, Jonker, even the plough horses, before they go out into the field in the morning, she talks to them. My husband was groom to her grandfather, in his youth; I think I can see the greys she used to drive with so much pride, and Blount the coachman at her side, as proud as a king, with his arms folded, and looking as if the team belonged to him. Oh dear, yes! And now all that grandeur has disappeared. The beautiful carriage-horses are sold, and the Freule has only her English horse which my husband stables and grooms for her. What a sin and shame it is when the gentry fall into such decay! And the family used to be the greatest in these parts, and good to their tenants. My parents and grandparents always lived on the estate; but oh, oh! since the marriage of the eldest Freule Roselaer, they have never prospered. What can I say? ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand,’ as the Scriptures tell us. The Jonker has certainly heard of all these things?”

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“Enough, Mrs. Pauwelsen, more than enough,” I responded, for the good woman’s chatter was becoming insupportable. I hastily took my leave of her and arrived just in time for breakfast; in fact, I was in the breakfast-parlour before either the Captain or the General. Francis was alone, but when she saw me she left the room under the pretext of seeing if the tea-water boiled.

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“Stay, Francis—I think I have a right to a kinder reception.”

“On what do you ground your right? Have you now satisfied your curiosity?”

“I know nothing, Francis; I asked no questions.”

"Asked nothing! on your word of honour?"

"I have not asked *two* words, Francis. I did not ask, because I did not want to hear anything."

"Forsooth! You have shown more self-control than I thought a man capable of."

"Are the women so much our superiors in this respect?"

"If it be necessary, we can keep quiet."

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## Chapter XIX.

The Captain made his appearance, and put an end to our conversation, without for a moment being aware how unwelcome his presence was to me. I could scarcely give a civil answer to his question—

"Slept well, Jonker?"

He went on, however, in his jovial tone—

"The General will be here directly."

And, indeed, the General's entrance followed like an echo to the words, and the breakfast began.

Francis was silent and preoccupied—yet she gave me a look as if she regretted her want of confidence in me—making all sorts of mistakes. The General's tea was sweetened twice over, and the Captain found he had no sugar in his, a defect which he remedied as furtively as possible, whispering to me—

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"Our Major's got out on the wrong side of the bed this morning. We must take care, or the orders of the day will be severe. She——"

"But Francis! What's the matter with you today; the eggs are too hard," growled the General.

"What a pity, just when we have a visitor," sighed the Captain; "otherwise they are boiled to perfection."

"By the way, Leopold, what hour is your carriage ordered for?" interposed the General.

"Well, uncle, I left it to the Captain," was my reply.

As we spoke a carriage drove up, and Francis rose from the table to look out of the window.

"It is indeed too early," said the General, reproachfully, to Rolf.

"Wait a moment, Excellency," replied Rolf, with a roguish twinkle of the eye; and he walked over to the window where Francis stood. Then with a loud laugh he said, "The Jonker left the matter in my hands, and perceiving he would like to stay a little longer with us, I simply sent off to Zutphen for his luggage."

It was now my turn to speak, and I asked Francis if she would keep me there a few days longer. Her answer, however, was in the negative.

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"Leave at once; it is better for both of us."

In the meantime the Captain, like a worthy major-domo, had not only assisted in bringing in my box, but also a number of packages, bottles, tins, &c., which he spread over the table, and clapping the General on the shoulder, as he said—

"Now, what says your Excellency; have I not made a splendid foraging party?"

"No more of your 'Excellency' and insolent nonsense," burst out Francis, her eyes striking fire and her cheeks burning with rage. "You clearly forget, you d——d rascal, that you are an inferior; otherwise you would not dare to act like this. Bless my soul, what a foolish throwing away of money is this—*perdrix rouges, pâté-de-foie-gras*, all kinds of fish in jelly, all kinds of preserved fruit. Why, it looks as if you were going to start a business here. Why have you brought all these useless



dainties again?" And she struck the table with her clenched fist till the pots and bottles danced again. "The General ought to turn you out of doors; and he would if his tongue and sense of honour had not grown dull."

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"Francis, Francis!" murmured Von Zwenken in a pitiful tone.

"No, grandfather," she continued, more loudly and rudely, "it is a shame, and if you had the least fortitude left you would put a stop to such extravagance."

"Major, Major!" interposed Rolf, deprecatingly.

"Silence, you miserable epicure—I am no longer your major; I have had enough of your quasi-pleasantry. If I had my will all this should be changed. But I have lost my authority; you let me talk——"

"Scream, you mean," corrected Von Zwenken, with a quivering voice.

"And you go on just the same," resumed Francis, pitching her voice still higher. "But I will not suffer you to take such liberties any longer; and if grandfather does not call you to order, I will myself put you out of doors, and all your delicacies with you."

"For heaven's sake, Francis, calm yourself," said Von Zwenken; "remember that Jonker van Zonshoven is a witness of your unseemly conduct."

"All the better. The Jonker chooses to become our guest, and he shall see and know into what a mean and miserable a household he has entered. I will put no blind before his eyes."

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"There is, however, a difference between trying to blind people, and tearing off the bandages from the sores in this way, Miss Mordaunt," I replied, with emphasis.

"Possibly, Jonker; but I cannot hide my meaning in fine words. I must speak plainly. I would rather live on bread and water than be beholden to another for these luxuries."

With this she left the room, giving me a defiant look, which I returned by a shake of the head, to signify how much I disapproved of her conduct and the intemperance of her language.

Whilst we stood staring at each other, we three gentlemen, in a state of stupefaction, she just put her head in at the door and said—

"Captain, you will attend to the housekeeping duties to-day; I am going for a ride."

"At your service, Commandant," answered Rolf, bringing his hand to his cap in military fashion.

I could not help expressing my amazement at the coolness with which he treated the whole affair.

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"What could I say, Jonker; such outbursts are not new to me. I saw this morning that the weather-glass stood at storm. The quicker and more violent the storm, the sooner it is over; and you know an old soldier is proof against weather."

"I am glad I warned you beforehand, nephew, of my granddaughter's temper," said the General, with a deep sigh, without raising his head to look at me. "Once she's got an idea into her head, there is no opposing her; she'll drive through anything, like a man on his hobby-horse; she never reasons."

I thought to myself, she reasons only too logically for you; and he evidently felt it, for throughout the whole scene he had sat with his head down, nervously playing with his ring.

"Come, General, don't be cast down," said Rolf, cheerily: "we'll maintain our alliance against the common foe, and the wind will change again."

As he spoke he unfolded a long, small parcel; it contained a riding-whip. "I am afraid the moment is inopportune," he said; "and yet she will need it. Who knows but she'll accept my present?"

"I hope not," I said to myself; "that would lower her in my esteem."

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"She deserves to be chastised with it," interposed the General, now giving vent to his pent-up rage.

"Yes, Excellency, that we ought to have done twenty years ago. It was a mistake to promote her to the command before we had taught her the discipline."

"A great mistake," sighed the General.

Rolf now set to work to attend to his housekeeping duties, and I excused myself under the pretext of having letters to write; for I had a great wish to be alone and reflect on all I had seen and heard this morning.

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## Chapter XX.

Once in my room, I threw off my coat, loosened my collar, and made myself quite comfortable before commencing a letter to Overberg.

Suddenly there came a polite rap at my door, and, when I opened it, who should stand before me but Major Frank in person. She was dressed in her riding-habit, and brought me an inkstand, which she placed on the table, then took a chair quite at her ease, though she could see I was not pleased at being surprised in my shirt-sleeves. However, I put on my coat and demanded the object of her visit, as I scarcely believed her sole object was to supply me with an inkstand; and I pointed out to her I had got my own writing-case with me. My freezing manner seemed to disappoint her, so she said—

"I wished to ask a favour of you, but I see I disturb you."

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I was still silent.

"Have you a strap amongst your luggage which I can use as a riding-whip? You know I have lost mine."

"I can lend you my ruler. Will that do?"

She grew very red, and after a pause she said—

"I see you are in no humour to render me a service."

"I am always ready to serve a lady who exercises the privileges of her sex. Why did you not send for me, if you wished to ask me anything?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, in an injured tone, "my want of etiquette causes your ill-humour. I have come into your room. Well, pass it over—you know I am so little of 'a lady.'"

"That's only too true, Major."

"Major!" she repeated angrily, opening her large eyes in astonishment. "I thought you disliked my nickname."

"Not since I have seen the soldier in action. But I should like to know to which class of majors you belong, tambour-major or sergeant-major? For I believe the command of a regiment is usually given to a man of refinement—to a person, in fact, who can make himself respected by his gentleman-like behaviour and dignity; but after the scene I witnessed this morning—"

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"Leopold!" she cried, deadly pale, her lips quivering, "this is a personal insult. Do you mean it as such?"

I was surprised at the change, for I had expected her to wreak her anger on me now. But she sat quite still, as if nailed to her chair; so I continued—

"My remarks only apply to the disagreeable character it pleases you to assume."

Still no answer. And I began to be embarrassed in my turn, which embarrassment was only increased by her breaking out in a plaintive tone—

"Leopold, you strike deeper than you suppose."

"Francis," I cried, changing my tone, "believe me, it is not my intention to wound you; I wish to cure you."

I was going to take her hand, when she sprang up as if she had received an electric shock, and said in her bitterest tone—

"I will not be cured by you; I am what I am, and don't you waste your precious time on such a disagreeable creature as you think me to be."

"Oh, Francis! I am not deceived in you, and I will try to cure you in spite of yourself. When you made such a terrible scene in my presence this morning, I understood you. It meant this: He is staying here to study the character of Major Frank; well now, he shall see it in all its rudeness and insufferableness, and we shall see how long he will stay in spite of me. Miss Mordaunt, I have seen through your intentions, and I am not to be frightened away by the rude mask you have put on."

"A mask! I am no masker!" she cried, stamping her foot with rage. "You, Jonker van Zonshoven, come from the Hague, a town full of maskers, to tell me this, me whose chief defect or merit—which you like—is to have broken with all social hypocrisies, me whose chief pride is to speak my mind plainly without regard of persons. I did not think it necessary to measure my words in your presence; it appeared to me you had made yourself one of the family, and I thought it best you should know the relationship in which we stand to each other."

"Just so," I replied, smiling. "You acknowledge that in raising your voice several notes too high when you gave those two humiliated men a piece of your mind, your real object was to drive a third person out of the house. Be sincere, Francis, confess the truth."

I tried in vain to look her in the face whilst I spoke. She had turned her head away, and was kicking the leg of the table.

"I observe, and not for the first time, that you can be disagreeable when you like," she remarked, after a long pause.

"I confess it; but an evasion is not an answer, Francis."

"Well then, yes, it is true; I wished you to leave for your own sake. But never believe, Leopold, whatever stories you hear about me, that I am deceitful, that I would play a part. I was myself when I made the scene—violent, angry, and burning with indignation. I have my whims and fancies, that I know; but I never feign—that would ill become me; for, I may say, I have too much good in me to act falsely. Yet there are so many contradictory feelings in me that I sometimes stand surprised at myself. And let me tell you, Leo, I came here to seek consolation from you, but your tone and your words have bitterly disappointed me, so much so that for a moment I have asked myself whether you were one of those snobs in patent-leather boots, who, while expressing horror at an ungloved hand, are yet not afraid of soiling its whiteness by boxing your wife's ears. Because I did not observe the form of sending a servant to ask you to come to my room, you receive me as you did, and repulse me with mocking words!"

It was now my turn to feel piqued, and I should have answered sharply had I not succeeded in controlling myself.

"Pardon me, Francis, I should consider myself the greatest of cowards to strike a woman; but it was no question of a woman just now. We were speaking of Major Frank—Major Frank who is angry when reminded of the privileges of the fair sex, because he will not be classed amongst 'the ladies,' and who, in my opinion, ought not to be surprised when, after his own fashion, one tells him the truth roundly, and without mincing matters."

Francis listened this time without interrupting me. She was staring at the panes of the window, as if to put herself in countenance again; her paleness disappeared, and, turning round, she said, without anger, but with firmness—

"I confess, Leopold, it is not easy to contradict you; and now I think we are quits. Are we again good friends?"

"There's nothing I desire more ardently; but, once for all, with whom? with Major Frank or——"

"Well, then, Francis Mordaunt asks for your friendship."

She offered me both her hands, and her eyes filled with tears she could no longer keep back. How gladly I would have kissed them away, and pressed her to my heart and told her all! But I could not compromise my commencing victory.

"Should I have spoken to you in this way, Francis, if I had not been your sincere friend?"

"I see it now, and I have need of a sincere friend. Well then, the Captain is ruining himself for our sakes; and grandfather, in a most cowardly fashion, lends himself to such doings. Is it not horrible?"

"It is very wrong, I admit."

"Now, suppose the General were to die—I should be left shut up in this place for life with the Captain. When he has rendered himself poor for our sakes, I cannot send him away. Now do you understand I had reasons for being angry this morning?"

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"That you had reasons, I don't dispute; but the form——"

"Come, come, always the form!"

"I don't say the form is the main thing, but a woman who gives way to such fits of violence puts herself in the wrong, even though she have right on her side. Just think for a moment what a scene if the Captain had retaliated in the same coarse language of the barracks, which he has probably not forgotten."

"I should like to see him try it on with me!"

"However, he had a perfect right to do so. I agree you are right in principle; but let me beseech you to change your manner of proceeding. The gentleness of a woman is always more persuasive than the transports of passion. You have told me your early education was neglected; but you have read Schiller?"

"Die Räuber," she replied, tauntingly.

"But not his 'Macht des Weibes,' nor this line—

'Was die Stille nicht wirkt, wirket die Rauschende nie!'"

She shook her head in the negative.

"This part of your education has been much neglected."

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"I will not deny it."

"But it is not yet too late. Will you listen to my advice?"

"Not now; I have already stayed too long here, and—and—you stay at the Castle ——"

"As long as you will keep me, Francis."

"Well, stay as long as you can—that is, if you can fall in with our ways. I am going out for a ride; I need fresh air and movement."

"*Apropos* the service you came to ask of me—the strap?"

"Oh, I shall pluck a switch. The Captain came to offer me a whip, and——"

"And you would rather accept it at my hands," I said, laughing.

"No; but I should like to borrow ten guilders of you for a couple of days."

I handed over my purse, and told her to take out of it as much as she required. What a strange creature! What a comic conclusion to our battle!

I also felt as if a little fresh air would do me good, and so I walked off to the village post-office with my letter to Overberg.

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## Chapter XXI.

Downstairs I met the General ready for a walk, and he offered to accompany me. He had also a letter for the post, which was a secret to be kept from Francis; and he expected to find a packet awaiting him, which could not be entrusted to a servant. The packet was there amongst the letters marked *poste restante*; but when he had opened it with precipitation, a cloud of disappointment covered his face, and he heaved a heavy sigh.

"Don't say anything to Francis about the packet," he said to me, as we walked back from the post. "Such business I must manage unknown to her; she does not understand these things, and she would not agree with me; and with her temper—at my age I have great need of quiet—that you comprehend. The Captain is entirely indebted to me for his rank, and it is but natural he should pay me some

little attention. Yet you heard how my granddaughter took the matter up this morning. Instead of being content with me for retiring to this wilderness of a place, which I did to please her, she does nothing to render my life supportable."

"And yet the Werve is beautifully situated, uncle."

"I agree with you there; but when one must give up all field sports, this becomes a very isolated place. The village offers not the slightest resource, and the town is too far away."

"Why don't you sell the Castle, uncle?"

"Ah, my dear boy, for that I must have money, much money; and that I have been in want of all my life. There are so many mortgages on the Castle that nobody would give the sum necessary to pay them. Besides, the person who bought it would like to possess the neighbouring estates. My sister-in-law, who possessed the Runenberg estates bordering on my property, wished to buy it, but I refused her; family hatred would not suffer me to make room for her. Thank heaven, she's gone. She instituted proceedings against me about a strip of land of no real value to either of us; and the lawsuit cost me thousands of guilders. She won, as a matter of course, and then laid claim to a small bridge which connected the land in question with my grounds. Again I lost my money and my case; and now I must make a long round to reach places quite near, because the use of the bridge is forbidden me. Oh, that woman has been the curse of my life!"

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"But to come back to the question. Overberg has commissioned me to say that the heir to the Runenberg is likely to make you an advantageous offer for the Werve."

"It could be done privately—as in the case of the farms? Overberg arranged that for me—and there are reasons for avoiding a public sale," cried the old man, brightening up with a ray of hope.

"Yes, Overberg said as much; the only question was whether you could be induced to sell it."

"For myself, yes, with all my heart. But Francis—there's the rub! She has an affection for this old rats' nest, for the family traditions, and for heaven know's what; nay, even for the title which its possession carries with it. God bless the mark! She has got it into her head that at some future day she will be Baroness de Werve; and it is an illusion of hers to restore this old barrack. But her only chance of doing it is to make a rich marriage. Formerly she had chances enough amongst the rich bachelors, but she treated them all slightly; and now we see nobody in this lonely place."

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"But you do not need her permission to sell the Castle?"

"Legally I do not require it; but there would be no living with her if I sold it without her consent. Besides, she has a right to be consulted. When she came of age I had to inform her that her mother's fortune was nearly all spent. It was not my fault. Sir John Mordaunt kept up a large establishment, and lived in English style, without English money to support it; for he was only a second son, and his captain's pay was not large. A little before his death he lost an uncle, to whose property and title Francis would have succeeded if she had been a boy. Shortly after this event my son-in-law died of apoplexy, and I was left guardian to Francis. My evil fate pursued me still, and being in want of a large sum of money to clear off a debt, which would disgrace the family if not paid at once, Francis generously offered me her whole fortune. I accepted it, as there was no alternative, but only as a loan; and promised to leave the Werve to her at my death."

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"But Francis is your only grandchild—or stay, I have heard you had a son, General; has he children?"

"My son is—dead," Von Zwenken answered, with a strange kind of hesitancy in his voice. "He was never married so far as I know—at least, he never asked my consent to a marriage; and if he has left children I should not acknowledge them to be legitimate. In short, you now understand why I cannot sell the Castle without Francis' consent; after my death my creditors cannot take possession of it without reckoning with her."

It struck me that Aunt Sophia had never foreseen this, and the mine she had been digging for Von Zwenken would have blown up Francis in the ruins if things had been allowed to take their course. I had, in fact, at my side, a type of the most refined selfishness, profoundly contemptible, recounting to me his shameful scheming under the cover of a gentlemanlike exterior and a polite friendliness, which might deceive the shrewdest man alive. Could I any longer wonder why Francis had so great an aversion to outward forms and ceremonies.

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"But," I resumed, "are you not afraid that after your death your granddaughter will be sadly undeceived, and perhaps cheated out of her all by your negligence."

"What can I say, *mon cher*? Necessity knows no law; and I still hope to better my fortune before the end comes."

"At his age, by what means?" I asked myself.

Then I thought of the packet he had been to fetch from the post-office. I believed I had seen it contained long lists of numbers; they were certainly the official numbers of some German lottery. The unhappy man evidently rested all his hopes on this expedient for re-establishing order in his affairs; and probably invested every penny he could scrape together in such lotteries. I thought him an idiot to trust to any such means.

"Nephew," he exclaimed, briskly, and with vivacity, as if a bright idea had struck him, "if it be true Overberg intends to treat with me about the sale of the Castle, would it not be well for you to break the subject to Francis, just to sound her? It appears to me you have some influence over her; and the greatest obstacle would be removed if you could change her fixed ideas on the point."

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"I will do so, uncle."

"You can make use of this argument, that the company of the Captain would become less of a necessity for me if I were in some town where other society is to be found."

Fortunately I did not need to answer him: we were at home, the luncheon bell was ringing, and the Captain came out to meet us, jovial as ever. Francis had not returned, and we took luncheon without waiting for her. Only at dinner-time did she put in an appearance. Her toilette was simply made, but she was dressed in good taste, and her beauty brought out to perfection. I was charmed. She seemed to tell me in a silent way that Major Frank had given place to Miss Mordaunt. She was quiet and thoughtful at dinner, and did not scold the Captain, who watched all her movements with dog-like humility. She paid much attention to the General, who seemed absent and out of sorts, for he only tasted some of the dishes. The dinner itself was a much simpler affair than on the preceding day; yet there was sufficient, and one extra dish had been made specially for Von Zwenken, who did not ask for the finer sorts of wine, but made up for this want by drinking two bottles of the ordinary wine without appearing any the worse for it.

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The only difference between him and the Captain was, that unlike the latter, he did not frankly confess that he lived to eat, and that his belly was his god. I began to feel a most hearty contempt for this grand-uncle of mine, and more especially when I reflected on the conversation we had had during our morning's walk.

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## Chapter XXII.

Dinner over, I did not hesitate about leaving the gentlemen to themselves. I declined a cigar, and followed Francis to the drawing-room. Rolf soon joined us, and demanded humbly—

"What says my Major—do I not deserve a word of praise?"

"Yes, certainly," she replied, but her face clouded.

Guessing the reason, I whispered to the Captain—

"Don't you perceive you annoy my cousin by always addressing her by that hateful nickname? Can't you see by her elegant dress she desires to appear herself—Miss Mordaunt?"

"Indeed I am a blockhead not to pay better attention; but the truth is, Jonker—excuse me, Freule—the custom is such an inveterate one."

"You and I must break with old customs, Captain," she said softly, but with emphasis, "for we have been on the wrong track—have we not, Jonker?"

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"May I say one word," interposed the Captain, "before the Freule and the Jonker begin to philosophise; should the General come in I cannot say it. You know the day after to-morrow is the General's seventy-sixth birthday. I had intended the

celebration to be a brilliant affair; but when I hear of wrong tracks, changes, and such farrago, I begin to fear all my plans will fall through."

"Oh! was that the reason you brought in all those dainties this morning?"

"Yes, and I thought the Jonker would be an agreeable addition to our party."

"I give you full leave to arrange it all in your own way, Rolf. Grandfather must be fêted."

"Hurrah! of course!" he cried merrily; and off he went to make his arrangements, carefully shutting the folding-doors behind him so as to isolate us from the dining-room.

I was just going to compliment Francis on the change in her style of dressing, when she complained of the closeness of the room, and skipped off into the garden. Left thus to my own resources, I lit a cigar and walked out in front of the house, where I soon espied my lady; and when I joined her she proposed to walk as far as the ruin to see the sun set. Instead of taking the regular path, Francis preferred making direct for the object in view; and we had to trample through the underwood, and were many times tripped by the roots of felled trees. In answer to my remarks on this whim of hers, she replied—

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"People say my education was neglected, which is not quite correct. I am not altogether a child of the wilderness. In fact, much trouble was given to my training, only it was not of the right sort. I was brought up as a *boy*. As you know already, my mother died a few days after my birth, and Rolf's sister was my nurse. Her own child had died, and I replaced it for her. She had a blind affection for me, almost bordering on fanaticism; she obeyed all my wishes, giving as an excuse to any remonstrances that she was the only person in the world who loved me. This was an exaggeration, for my grandfather, who lived in the same house with us, made much of me, though it is true Sir John Mordaunt took little notice of his child. He had previously had a son called Francis, like myself, on whom all his hopes were fixed during the six months the child lived. I was a disappointment, as he wished to have a son to take the place of the lost infant; and he received me with so little welcome that I have heard the last hours of my poor mother's life were embittered by this knowledge. My nurse, who could no longer bear the indifference with which he treated me, one day took me into his room, to show him what a healthy, strong child I was. 'Indeed,' she said, 'it might have been a boy.'

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"Rolf has since told me that my father seemed suddenly struck by an idea. From that day forth he devoted much attention to my training, and this has made me what I am. Under pretext of hygiene and English custom, I was dressed in a loose costume, 'a boy's suit,' as my nurse called it, and I was taught all kinds of gymnastic exercises. They hardened me against heat and cold like a young Spartan. Rolf taught me the military exercise, and made me quite an adept at fencing, and all the young officers who dined with us were invited to have a bout with me. Out of complaisance to papa, they allowed me to come off victor; and Sir John was sure to reward me splendidly for any praise I won. At this time grandfather held the rank of Major, and I suppose it was an idea of Rolf's to give me the title of 'Little Major,' with which my father was so pleased that he often addressed me by this sobriquet, and so gave it the stamp of his authority. I well remember, on one occasion, an officer, evidently a stranger, addressed me as Miss Francis, which so much surprised me that I uttered a good round oath in English—it was Sir John's favourite expression; whereupon my father took me in his arms and kissed me, so far as I can recollect for the first time in my life."

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"It is less to be wondered at that the bad habit has clung to you even to this day."

"My nurse of course told me it was wrong, and tried to break me of it; but in my childish way I was a match for her, replying, 'But papa does so—is it a sin, then?'"

"'Oh, for gentlemen it is different.'

"'Very well, I will be a gentleman; I won't be a girl.'

"Indeed, my childhood was embittered by the idea that I was a girl and could never become a man. I never went to children's parties; I was always with grown-up people, officers, and lovers of the chase, and at eight years of age I was no bad match for some of them on horseback. When my nurse acknowledged she had lost all control over me, a tutor was engaged—yes, a tutor: don't be surprised. Sir John had never either announced the death of his son or the birth of a daughter to his relations in England. For this reason I was isolated from my own sex, and even learned to regard it with somewhat of an aversion, owing to the conversation of Sir John and Dr. Darkins. I profited by such training, though perhaps not exactly as they desired, for I hated a lie, and my chief desire was to show myself such as I

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was, proud and frank in all my dealings with men. I am convinced grandfather had no hand in this plot, but he was too weak to speak out and set his face against it. Sometimes, however, he gave me needlework to do, and he had a strong aversion to Dr. Darkins. Disputes arose between him and Sir John, and he shortly after moved to another garrison, taking Rolf with him. When I was close upon my fourteenth year, Dr. Darkins was suddenly cashiered, and it was announced to me that I should be sent to an aristocratic ladies' boarding-school. There I played all sorts of pranks, smoked like a grenadier, and had always a supply of extra-fine cigarettes wherewith to tempt my schoolfellows.

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"The cause of this great change in my life was brought about in this way. Aunt Ellen, a sister of my father's, had come over to Scheveningen with her husband for the bathing season, and thence she made a flying visit to see her brother, taking everybody by surprise—nobody more so than Sir John himself.

"Francis must be a big boy now; what are you going to make of him?' I heard her ask my father.

"There's nothing to be made of him,' my father answered angrily in his embarrassment, 'for Francis is only a girl. The eldest child, a son, is dead. I have only this one.'

"John, John,' cried the lady reproachfully, 'the whole family believed you had a son, and you have done nothing to undeceive us; and the old baronet, who pays you the yearly income set apart for his heir, is expecting to see you both in England very soon. What do you mean by it? Have you acted like a gentleman?'

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"Papa lisped something about 'absolute necessity,' and seemed anxious to induce her to co-operate in his schemes. The proud lady burst forth in indignation—

"Can you imagine I would become a party to such deception?'

"Sir John, to relieve his disappointment, uttered his usual oath, and ordered me out of the room, as he now perceived I was listening with all my ears.

"I obeyed very unwillingly, and not until I had spoken to Aunt Ellen. He ordered me to hold my tongue, and there was a mingling of menace, of anxiety, and embarrassment in his looks which drove me sheer out of the room. I had never seen him look like that before. What passed between them I cannot say. Aunt Ellen afterwards gave me fifty pounds, and promised to make me that yearly allowance if my conduct was satisfactory at school. I told her I hated girls' schools, and that I should much prefer going to England with Dr. Darkins, as had been promised me.

"That's out of the question, my child.' More she did not say, and I knew better than to ask Sir John any questions.

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"Well, as you may imagine, I did not stay a whole year at school. In some things I had the advantage of the eldest girls, whilst in others I was more stupid and ignorant than the children in the lowest class. My knitting was always in confusion; I broke my needles in my impatience; I spoilt the silk and sampler if I had any marking to do; and, to make matters worse, if any one laughed at me for my awkwardness, or punished me for my carelessness, I flew into the most violent passion. I fought with the assistant-mistress, and boxed the ears of any girl who called me Major Frank—a girl from the same town as myself having betrayed me. Before I had been there six weeks I ran away, and had to be taken back by Sir John himself; but six months later I was dismissed as an untractable, incorrigible creature, whose conduct was pernicious in its effect on the rest of the school. The dismissal, however, was an injustice to me. Music was the only thing I liked at school, and the music master was the only teacher who had never had reason to complain of me; on the contrary, he praised me, he flattered me, and one day he even gave me a kiss."

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"The wretch!"

"Yes, this liberty aroused all my feelings of feminine dignity, and I boxed his ears for him."

"That was just like you!"

"The other girls rushed into the room; the headmistress followed to inquire into the cause of the disturbance. Of course the master had the first word, and he was base enough to say I had become so violent on account of his correcting my fingering. When asked for my explanation, I answered that I would not contradict a liar—it was beneath my dignity.

"I declined to apologize, and was threatened with the severest punishments known in the school. They shut me up in a room and fed me on bread and water, but all in



vain; the mistress was obliged to write for my father.

“He sent my old nurse to fetch me away, and I confided the truth to her with many tears. She was very anxious to make a scene, give ‘madame’ a piece of her mind in the presence of her pupils; but I was so glad to get away from the school that I prevented her carrying out her intentions. I told her I should not be believed. The fact was, one of the elder girls told me I was very foolish to make so much fuss about a kiss. The music master kisses me,’ she continued, ‘and all the others who are pretty,’ as he says. Still, we are much too sensible to tell any one, for he lends us French novels forbidden by madame, and improvises invitations for us when we want to go out: in short, he is ready to do us all kinds of services that we could not trust to a servant of the establishment. What folly to make such a man your enemy!

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“I have since met this same girl—Leontine was her name—in society, and experienced the advantages of her education. She was ever very polite to my face, and calumniated me directly my back was turned. Thus, you see, under these forms of decorum all kinds of lies and infamy are hidden.”

“Francis, I am quite of your opinion that a man’s fine manners are no guarantee of his morality or uprightness; but do you think society would be improved by turning all its sin, wretchedness, and ugliness to the surface?”

“It is certain we should then fly from it in disgust and horror.”

“But every one cannot fly from it. There are people who are obliged to live in society; and, provided that we do not become its dupe, it is better that what you call the mantle of decorum should give to social life an aspect which renders it supportable.”

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As we returned from the ruin the sky had become misty, and the sun was setting behind the clouds, its presence being only marked by the orange and purple rays struggling through the mist; the fields were already invisible under this wet sheet of nature’s procuring. It was time for us to seek shelter from such humidity as surrounded us. Francis proposed to enter the house with all speed.

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## Chapter XXIII.

Now that Francis was once in the humour to give me the history of her past life, I encouraged her to continue her story.

She went on to say that a Swiss governess was engaged to teach her needlework and other ladylike accomplishments.

“My father,” she said, “seeing all his plans foiled by the unexpected visit of my English aunt, left me entirely in the hands of my governess. And as I no longer wrote a letter every year to the old uncle telling him of my progress in fencing and horsemanship, and signing myself *Francis* Mordaunt (I had been told this was the accepted orthography in England), Sir John received no more bills of exchange from that source. It was these bills of exchange which had enabled him to keep up such an expensive establishment. He ought now to have adopted a plainer style of living; but he preferred drawing upon his capital.

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“I thought it my duty to write to Aunt Ellen, and to tell her the truth about my having left the school. She answered me in affectionate terms, and enclosed the annual fifty pounds with many exhortations to industry and much good advice. She even promised me I should come to London on a visit, as she had much to tell me. But, alas! next year she died, and my pension ceased—nor have I ever heard a word of my English relations since.

“Mademoiselle Chelles, my governess, was a woman of tact, and won my affection and esteem. In the long walks we took together our conversation was confidential, and she spoke of the sufferings of the poor, and the pleasures to be derived from relieving them; in short, she showed me the serious side of life in a manner no one else had ever done before. She inspired me with a love for the beauties of nature, and awoke the better feelings which, thus far, had lain dormant; assisting me in my preparation for confirmation. Perhaps she would have succeeded in extirpating ‘Major Frank’ altogether, but that my nurse grew jealous of her influence; and, worse still, Rolf, now promoted to the rank of lieutenant, fell in love with her. She could not bear the *grand soudard*, the ‘ogre,’ as she called him; for his manners

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frightened her, and he made his offer in such a maladroit fashion that she walked off to my father, and said she would leave the house if ever that man were allowed to put his foot into it again. This, as everybody said, was assuming the 'high tone' on her part. Grandfather and nurse were on Rolf's side, and my father answered—'It's only a governess, let her go.' I myself said little for her; I was too anxious to regain my ancient liberty—though I have since known the loss I sustained in losing her. I was young then; my father ought to have known better. Even to the present day this is one of my grudges against Rolf.

"Again I became 'Major Frank.' I accompanied my father on his rides, and I saw he was proud of my horsemanship. Sometimes we hunted together, and when he allowed me to drive I was ever ready to show off my daring and skill. In the meantime my nurse died, and now, indeed, I felt the truth of her words—that she was the only person in the world who really loved me. I had to take her place, and fulfil the duties of mistress in the household. My father was expecting a visitor from England—"

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She stopped abruptly, and fixing her beautiful blue eyes on me with a strange expression, asked—

"Leopold, have you been in the society of women much?"

"When I lived with my mother I saw many of her friends and visitors; but since —"

"That's not the question. I ask you if, like most men, you have sometimes suffered from the intermittent fever called love?"

"I have done my best, cousin, to escape it. Knowing myself to be too poor to maintain a wife in these expensive times, I have always observed a strict reserve in my relations with them in order not to be led away from my principles."

"Then you have never been 'passion's slave,' as Hamlet puts it."

"My time has always been too much occupied for anything of the sort."

"So much the better for you; but I am sorry for myself, because you will not be able to give me the information I am seeking."

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"Tell me what you want to know; possibly I can enlighten you."

"I wish to know if you think it possible for an honourable man, who is neither a fool nor a coxcomb, but who, on the contrary, has given evidences of his shrewdness and penetration, not to observe pretty quickly that a girl—how shall I express myself?—that a girl is deeply attached to him, even though no word of love has been exchanged between them?"

I was greatly embarrassed. What could be her meaning? Was this simplicity or maliciousness on her part, to address such a question to me? After a few moments' reflection, however, I answered—

"I believe that, in general, both men and women very quickly discover the mutual feelings which they entertain towards each other, even though no words on the subject have passed between them."

"That is my opinion also now; but at the time I am referring to I was as inexperienced as a child. My father's friends always regarded me as an ill-bred girl, whimsical and capricious, a sort of savage whom nobody cared to invite into society either for the sake of their sons or daughters. The young officers who visited at our house would try to make themselves agreeable; but their conduct appeared so insipid, so ridiculous, that I only mocked them, and gave such biting replies as to disconcert the most intrepid amongst them.

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"It was at this time that Lord William came to stay with us. He was introduced to me as a schoolfellow of my father's; at Eton he had been Sir John's fag, and indeed was his junior by only a few years. For some reason, unexplained to me, it was said he had been obliged to leave England, and my father offered him the suite of rooms left vacant by my grandfather. Lord William appeared to be rich; he brought over an immense quantity of luggage, and paid right royally for any service rendered him. I believe, indeed, he had a private agreement with my father about the housekeeping expenses, though neither of them ever told me so. Now a housekeeper was engaged to assist me in the management of the house, and yet it was with the greatest difficulty that I could adapt myself to the duties of mistress of such an establishment. The presence of our visitor, however, greatly aided in reconciling me to my position.

"Lord William (I never knew his family name) was a man of letters, and had had a

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very valuable and expensive library sent over for his use. Moreover, he was highly gifted with the faculty of communicating his knowledge to others in a pleasant and agreeable manner. He was an enthusiastic lover of art and poetry; he could read and even speak several modern languages, and was passionately fond of antiquities and ancient history. He knew—what we were all ignorant of—that the library of our own small town possessed works of inestimable value on these subjects, and I think this was his reason for choosing it as his place of sojourn on the Continent. At all events he made great use of the library. You may understand my surprise at seeing a man, evidently of high rank, who cared neither for hunting nor noisy pleasures of any kind, and who declared the happiest moments of his life to be those spent in his study, and yet withal he was a perfect gentleman and man of the world. The gentlemen said he was ugly; the ladies were silent on that point, but appeared delighted with the slightest attention he paid them. I thought he bore a striking resemblance to our Stadtholder William III., though less pale. He had a high forehead, strongly marked features, and dark eyes, which made you think of the piercing regard of the eagle.”

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“Had he also the beak?” I asked, growing impatient.

“I have told you he was like William III. (of England),” she replied, looking at me in astonishment; “his nose was curved sharply. But not to detain you too long, I will at once confess he exercised a powerful influence over me for good. I soon discovered that my manners were displeasing to him, and that he evinced towards me a compassionate sympathy, as if he regretted the sad turn my tastes had taken. One day I overheard him ask my father why he did not take me out into society. He gave as a reason my wild and brusque manners, and the kind of society to be found in a small town like ours. Lord William was not a man to be easily discouraged. He spoke to me privately about my previous life, and put all sorts of questions to me about my education. I told him everything, in my own way, without trying to hide any of the particulars from him.

“‘Do you like reading?’ he asked me.

“‘Not at all,’ I answered. ‘I like society, men and action.’”

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“‘But any one who does not read, and read much, becomes idiotic, and makes but a poor figure in society.’

“‘If that’s the case, tell me what I ought to read.’

“‘I cannot answer your question right away; but, if you are willing, we will read together and try to make up for lost time.’”

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## Chapter XXIV.

“And so it was settled. He undertook to educate me and to form my tastes. He soon made me acquainted with the masterpieces of German and French literature, and discovered to me the beauties of the classics in his own language; and I learnt from him most assiduously that which Dr. Darkins never could have taught me \_\_\_”

“And so well, that you fell in love with each other!” I interrupted, giving way to a movement of anger.

“Not exactly; but if you interrupt in that way I shall lose the thread of my narrative. It is at your desire I recount to you the story of my past life; and how much wiser would you be if I were to compress it into a sentence like this for instance: ‘Lord William came to our house in the autumn, and left us the following spring?’”

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“Without having become your *fiancé*?” I said in agony.

“Without having become my *fiancé*,” she answered in a dry, cold tone.

I was angry with myself. I had only too plainly shown that I was jealous of the praise lavished on this stranger. And what right had I to be jealous?

She was the first to break the silence which ensued.

“Leopold,” she said, “I perceive that this account of the events of my youth is anything but agreeable to you. If you had left us as I wished you to do this

morning, I should not now be wearying you with my recollections of the past.”

“Believe me, Francis, I have remained on purpose to listen to them; I promise not to interrupt you again if you will continue.”

“Well then, now I will confess to you that I loved Lord William with all the strength of a first love, and with all that innocency of a young heart which does not yet even know that the passion which sways it is love. I soon found that Lord William was dearer to me than all the world beside, and that my chief delight was to obey him in all things, to consult him on all occasions, and to accompany him when and wherever it was possible. I even found means to interest myself in his archæological researches. I translated for him Dutch documents which formerly I would not have taken the trouble to read. Besides, finding that, like most men, he was fond of a good dinner, I took care to have such dishes prepared as I knew to be to his liking. I began to pay attention to my dress, because he himself, without going to extremes or exceeding the bounds of good taste, was always well dressed. He introduced me into the society of our small town, and I felt vexed every time he paid the least attention to another lady, though I took care not to let him see it. We also gave dinners and received company, and the ladies were greatly astonished at the manner in which Major Frank played the hostess. The winter was drawing to a close, and it had been settled that, on the first fine day which offered, we should all make an excursion to the Werve. My grandfather had returned to the garrison, and I was soon aware he disapproved of my sentiments towards Lord William. And it was not long before I knew the reason why.

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“One fine spring morning I was sitting on the balcony with a book in my hand, when I heard my grandfather and father, who sat on a bench underneath, speaking of Lord William and myself in terms which excited my curiosity.

“Grandfather, in a very bad humour, said: ‘She is always parading him about, and he pays no attentions to anybody but her. In your place, I should ask him to declare his intentions, and then the engagement can be publicly announced.’

“My father burst out in a loud laugh.

“‘Major,’ he said, ‘what are you thinking of? William, whose intentions are perfectly honest, was at school with me; he is only two or three years my junior, and Francis has not completed her seventeenth year.’

“‘What does that matter? He does not look much over thirty, and I tell you she’s madly in love with him. How is it possible you have never perceived it yourself?’

“‘Bless me, Major!’ cried my father, ‘you must know that William is married; and, moreover, I am very grateful to him for acting the part of mentor to Francis; indeed she had need of one!’

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“‘In truth, Sir John, either you are too simple, or you indulge a confidence in your friend I cannot approve of.’

“‘You would have the same confidence in him that I have, if you knew him as well. He is every inch a gentleman, sir, and if I hinted the slightest suspicion he would leave the house instantly. And, besides, he is generous, very generous—I am deeply indebted to him. His stay with us is almost at its close. He must return to London to preside at the meeting of some society of antiquarians of which he is the president. The disagreeable affair which obliged him to come to the Continent is almost arranged. He was afraid of a lawsuit which would have caused much scandal in high life, but the mediators are now hopeful of success. His wife, who is travelling in the South with his relations, has written him a very humble letter, imploring him to forget and to forgive. He has told me his mind is not yet quite made up, but that he has a great repugnance to a divorce; probably then—’

“Hereupon the two speakers got up and walked away into the garden. As for myself, I remained for a long time leaning against the balustrade, immovable as a statue of stone. When I found myself quite alone, I could not suppress a cry of grief. Yes, my grandfather had read me! I loved—I loved with passion, and all at once I discovered my passion to be a crime. And he, had he not deceived me by leaving me in ignorance of what it was most important for me to know? Ought he not to have foreseen the danger into which he was leading me by his kind and affectionate treatment? Without doubt he felt himself invulnerable; without doubt he still loved his absent wife. It is true that with his kind manners he always maintained a certain reserve with me; once, indeed, and once only, he had kissed my hand with marks of tenderness for some attention or other I had shown him. That night I could not sleep for joy; on the morrow, however, he resumed his habitual reserve.

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“My first idea was to go and reproach him to his face for what I considered his

deception towards me; but he was not at home, and would not return before dinner. At table I could not help showing him how much my feelings towards him had changed. This he observed, and when the other gentlemen lit their cigars after dinner, instead of following me to the drawing-room, as was his wont, he took a cigar and stayed with them. I remembered that I could smoke also, and I followed his example. I saw him frown; he threw away his cigar, and invited me to go with him to his study. This was just what I wanted.

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“‘What is the matter with you, Miss Francis?’ he asked. ‘I cannot understand the reason for this change in your behaviour towards me.’

“‘On a little reflection, my lord, you will easily discover the reason. You know how much I love plain-speaking.’

“‘Very good.’

“‘What can I think of you when I hear from other people that you are married?’

“‘I saw he grew pale, but he answered with great coldness—

“‘Has Sir John only just told you that? and why to-day above all others?’

“‘Sir John has told me nothing; I have heard it by accident. By accident, you understand, my lord, and now I think I have the right to hear from your own lips more particulars about your wife.’

“‘He drew back some paces; his features became so contracted under an expression of violent suffering that I myself was afraid. For a time he was silent, pacing up and down the room; and finally he said to me, with a mingling of sadness and discontent—

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“‘I am sorry, Francis, but I did not think the time had arrived when I could give you such a mark of confidence. There is too much of bitterness in your tone for me to suppose your question arises out of an interest in my sorrows, and only those who have such an interest have a claim to my explanations. Is it a young girl like you that I should choose out by preference, in whom to confide the sad secrets of my unhappy marriage? And how could I begin to speak about a subject on the termination of which I am still in doubt?’

“‘And it never occurred to you, my lord, that there might be a danger in leaving me ignorant of your marriage?’

“‘No, certainly not. I came here to divert my thoughts from my troubles, and to seek solace—which I have found—in my favourite studies. I made your acquaintance in the house of your father, who received me hospitably; and I thought I perceived your education had been neglected, nay, that even a false turn had been given to your ideas. This I have tried to remedy and I must acknowledge you have gratefully appreciated and seconded my efforts; but it does not follow that I ought to acquaint you with all my personal affairs and all my griefs and troubles. I fled from England to escape the condolence of my friends and the raillery of my adversaries. I wished to avoid a lawsuit in which my name—a name of some renown in England—would have been exposed to the comments of a public ever hungering after scandal. Could I have talked to you on such a subject? It would have cast a gloom over the golden dreams of your youth, and rendered the autumn of my life still more cloudy!’

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“‘The clouds surrounding you, my lord, must be pretty thick already,’ I replied, exasperated by his cool manner, ‘to prevent your seeing that my ignorance of your marriage has caused me to embark on a sea of illusions, where in the spring-time of life I shall suffer shipwreck.’

“‘A movement of fright escaped him. I broke forth in complaints and reproaches; he fell back on a divan and covered his face with his hands. He protested he had never guessed at such an idea, never even suspected anything of the sort. Afterwards, when I had eased my mind and was sitting sobbing before him, he recovered himself, and coming over to me he said, in his usual calm and affectionate tone—

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“‘My child, there is much exaggeration in all you have told me. Your imagination has been struck, and you have suffered it to carry you away, so that you believe all you say now; but I can assure you, you are mistaken. You are impressionable, susceptible, but too young to understand the real passion of love. At your age, young girls have very often some little love affair with the engaging young dancer they met at the last ball. You, who have been kept out of society on account of the masculine education you had received, have known no such temptations; but perhaps for this very reason you were the more exposed to illusions of another kind, which I confess I ought to have foreseen, namely, that of falling in love with

the first gentleman who showed you more than the usual attentions of common civility. I happen to be this man. We have read several plays of Shakespeare together. Every young girl may imagine herself a Juliet; but that is no reason why she should imagine her teacher to be a Romeo. Now, seriously, Francis, could you take me for your Romeo? Look at me, and consider how ridiculous any such pretension on my part would be. I am about the same age as your father; I am turning gray; I should also be as stout, but for a disease which threatens me with consumption. All this is far from poetic, is it not? Exercise your reason, your good sense, and you will be the first to acknowledge that I am most unfitted to become the hero of a love affair.'

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"I was silent; I felt as if some one were pouring ice down my back. He approached me, and laying his hand on my shoulder, with the greatest gentleness said—

"I was married one year before your father, and though I have no children, I might have had a daughter of your age. I had accustomed myself, gradually, to regard you as my own daughter; you deprive me of this pleasure, for the present at least, though I am sure you will one day recover from your folly. It is your head which is affected, not your heart, believe me, for I have had experience in the depths of abasement to which the passions may lead a woman who has not energy enough to overcome them. If I had a son—I have only a nephew, who will be heir to my title and property—and if——"

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"Thank you, my lord, I could never address you as my uncle!' and I burst out in an hysterical laugh. There was a beautiful edition of Shakespeare lying on the table, a present from him; I took it up and tore it leaf from leaf, scattering them about the room. At the same instant my maid knocked at the door; she came to remind me it was time to dress for the ball. We had accepted invitations for this evening to the house of a banker, one of the most prominent men in our province. My pride having been touched to the quick, I determined to seek solace in the wildest excitement. I flirted with the only son of this banker, who all through the winter had been very attentive to me. I felt much pleasure in showing Lord William how easily I could forget him; but my eyes were all the while furtively following him to see the effect my conduct might produce. He remained calm and cool as ever. After a while he seated himself at the card-table, and lost a considerable sum of money to my grandfather. On the morrow, I perceived preparations were being made for his departure in all haste. Lord William had received the letters he had so long expected, and seemed to have no time to notice me. I became transported with passion, when my father told me at luncheon that the banker's son had asked permission to wait upon me in the course of the afternoon. You can understand my rage. 'What a falling-off was there!'—from Lord William to a Charles Felters!

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"I answered my father that I would not speak to the simpleton.

"You must!' he replied, in a tone of authority I was little accustomed to in Sir John. 'You have given the young man encouragement, and you had better reflect on the consequences of refusing such a good offer.'"

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## Chapter XXV.

"Poor Charles Felters was quite thunderstruck at the reception I gave him. His gay partner of last evening's dance had changed into a veritable fury. I told him plainly I didn't care a jot for him. He hesitated, he stammered, and couldn't make up his mind to go. I was expecting Lord William every moment to take leave of me, and I would not have them meet. In my confusion my eyes rested on a 'trophy of arms' with which my father had decorated one side of the room. Scarcely knowing what I was about, I seized a foil, handed it to my would-be lover, and taking another myself, I took up my position on guard, exclaiming—

"The man who wins my love shall win it with the sword.'

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"The miserable ninny never even observed that the foils were buttoned, but, throwing down his, rushed out of the room in the greatest alarm."

"I have heard of this feat of arms, Francis," I said, laughing; "and, moreover, that Felters is still running away from you."

"*Voilà comme on écrit l'histoire.*' I have myself heard he made a voyage round the world to escape from me; but the truth is he only made a tour up the Rhine, fell in with the daughter of a clergyman, and married her. She has made him a happy

man, and he is now the father of a family; nevertheless, all his relations bear me the most intense hatred, and lose no opportunity of serving me a malicious turn. I still held my foil in my hand when Lord William entered the room. His look was sufficient to show me his disapprobation.

“If your father had taken my advice, Francis,’ he said, ‘he would have waited some little time before informing you of the intentions of Felters; still there was no reason for your acting in this way. *For shame* to treat a poor fellow, who perhaps never had a foil in his hand before, in such a manner. But, well! I have always hesitated about putting you to the test; permit me now, however, to take the place of the miserable fugitive.’

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“And without waiting for an answer he picked up Felters’ foil, and cried—

“‘En garde!’

“I literally did not know what I was doing. I would not decline his challenge, and I determined to show him that he was not fencing with an inexperienced girl. He handled his foil with a lightness and firmness of hand I had little expected to find in a man of letters, confining himself, however, to parrying my attacks only; and yet this he did so skilfully that I was unable to touch him. I exhausted myself in my desperate efforts, but I would not ask for quarter.

“‘You see such exercise requires more than the arm of a woman,’ he said coolly.

“My wild despair and anger seemed to give me strength, and falling in upon him I broke my foil upon his breast. He, with a smile, had neglected to parry this attack, and I saw a thin stream of blood trickle down his shirt-front. Now I was overwhelmed with sorrow and repentance. Sir John and grandfather immediately came upon the scene.

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“‘It is nothing, gentlemen,’ he said to them, ‘only a scratch; a little satisfaction which I owed to Miss Francis, and which will perhaps cure her of her taste for such unladylike weapons.’

“‘I will never, never more touch them,’ I cried in terror when I saw his pocket-handkerchief, which he had applied to the wound, saturated with blood.

“And I have kept my word, though it has not prevented my obtaining a wide reputation as a duellist. Neither Charles Felters nor the servant of Lord William could hold their tongues, though the latter had been forbidden by his master to say a word on the subject. I was reminded very unpleasantly, next time I appeared in the town, that the affair had become public property. Lord William would not allow us to send for a surgeon, but had the wound dressed by his own servant; and, fortunately, it turned out to be less dangerous than I feared at first. I sought my own room, and hid myself there with all the remorse of a Cain. I resolved to throw myself at his feet and beg his pardon. But the reaction to my excited state of feelings had now set in, and I fell exhausted on a sofa, where I slept for several hours a feverish kind of sleep. When I awoke Lord William was gone. After this I was seriously ill; and on my recovery my grandfather took me as soon as possible to the Werve for the fresh country air. Sir John told me, when I was quite well, that Lord William had certainly given proof of his good-nature to allow me to touch him; for while at Eton he had been considered one of the best fencers in the school, and just before quitting England he had fought a duel with an officer in the Horse Guards, and wounded him in a manner that report said was likely to be fatal.

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“My answer to this was that I had never suspected Lord William of being a duellist.

“‘That he never was; but in this instance his honour was at stake. He could not leave the insult of this captain unpunished. Perhaps, however, he would have acted more justly if he had put his wife to death; and though an English jury would certainly have brought him in guilty of murder, yet, considering the great provocation he had received, public opinion would have sympathized with him in the highest degree. Now he is reconciled to her again, at least in outward appearance; but he has written to me that he is going to make a tour all over the world.’”

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“And you have never since heard of this ‘My lord?’” I asked Francis, to whose story I had listened with as much sorrow as attention.

“Never; and I don’t even know his family name to this day. Changes now followed in rapid succession. My father died suddenly; my grandfather was promoted in rank, and we removed to Zutphen, where I proposed to begin a new life. But though we break with our antecedents, it is impossible to sponge out the past. However, more of this hereafter. I must attend to the other gentlemen, otherwise I shall be accused of neglecting my duties. I will tell you more of this history at

another time if it interests you; for it is a relief to me to confide it to a friend. Only never begin the subject yourself, as there are moments when I cannot bear to think of it."

"I promise you this, Francis," I replied, pressing her hand.

It would be impossible for me to recount all the feelings which passed through my mind in listening to Francis's trials. I will not weary you, dear William, for I acknowledge I felt sad and irritable. And yet I tried to think these were her "campaign years," as she calls them, though it was evident her heart had suffered long before she attained her twenty-fifth birthday. If she had told me of deception, so common in the world, of an engagement broken off, of a misplaced affection, such things would not have troubled my peace of mind. What affected me was to think this Englishman had won the place in her affections which I wished to be the first to occupy—that place which permits a man to inspire a woman with confidence, and exercise over her an influence authoritative and beneficial. Time had done much to cool her love for him, but she had not forgotten him; and it was certainly a devotion to his memory which rendered her so indifferent to the merits of other men. I wondered if she had told me all this history in order to make me comprehend the improbability of my being able to replace her ideal. Had she not told me on the heath, on our first meeting, that if she suspected I came to demand her hand in marriage, she would leave me there and then? I felt myself diminishing in her estimation. And there was a portrait of William III. hanging over the mantelpiece which seemed to say to me, ironically, "Too late, too late!"

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Yet again I asked myself whether I was not growing jealous of a vain shadow. Eight years had passed since these events. She was no longer a little girl, who could imagine she saw a Romeo in her mentor who was a long way on the wrong side of forty. Who could say that the comparison, which she could not fail to make now, would be to my disadvantage?

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I determined not to remain in this perplexity. At the risk of committing an imprudence, I made up my mind to ask her whether she regarded the loss of her Lord William as irreparable. It was necessary for me to know what chance of success was left me.

This night I slept little, for I was rolling over in my mind all sorts of extravagant declarations which I intended to make to my cousin next day. This, however, was the day preceding the General's birthday, and Francis was fully occupied with the Captain in making all sorts of preparations; so that during the whole day I never once could find a suitable moment to begin the subject. The master of the village school would bring up to the Castle his best pupils to recite verses made for the occasion; the clergyman and the notables would also come to offer their congratulations.

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Francis sent me to the post-office to fetch a registered letter for her.<sup>1</sup> General von Zwenken was in a bad humour because Rolf had no time to amuse him, and finding myself rather in the way I went off to my room to write.

Here in the afternoon I found on my table a little Russian leather case, on which my initials had been embroidered above the word *Souvenir*. Inside I found a bank-note equivalent to the sum Francis had borrowed of me; on the envelope which inclosed it she had written, in a bold hand, the word *Merci*, her name, and the date. The case itself was not new. Poor dear girl! she must have sat up half the night to work my initials in silk, as a surprise. I now felt more than ever how dear she was become to me, and I promised myself not to temporize any longer. Then the idea occurred to me: If I can get her permission, I will ask her hand of the General to-morrow after I have congratulated him on his birthday.

This idea threw me into a transport of joy. I got up from my chair with the intention of seeking my cousin and bringing matters to a crisis at any risk. My hand was already on the handle of the door, when I thought I heard a tap at the window. Immediately a hoarse voice called several times—

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"Francis! Francis!"

Astonished, and wishing to know who this could be, I stood motionless. The voice cried again—

"Francis, if you don't open the window I will break the sash all to pieces."

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<sup>1</sup> In Holland one is obliged to fetch a registered letter; they are never delivered by the postman.



## Chapter XXVI.

As, for very good reasons, Francis gave no answer, a vigorous arm forced open the window, and a man sprang into the room, seemingly quite indifferent about any damage he might have caused.

"What is your business with Miss Mordaunt?" I asked, advancing towards the intruder.

"A stranger here?" he answered, with an expression of surprise; "I thought they never had visitors now."

"I think the manner of your entrance is much more astonishing, and I am the person surprised."

"Well, yes, my entrance is *somewhat irregular*," he replied, in the most familiar style possible; "however, *Mr. Unknown*, I am neither a thief nor a housebreaker. I have entered in this way because I wished no one but Francis to know of my arrival, and I was sure I should find her here; but, now I am here, allow me to rest myself whilst I reflect a little upon the best means of obtaining an interview with her."

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And he threw himself at full length on the old sofa, which creaked under his weight.

"Ah! ah!" he continued, examining the walls, "the family portraits are gone—eaten away, no doubt, by the moths and the damp."

It was quite clear to me the stranger was not here for the first time. Though his manners were free, there was something gentlemanly in his personal appearance. Still his dress was fantastic. He wore a short velvet jacket with metal buttons, and a silk handkerchief loosely tied around his neck; tight trousers of a grey pearl colour, and polished riding-boots with spurs, and a soft felt hat.

"You've got nothing to drink here?" he asked, after a pause of some minutes. "I have ridden for three hours, and my throat is almost choked with sand and dust."

He spoke Dutch with a foreign accent. His age seemed to be about fifty, though he might be younger. His lively, active features were never at rest for a moment; his greenish-grey eyes, the fine wrinkles on his high sunburnt forehead, and the paleness of his cheeks, all marked him as the adventurer endued with strong passions—an impression that was increased by his thick-set face, large nose, and the tufted mustachios hanging over his thick, sensual lips. I could not refuse him a glass of water, unwelcome as I found his presence. As I handed it to him I said—

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"You seem to know this house well."

"Yes, and that's no wonder; I played many a prank here in my boyhood. But you, sir, who are you? An adjutant of the Colonel's, or a *protégé* of Francis's?"

"I think I have the best right to question you, and to ask who you are?"

"That's true enough; and I would tell you with pleasure, but it's a secret which concerns others besides myself. Call me Mr. Smithson—it's the name I am known by at present."

"Very well. Now what is your business here, Mr. Smithson?"

"I wish you to tell Francis I am here."

"Do you think the news will be agreeable to her?" I demanded.

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"I cannot say, but she will come all the same."

"Here, into my room?"

"Bah! our Major Frank is no prude."

"Mr. Smithson, I give you fair warning that if you say a single word derogatory to the character of Miss Mordaunt, I shall instantly make you take the same way out of this room by which you entered it."

"Oh! oh! Mr. Unknown, I am a first-rate boxer. But easy, man, easy! For I should be the last person in the world to say an offensive word about Francis. Now, since you know her, you ought to be aware that she would never refuse to assist a person in distress out of a sense of prudery. Just you ask her to come here to see—

not Smithson, because she does not know me under that name, but a relation of hers, who calls himself Rudolf."

"And if she refuses to come?"

"Oh, you make too many difficulties. Ah! is it possible you are her—I should have thought Francis Mordaunt more capable of commanding a batalion than of bowing herself under the yoke of marriage. But, after all, women do change their minds. Then you are the happy mortal?"

"A truce to your suppositions," I answered him in a firm voice; "I am here as a relation, a grand-nephew of the General's; my name is Leopold van Zonshoven."

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"Well, upon my word! Probably we are cousins, for I am also related to the General. Francis will not refuse to come, I assure you—especially if you tell her that I do not come to ask for money; on the contrary, I bring some with me."

Hereupon he drew from his pocket a purse containing a number of clean, new greenbacks.

"Tell her what you have seen; it will set her mind at ease, and possibly yours also—for you seem as yet only half-and-half convinced that I am not a highwayman."

I no longer hesitated; but took the precaution to lock my door on the outside, lest he should follow me, and surprise Francis before I had warned her. Having reached her room I knocked gently, and she answered "Come in." It was the first time I had penetrated so far, and I began in a serious tone—

"Something very singular has happened, my dear cousin——"

"It is not an accident you come to announce to me, I hope?" she exclaimed.

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"No, but a visit which will not prove agreeable, I am afraid."

"A visit at this time of the day! Who is it?"

"A person who says he is a relation of the family, and refuses to give any name but that of Rudolf."

She knit her eyebrows.

"Good heavens! Unfortunate man! Here again!"

I explained to her how he had forced his way in at the window, and offered to make him retrace his steps if she desired it.

"No, there must be no disturbance," she said, in a state of agitation. "My grandfather must not even suspect he is here. I will go with you, Leopold; this once you must excuse me if I do anything you consider in bad form. How dare he show his face here? I can do nothing more for him. You will stand by me, won't you?"

I took her hand and led her to my room. Rudolf lay on the sofa, fast asleep. When he saw Francis standing before him, he jumped up as if to embrace her, but she drew back. He did not seem hurt, but he lost his tone of assurance.

"I understand, Francis, that my return is not a joyful surprise to you."

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"You have broken your promise. You gave me your word of honour you would stay in America. At any rate, you ought never to have set foot in your native country again——"

"Don't judge me without having heard——"

"Is it not tempting fortune to come back here to the Werve, where you may so easily be recognized?"

"Oh, don't make yourself uneasy on that score, my dear. I have taken precautions; and as for breaking my promise, I beg your pardon on my bended knees."

And he made a gesture as if he would fall on his knees before her.

"Don't be theatrical," she said severely, and again retreated some steps from him.

"Heaven forbid! On the boards, to gain a livelihood, it is another thing; but in your presence, before you, Francis, whom I honour and love, I wish to justify my conduct. You may condemn me afterwards, if you like. It was really my intention never to appear before your eyes again. Alas! man is but the puppet of fortune, and I have not been able to swim against the stream. I have had all sorts of

adventures—but can I tell you all now?” he added, looking significantly at me. “To tell you the truth, I had reckoned on our being alone.”

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“Stay, Leopold,” she said, in answer to an inquiring look I gave her.

“Francis,” resumed Rudolf, with tears in his eyes, “you know you need no protector where I am.”

“I know that, but I will not again expose myself to calumny for your sake. As for your security, Rudolf, I can answer for my cousin Van Zonshoven’s discretion. You may tell him who you are without fear.”

“It is a question of life and death,” he said in French, with a most indifferent shrug of the shoulders, and he again stretched himself at full length on the sofa. “The least indiscretion, and my life will be forfeited. What of that? I run the risk of breaking my neck every day.”

And then, turning towards me, he began to sing, or rather to try to sing, with a voice quite hoarse, and with a theatrical *pose*, the following lines out of the opera “The Bride of Lammermoor”—

“Sache donc qu’en ce domaine  
D’où me chasse encor ta haine,  
En seigneur j’ai commandé.

At least,” he put in, “during the absence of the Baron, for I was heir-presumptive—a presumption which, alas! is destined never to be changed into certitude—”

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Francis, visibly affected by his jesting style, interrupted him, and said to me—

“Rudolf von Zwenken, my grandfather’s only son.”

“It would cost my charming niece too great an effort to say ‘*My uncle.*’ It is my own fault. I have never been able to inspire people with the necessary respect for me. Well, now, Cousin van Zonshoven, you know who I am, but there is one point I must rectify: Rudolf von Zwenken no longer exists—he is civilly dead.”

“And morally,” murmured Francis.

“And if he were to rise again under that name,” he continued, without heeding Francis’s interruption, “he would commit something like suicide, for he would be arrested and shot.”

“And knowing that, after all that has been done to put you beyond danger, you show yourself in this place again! It is inexplicable,” cried Francis.

“But, my dear, who told you I had come to show myself here? It is true we give representations in the provinces; but the person who appears in public is Mr. Smithson, so well begrimed that Baron von Zwenken himself would not recognize his own son.”

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“That’s very fortunate, for it would be the death of him,” retorted Francis, harshly.

“How you exaggerate, dearest. *Monsieur mon pere* never had so much affection for me. He shall never know Mr. Smithson. His son Rudolf, however, seeks an interview with him, and requests you, Francis, to assist in bringing it about.”

“It is useless, sir; you may neither see nor speak to your father again.”

“Can you be so hard-hearted, Francis?”

“My duty obliges me, and I must have some regard for the feelings of your father in the first place.”

“But, my dear child, try to understand me. I only wish to kiss his hand and beg his pardon. With this object I have run all risks, and imposed on myself all kinds of fatigue. I have just ridden hard for three hours, hidden myself in the old ruins, climbed the garden wall at the risk of breaking an arm or a leg; then, seeing a light here, I broke in—and all this for nothing! No, *my darling*, this cannot be; you will still be my good angel, and arrange the meeting I so much desire—”

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“I say *No*; and you know when I have once said a thing I mean it.”

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Rudolf, after a pause, began once more—

“You have a good heart, Francis. Ah! I know your reasons. You think I am returned again like the prodigal son, with an empty purse, ‘after eating of the husks which the swine did eat.’ It is just the contrary.”

“Don’t be profane, Rudolf,” said Francis, severely.

“But it is true—I bring money with me, over two hundred dollars in clean greenbacks, as a commencement of restitution, an earnest of my reform. What do you think my father would say if he found them to-morrow morning on his pillow? Don’t you think he would receive me with open arms?”

“No, Rudolf, certainly not. You have broken your word of honour, and for this your father will never forgive you. Don’t talk of restitution. What is this sum in comparison with what you have cost him, and all the suffering you have caused him and me? Such sacrifices as we had made gave us the right to hope you would leave us in peace—forget us.”

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Rudolf bowed down his head and heaved a deep sigh. I could not help pitying the unfortunate man. I should have liked to say something in his favour; but the cold, haughty, nay, contemptuous attitude of Francis seemed to impose silence on me. There must be some reason, I felt sure, for her inexorable severity; consequently I remained a passive spectator.

At length Rudolf roused himself from his despondency, drank off a glass of water, and, turning towards Francis, said in his most serious tone—

“Just listen, Miss Mordaunt. It appears to me that, under the pretext of acting as guardian to my father, you oppose a reconciliation between us, without even consulting his wishes; and it is strange that a niece, a granddaughter only, should usurp the position of the eldest son, and refuse to listen to the returning prodigal.”

“Don’t talk to me about your prodigal son,” cried Francis, angrily; “you are not the prodigal son. It is only a passing whim, and you will be carried away again to-morrow by some new idea as you always were.”

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“Don’t you be afraid you will lose anything by it,” he said in a bitter tone; “you know I shall never lay claim to my father’s property, even though we were reconciled.”

“Must I then be suspected of cupidity, and by you indeed!” exclaimed Francis, in the greatest indignation.

“I should never accuse you of anything of the sort. On the contrary, I am only too sensible of your generosity. I only mentioned this to set you at ease about any consequences which might result from my reconciliation with my father. To the world I am Richard Smithson, American citizen; but let me have the pleasure of being for the few minutes I stay here Rudolf von Zwenken, who would speak to his old father once more, and take a last farewell of him. How can you oppose such a desire?”

“Your last farewells signify nothing; you always come back again.”

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“But if, in spite of your opposition, I go at once and seek my father in the large drawing-room—I have not forgotten my way about the house—who shall hinder me?”

“Do as you like; only I warn you you will find Rolf, who knows you, with grandfather; and Rolf knows his orders, which he will carry out like an old soldier.”

“The devil take Rolf! What’s the old ruffian doing here?” spitefully exclaimed Rudolf.

“The old ruffian does all he can to cheer the declining years of your father, whom you have rendered unhappy by your conduct.”

“My misery would not be complete without your contumely,” sobbed Rudolf. “I came here so cheerful and well disposed.”

“Mr. Rudolf,” I said, “allow me to arrange an interview for you with the General, since Miss Mordaunt declines.”

“Don’t you trouble yourself, Jonker van Zonshoven,” retorted Francis, in her most

cold and haughty tone. "I do not decline, but I know it is impossible, and therefore better to say nothing. Rudolf well remembers I threw myself at the feet of my grandfather, and besought him not to send his son into exile unforgiven, and it only added to the pain and sorrow of the scene. Don't forget, either, that you yourself caused the report of your death to be spread abroad. The old man believed it, and I have since heard him say it was a comfort to him. His fears lest you should be arrested, tried, and condemned, were only set at rest when he heard the news. Would you renew his distress, and put him to these tortures again?"

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"It is true, too true—you are right," said Rudolf, quite breaking down.

"But you shall not leave the house without some refreshment," returned Francis in a kind tone, now she felt her victory to be certain; "I will go and fetch you something to eat immediately. Cousin Leopold will allow you to have supper and to repose yourself in his room."

Whereupon she left the room, and I was left alone with this singular cousin of mine.

"Bah!" he said, "our Major is not to be trifled with. What eyes she gave me! I felt as if she would pierce me through and through; and yet she has a good heart—there's not one in a thousand like her."

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"I think she might have shown a little more of its tenderness towards a relation," I interposed.

"What shall I say? She knows only my evil deeds as she has heard them recounted by my father. When chance or misfortune has thrown us two together, it has always been under circumstances which could not dispose her in my favour. I have cost her both trouble and money—nay, I even fear her reputation has been called in question on my account. When I was in trouble she came to my assistance, regardless of what public gossip might say. It was at Zutphen. My father's door was shut upon me. She agreed to meet me in a lane outside the town, a public promenade little frequented at certain hours of the day—in fact, very seldom except on Sundays. But we were discovered; certain idlers took it into their heads to play the spy on us, and Heaven only knows what sort of reports they set flying about the town. The generous girl had pawned her diamonds in order to assist me, unknown to her grandfather. This act of devotion was of course interpreted to her disadvantage. You may think it would be more noble on her part not to remind me of what she has suffered when she sees me again; but, my dear sir, a perfect woman is as scarce a thing as a horse without a defect. Though she were to scratch and to bite me, I would still bow my head in submission to her——"

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The entrance of Francis with a bottle of wine, bread and meat, &c., interrupted what he had to say further. He attacked the eatables with a most voracious appetite.

When he had somewhat allayed his hunger, he began—

"Francis, my darling, where am I to pass the night? I cannot go into that part of the house occupied by the General and Rolf, that's certain. I would go into the stable and sleep in the hay, but that I am afraid the coachman might recognize me."

"We have no coachman now," replied Francis, quite pale.

"What! You have sent away Harry Blount?"

"Harry Blount is dead."

"Dead! Why he would scarcely be thirty years of age. I taught him to ride——but Francis, my angel, you are quite pale; have you also sold your beautiful English saddle-horse?"

"No, Tancredo is stabled at farmer Pauwelsen's; but it is the recollection of Harry Blount which causes me to turn pale. I—it is dreadful—I was the cause of his death."

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"Nonsense; come, come! In a moment of passion?" (here he made the gesture of a man who horse-whips another). "I did so more than once, but that does not kill a man—and you will not have murdered him."

"Nevertheless, I was the cause of the brave fellow's death. It occurred during a carriage drive. We had sold the beautiful greys——"

"What! that splendid pair. My poor father!"

"We had a new horse which we wished to run with the only one left us. Harry wanted to try them himself for the first time, but I took it into my head I would drive them. I got on the box by his side, seized the reins, and, as soon as we were on a piece of level road, they went like the wind. I was proud of my skill, and was rejoicing in my triumph; but still Harry shook his head, and recommended me to be prudent. The sky became clouded, and a thunderstorm threatened us. In my folly, I urged the horses on still faster, though they were already taking the bits between their teeth. Harry became alarmed, and tried to take the reins out of my hands; but I resisted, and would not give them up. In an instant the thunder began to roll, and lightning struck right across our way; the horses took fright and began to rear on their hind-legs. Blount jumped off the box to go to their heads, but tripped, and they passed over his body. In despair, I also jumped from the box at the risk of my life, and the violence of the shock caused me to swoon. When I was again conscious, I saw the unfortunate Blount lying on the road, crushed, with scarcely a breath of life left in him. Within an hour he was a corpse."

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Here Francis burst into tears, and covered her face.

"It is a pity, Francis, a great pity," replied Rudolf. "For your sake, I would that I had been the victim of this accident rather than Blount. You would have had one burden less to bear. Don't take it so to heart, my child. I have seen others fall from their horses never to rise again alive. What can we do? Wait till our turn comes, and not make life miserable by thinking too much about it. But," said he, "you have not yet told me where I am to sleep. Must I go back to the ruin? It is a cold place, and doubly so when I think of the parental castle close by."

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"The truth is, I cannot offer you a room, Rudolf. There is not one suitable for the purpose."

"But why cannot Rudolf share mine?" I asked; "I will give up my bed to him."

"No," he replied quickly; "I will be content with the sofa, if Francis will consent to my staying here."

"Very well," she answered; "only you must promise that to-morrow, before daybreak, you will be far away. It is your father's birthday, and there will be many visitors at the Castle."

"I will start early, I promise you, Francis."

"Well, I will once more trust to your word of honour. And now good-bye. It is time for me to go; otherwise my absence will be remarked upon by the gentlemen of the house."

"Take this purse, Francis; it is a little commencement of restitution; I would I could offer you more, but I have not yet become a veritable Yankee uncle. I have not discovered a gold mine. Accept at least what I can return to you."

And he spread out the American greenbacks before her.

"Are they real ones, Rudolf?" she asked in a grave tone.

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"By heavens, Francis, what do you mean by such a question? I have committed many follies in my life—I have been a fool, a ne'er-do-weel, a spendthrift, I am a deserter—but a forger of false bank-notes! Francis, could you suspect me of such infamy?"

"I wish I had only suspicions, Rudolf; unfortunately I have the proofs."

"The proofs!" he cried, in a sorrowful tone of voice; "but that's impossible."

"What am I to think of the false letters of exchange in which you forged your father's signature? We have got them under lock and key, these terrible proofs, and they have cost us dear. I have pardoned this fault with the rest, Rudolf; but facts are facts."

"It is impossible, I tell you!" he answered with firmness. "There must be some terrible mistake in this case, and I trust you will assist me in clearing it up. If my father believes that of me, I am not surprised he should rejoice at my death, nor am I astonished you despise me. However, I solemnly protest to you by all that's dear to me, I am innocent, Francis."

"Yet these bills were presented to Baron von Zwenken, and we paid them to prevent a lawsuit. It could not have affected you very much, for you were in America; but my grandfather would have been obliged to retire from the army."

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"Francis, you are possessed of good, sound sense. How dared I have committed

such an offence just at the time I was in hiding near Zutphen, at the moment when you were so generously raising funds for my enterprise in America; nay, at the moment when my sincerest desire was to carry my father's forgiveness with me into exile? Show me these accursed bills, and I will prove my innocence."

"They are in the General's possession; I cannot get at them to show you them."

"If we had them here, I would soon prove to you that it is impossible for me, with my wretched handwriting, to imitate the fine and regular hand of my father. What is your opinion, Mr. Leopold?"

"I believe what you say," I answered.

"Ah, that's a relief; it does me good!" he murmured, his eyes filling with tears. "My father has been accustomed to spend his leave in fashionable watering-places; is it not possible for him there to have made the acquaintance of some wretch wicked enough to serve him such a turn?"

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"For the last few years the General has not been from home, except one winter which he spent in Arnheim."

"Can Rolf have done it?"

"No, don't suspect Rolf; he never had any education, but he's the honestest man living, and he would pluck out an eye rather than cause the old General any trouble."

"Then I don't know whom to suspect. Now take these notes, Francis—they are real, I assure you; take them as a proof you still believe my word."

"I believe you, Rudolf; but I think you have more need of them than I have."

"Never mind me; I have a good position now: first rider in the Great Equestrian Circus of Mr. Stonehouse, of Baltimore, with a salary of two hundred dollars a month—is it not splendid? You see I have not lost my old love for horses. Formerly they cost me much money; now they bring me in a living."

"Well, Rudolf, you might have sunk lower; your business demands courage and address. But I will not accept your money; I never take back what I have given. Tomorrow morning we shall see each other again. You need not jump from the balcony and scale the garden wall; I will let you out myself."

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"Ah! you wish to make sure of my departure——"

"I have already said I would trust to your promise. Good night, gentlemen."

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## Chapter XXVIII.

She was scarcely out of the room, when Rudolf, who had drained the bottle, began in his usual tone of banter—

"I don't know whether I ought to congratulate you, Mr. Leopold, but I am firmly convinced our charming Major has found her colonel."

I only shrugged my shoulders; for I felt a repugnance to making Francis a subject of conversation with such a fellow.

"Do you imagine I have no eyes? I know the women, I can assure you. I have come across all sorts, and all sizes and colours, in my vagabond life; and my niece, though she were a thousand times Major Frank, is still a woman—a woman with a man's heart, as good Queen Bess used to say of herself. I don't know what you intend to do, but it appears to me you have only to propose—"

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'Et bientôt on verra l'infante  
Au bras de son heureux vainqueur.'

She is smitten by you, that's certain! Why, she's like a thoroughbred horse. With much patience, much attention, and a firm hand that knows when to be gentle, so one succeeds. As for myself, I was always too rash, too impatient. *These gracious devils* soon perceive it, and once they know it, you are thrown—there's no help for you. After all, perhaps I am mistaken," he said, seeing I remained silent;

"otherwise I would add that I hope you are rich. Her grandfather is ruined——"

"And by whom?" I interposed; a little hard upon him, I confess, but his volubility had become insupportable.

"By whom? that's the question. I have contributed my share, I acknowledge, yet not more than my own fortune which came to me from my mother, as the eldest and only son. John Mordaunt could tell us something if he were alive. He got his wife's fortune when they were married, and Francis ought to have had something when she came of age; that is if anything were left, for they lived in style—yes, a style that would have run through any amount. I was sent off to the Werve with my tutor, for I had begun to understand and to make observations. After the death of my sister I was never invited to the house of John Mordaunt. But perhaps it will not interest you to listen to my old stories?"

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"Certainly, I should much like to hear an account of your adventures."

"Well, then, my father was the first cause of my misfortunes, for he opposed my wishes in everything. I wanted to be an officer; and my father would not let me go to the military college at Breda because he was prejudiced against it. He insisted upon my studying law at Leyden: this, he said, would lead to a fortune. Ah, I have found a fortune!" he repeated, with a bitter laugh. "Since I was sent to study for my father's pleasure, I thought it only right to seek my own; and, as he made me a fair allowance, I was soon noted as the wildest and most extravagant of students. I kept my horses and a Tilbury, and ran up enormous bills. Still I attended those lectures which interested me, and I had just put on a 'coach' for the final examinations, when my father lost a lawsuit against my Aunt Roselaer. The supplies were stopped, and I left college without having passed my examination as Master in the Law. My father's interests obtained for me a place in the financial world, but with the condition I should marry a rich heiress. The misfortune was, the heiress in question was of an over-ripe age, with a nose too red for my taste, and I neglected her. My father grew furious, and declared he would discard me. Moreover, I could not settle down to the regular routine of a counting-house for several hours a day, and sometimes extra work in the evening after dinner. I found in the office an old clerk, a regular old stager, who had sat on the same stool at the same desk for twenty years without a chance of promotion. This is my man, I thought, and I left the responsibility in his hands, whilst I amused myself with my friends at the club. But one fine day, when I was out picnicing with a party of friends, my worthy clerk started off with the cash-box. I was of course held responsible, and my father's guarantee was forfeited.

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"I dare say the whole of Francis' remaining fortune was swallowed up by this affair and a lawsuit arising out of it. What could I do now? I had a good voice, and I proposed to go to some music academy abroad, and return as an opera singer. My father would not consent to this, and told me the best thing I could do was to enlist in the ranks as a common soldier. I caught at this idea in the hope of being promoted to the position of an officer at no distant date; but I had never been habituated to discipline. I was sent to a small fortress on the frontiers; Rolf was my lieutenant, and he did not spare me either hard work or picket duty. To cut it short, I had enlisted for five years, and I did not stay five months. One fine morning I walked off altogether. I was caught, and I wounded an under-officer in self-defence; the charge against me was as clear as the light of day. But I succeeded in breaking out of prison. I own I was not very strictly guarded, and Francis, as I afterwards learnt, had done her utmost to facilitate my escape. Again I was free as the air; but I must live. I tried everything. I gave lessons in French and in Latin to little German boys, and I taught the little Fräuleins music and singing; I was even appointed private singer to an Austrian princess, who was deaf, and imagined that my voice resembled Roger's. I wandered about with a travelling opera company, and sang myself hoarse in the open air. I have been coachman to a baron, and travelled for a house in the wine trade, but when they wanted to send me to Holland I had to give up the post. Afterwards I was waiter at an inn, billiard-marker, valet to the secretary of a Polish count, who, appreciating my ability at the noble game of billiards, took me to Warsaw, and hastened to initiate me into his plans for the 'Independence of Poland.' As a matter of course, his enterprise was unsuccessful; but he got sent to Siberia, and I myself was kept in prison for some weeks because I refused to give evidence against him. Again I found myself thrown on the wide world without a penny in my pocket. But I will not weary you with a recital of all I have done and suffered. Perhaps the best thing, and the simplest, for me to have done, would have been to plunge into the Rhine and stay at the bottom; but I have always had a repugnance to suicide, and, besides, I have always been blest with a fund of good spirits and health. I now made a tour of the German watering-places from north to south, getting along as best I could, and changing my name very often. Once I was imprisoned with a Moldavian prince accused of murder, but I was let go, as I could prove my connection with the prince was posterior to the crime. A report then got abroad in

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Holland that I was dead, and I skilfully manoeuvred to obtain credence for it. At last, weary of my adventurous life, I heard how a member of our family had succeeded in America, and I decided to try my luck there; but I must have money. I flattered myself that after ten years my father would consent to do something for me. I wrote to Francis. The answer was not encouraging. My father threatened, if I dared to cross the frontier, he would hand me over to a court-martial. I thought Francis said this only to frighten me. I came to Zutphen, well disguised, and there I was convinced she had told me the truth. Francis, poor soul, was the only person who took pity on me, and you know already what it cost her. And when I think she could believe me to be guilty of forgery! Oh, the fact is I would not make her more unhappy by telling her what I suspect——”

“What then?”

“Listen; I have my weaknesses, but I have never been ruled by passions. I am not ‘passion’s slave.’ Wine, play, and pleasant company have run away with my money, and in some respects I am no more than a great baby; but a real passion, a tyrannical passion, capable of making me a great man or a great malefactor, such a passion I have never known. Some one in our family, on the contrary, has been ruled by such a passion; and many things I observed in my boyhood without thinking much about them. But you are a discreet man, otherwise Francis would not confide in you as she has done; and, besides, you are a relation of the family—it is better you should be warned.”

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After a pause—

“Know then that amongst all the trades I tried in Germany, I have had the honour to be *croupier* in a gaming-house. There, unrecognized by my unfortunate father, I have seen him play with a violence of passion of which you can form no idea; and, believe me, in spite of all my faults, it is in that way both his own and Francis’s fortune have been lost. I would have thrown myself at his feet, and besought him not to precipitate himself deeper into this abyss; but my position prevented me. Still, I watched him without his knowing it, and I soon found out for a certainty that he borrowed money of a Dutch banker, to whom he gave bills on Francis’s property;—and, you see, rather than confess this to her, he has accused me——”

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“But such conduct is abominable!”

“Ah! passions do not reason. I was far away, and my name was already sullied. I only desire to clear myself in Francis’s opinion. But to conclude my history: I was not more lucky in the New World than I had been in Europe; I was shipwrecked and lost my all before I could land at New York. I then went to the far West without meeting with anything which promised me a future; in short, I felt quite happy when I made the acquaintance of Mr. Stonehouse, who engaged me to accompany his circus to Europe. And so it has come about that I once more tread my native earth under the protection of the American flag. Once so near the Werve, I was seized with an irresistible desire to see the old place again. My satisfaction and reception have not been very flattering, as you have witnessed; but I will keep my promise to Francis, cost me what it may. And now good night.”

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Without awaiting my answer he threw himself at full length on the sofa, and soon gave me auricular evidence that he was enjoying the profoundest slumber. I had nothing better to do than follow his example. When I opened my eyes in the morning he had disappeared, but he had left his pocket-book and the notes on the table.

After mature reflection I came to the conclusion that his surmises were right, and that the father had defamed his own son to escape the remonstrances of a granddaughter.

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## Chapter XXIX.

When I began to reflect on the coming day, I remembered that it would be necessary for me to congratulate my uncle on his birthday; and I felt it would require a stretch of the forms of politeness to do this in a becoming manner. It occurred to me now that if Francis could only see through that little glass window in my breast, she would have the best of the argument in future on the subject of the conventionalities of society; for I confess to you, dear William, I had become a convert to Aunt Sophia’s opinions with regard to this same General von Zwenken, and now I admired her prudence in preventing her fortune from falling into such

hands.

As the birthday fell on a Sunday we all went to the village church, a duty which the General considered his position as lord of the manor imposed upon him; and one which he performed as he would have done any other duty laid down by the military code. The clergyman was old, monotonous, and wearisome. The greater part of the congregation went to sleep under the effects of his sermon. Francis took up a Bible and pretended to read, whilst it seemed to me the wakeful part of the congregation paid more attention to us than to their minister; and the remarks they whispered about one to another struck me as not being very favourable to us. The General alone kept his eyes fixed on the preacher throughout the sermon; but whether his mind was so intently occupied with the subject matter, I will not take upon myself to say.

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On our return the fête commenced. The village schoolmaster brought up his scholars, who recited a string of verses glorifying the Baron as patron of the school, though I doubt whether he had ever entered it. And I believe the same verses had done duty for several generations on similar occasions, when the owners of the Werve admitted the master and his scholars to an audience.

Then came the Pauwelsens from the farm, who still address the General as their landlord; after them some of the villagers. All these people were regaled with cake and chocolate. The burgomaster<sup>1</sup> called in his turn; he was a regular rustic, and paid a good deal more attention to me than to the General. He evidently saw in me a mystery which excited his curiosity.

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Captain Willibald also put in an appearance, and after congratulating my uncle, handed him a box of cigars, saying—

“They are the old sort; I know your taste exactly.”

“Certainly you do, my good fellow; it is an agreeable present. Here in the country one must lay in a stock. What say you, Leo?”

“To my shame, I must own I did not know what to buy you on such an occasion; but I will take care to make up for this omission of mine very soon.”

Uncle rejoined in a whisper—

“The one thing I should like you to do is to reconcile yourself with your uncle, the Minister for Foreign Affairs.”

Happily it was not necessary for me to reply to this remark. Francis entered the room, and quite charmed me by her manner. She was cordial to all the visitors—I thought I had never seen a better hostess. I saw how amiable she could be when quite at her ease, and not beset by fears of what envious tongues might say as soon as her back was turned.

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The dinner was beautifully arranged. The Captain had put on his full-dress uniform, the General his also, and I had given some extra attention to my toilette. Francis was dressed plainly as usual, without much regard for the day or the visitors; and yet there was something original in her style of dress, an elegance which seemed to heighten her beauty considerably. I was struck by the richness and weight of the silver, all engraved with the family coat-of-arms. I felt sure that the Captain and Francis had put their money together to get it from the pawnbrokers for the occasion. At table she took her place between the clergyman and myself. The village lawyer, the postmaster, and some rough-looking country farmers, together with the churchwardens and several members of the local board, had been invited to the dinner. Rolf took his place in the midst of them, and soon loosened their tongues by pointing out the various sorts of wine, and filling up their glasses with no sparing hand. Even the clergyman I found to be much more entertaining at table than in the pulpit, and the conversation never flagged. Fritz, assisted for the nonce by one of the sons of farmer Pauwelsen, had donned a livery which I felt pretty certain was the uniform of an officer metamorphosed. He was more attentive, and more particular than ever in his manner of serving every one; it seemed to me as if he had something on his mind, he was so solemn and serious. In spite of myself I could not help thinking of the utter ruin this once opulent house had fallen into, and of the unhappy son banished from his father's table. As for the General, I had never yet seen him in such good spirits. The table so well served, the appetizing dishes, and the wines which he had such a delicate manner of tasting—all this just suited his epicurean habits. Afterwards we drank coffee in the garden, and Rolf insisted upon our drinking a bowl of May wine; for he was most anxious to display his skill in the composition of this very famous German beverage.

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This completed the entertainment, for the country people are accustomed to retire

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early; and the evening was still young when a great lumbering coach drew up before the hall door, to convey the visitors back to the village.

I had hoped to meet Francis and propose a walk round the garden, but she was nowhere to be found. It appeared she had run over to the Pauwelsens with some of the dainties for the old bed-ridden grandmother. And her first care on her return was to inquire the whereabouts of her grandfather.

"He must not be left alone for a moment to-day," she said to me; "I have not been at my ease all this day."

"Because of Rudolf?" I inquired.

"I can never be sure what whim he will take into his head next. But you are sure that he is gone?"

"Certainly, before I was awake; but he left his pocket-book on the table. I will take it to him to-morrow."

"Don't do anything of the sort, I am sure he will come back; this thought has pursued me like my shadow all this day. But tell me what you thought of my dinner."

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"You were a charming hostess, Francis. How I should like to see you mistress of a well-furnished house of your own!"

"And one in which it would not be necessary to take the silver out of pawn when I expected visitors," she replied bitterly.

"My dear cousin, I know this must have been a bitter trouble to you," I answered compassionately.

"This I feel the most humiliating of all; but I did it to please my old grandfather, upon whom I can be severe enough at times about his weaknesses. Rolf, who in spite of his faults is the best-natured fellow in the world, went to the town of—, and we polished it up ourselves. We would not let Fritz into the secret."

"And to me, Francis, to whom you owe nothing, you have given much pleasure, by surprising me with this little Russian leather case—"

"Don't mention such a trifle. I only wished to mark the day on which you became my friend."

"Yes, indeed, your friend for life," I answered, gently drawing her arm within mine. This word had given me courage, it rendered me bold. "I thank you for that word, Francis; but it is not yet enough. Let me be to you more than a friend; permit me —"

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"More than a friend?" she cried, visibly agitated. "I beseech you, Leopold, let us not aim at what cannot be realized, nor destroy this relationship which is dear to me, by striving after the impossible. Promise me seriously, Leopold, you will not mention this subject to me again, or use any such language to me."

This answer seemed very like a formal refusal, and yet I remarked an emotion in her voice which to a certain extent reassured me.

"And why should it be impossible, Francis?" I resumed, mustering up all my courage.

This time I got no answer; she uttered a shriek and rushed off to the summer-house, I following her. There a frightful spectacle awaited us.

Rudolf, the miserable Rudolf, was on his knees before his father, kissing his hand. The latter was seated on the bench, to all appearance motionless. Suddenly Rudolf uttered a cry of terror and despair.

"I warned you," said Francis; "you have been the death of your father."

"No, Francis, no, he has fainted. But I found him in this condition; I swear to you by all that's dear to me that I found him thus."

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The fact was that the General had become stiff and motionless as a corpse. The trellis work alone had prevented his falling to the ground. His face had turned a little blue, his eyes were fixed and wide open, and his features distorted. Francis rubbed his temples with the contents of her scent-bottle. This friction revived him a little; but prompt medical aid was necessary.

"Tell me where the village doctor lives," cried Rudolf, beside himself in his

agitation, "that I may fly to him."

"It will be better to send Fritz," replied Francis, in a cold, decided tone.

I ran off in search of the old and faithful servant, to whom I explained the state of affairs.

"The General has had an attack!" he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "and it is my fault!"

"How so?"

"I ought not to have allowed it—but I—I could not drive away the only son of the house."

"Of course not, but keep your own counsel and make haste."

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And the old soldier started off at a speed I had thought him little capable of.

When I returned the General was in the same condition; Rudolf, leaning against a tree, was wringing his hands.

"That will do no good," Francis said to him; "help me to carry him to his room; Leopold will give us a hand."

"That's not necessary—he is my father, and it is my place to carry him."

In an instant he took up the old man with so much gentleness, and yet with such firmness of muscle, that you would have thought he carried a babe. He refused my assistance even up the staircase. He laid the old Baron on his bed, with his eyes still fixed, and quite unconscious.

"Thank God! there he is safe," said Rudolf, falling into a chair. "I have had many a hard piece of work in my life, but never one in which my heart was so deeply concerned. May I stay here until he regains consciousness?" he asked of Francis like a suppliant.

"I feel that it is impossible for you to leave at such a moment," she answered; "but we must call in Rolf, and if he sees you here——"

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"Oh, if he makes the slightest to do I'll twist his neck about like a chicken's."

It occurred to me that the more simple and prudent plan would be for me to go and make the Captain acquainted with what had happened, and obtain his promise to keep silent and to pretend not to know anything about Rudolf's presence. He was enjoying his after-dinner nap when I found him, and I was afraid he would have an attack of apoplexy when I told him about the coming of Rudolf. His anger seemed to make him forget the gravity of the General's position. I endeavoured to make him understand that the accident might possibly be attributed to a fit of cold, caused by drinking May wine in the cool of the evening so shortly after the copious dinner of which the General had partaken; but he had made up his mind that Rudolf was the cause of the misfortune, and he asserted that his duty as a soldier and an officer was to have him forthwith arrested as a deserter.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that I could get this fixed idea out of his head. I succeeded, however, at length in proving to him that the duty which he owed to humanity far surpassed all others at present; that it would be an unheard-of cruelty to arrest the son now at the bedside of a father, dying, for all we knew; that even Francis herself had consented to his staying, and that we were in duty bound to cast a veil over the family secrets. Finally the inborn good-nature of Rolf triumphed, and we went together to the General's room.

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The doctor had just arrived. He considered the case serious, and said it would be necessary to bleed the patient. Fritz and Rolf were left to aid the doctor and undress the invalid. Meantime I led Francis into a cabinet where Rudolf had taken refuge and was breathlessly awaiting the doctor's verdict.

As we had left the door ajar we heard the patient recover consciousness, and call for Francis in a strangely altered voice, and address questions to her in a frightened tone; which questions the doctor, not understanding, put down to delirium, though they made it clear enough to us that he had seen and recognized Rudolf, although he mentioned no names.

"If the patient is not kept strictly quiet, I fear it will turn to brain fever," said the doctor on leaving.

"Would you like to see the person you referred to just now?" I asked the General in a whisper, as soon as we were alone.

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"No, indeed! I know he is here; he must leave in peace, and at once, never more to appear before my eyes, or—I will curse him."

We could hear a suppressed sigh in the neighbouring cabinet. Rudolf had understood.

Rolf and Francis undertook the duty of watching at the bedside of the patient during the night; and I led Rudolf to my room—I may say supported him, for the strong man reeled. He threw himself on the sofa and wept like a child.

"It is finished," he said. "I could not, after all, have expected anything else, and I have my deserts."

"Francis was in the right, you see; you ought not to have broken your promise."

"It is not my fault I broke it. Fritz caught me this morning just as I was scaling the garden wall, and I was obliged to make myself known to him, otherwise he would have given me in charge as a housebreaker. He then offered to hide me in an unoccupied room on the ground floor until to-night. Thence, unseen, I could watch the movements of my father; and when his guests were gone, I saw him walking alone towards the summer-house, where he sat down, and, as I thought, he had fallen asleep. Then it was I ventured out of my hiding-place and approached him. It appears, however, he must both have seen me and recognized me. But now I have said enough, and this time I will go away for good. God bless him! May the Almighty strengthen dear Francis."

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I persuaded him to spend this night with me, and try to get a little rest. From time to time I went to make inquiries about the General, and towards morning I was able to inform Rudolf that his father had passed a fair night and was now sleeping calmly; he could therefore leave with his mind more at ease. I accompanied him a part of the way outside the grounds, and promised to keep him informed of the state of his father's health. He gave me his address, as I was to write to him under the name of Richard Smithson, and he then parted from me with the most passionate expressions of gratitude for the little kindnesses I had been able to show him.

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<sup>1</sup> In Holland every village has its burgomaster, who acts as chairman of the local board.

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## Chapter XXX.

The General escaped for this time, but his recovery was slow. He was weak, and both his arms and legs seemed as if they were paralyzed. I allowed myself to be easily persuaded to prolong my stay at the Werve, and I was able to render Francis many little services. One of us two had to be constantly at the side of the convalescent, for Rolf had better intentions than judgment. He let the General have just what he asked for, and would soon have brought on a relapse if we had not watched them both. Francis was very thankful to have me with her; and yet she could not be satisfied that it was possible for me to spare so much time from all my business. She little suspected that my most pressing and agreeable occupation was to remain at her side and win her affections. Her devotion to her grandfather was sublime; she forgot all the wrongs he had done her, and only reproached herself for having caused him pain by her plain speaking.

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Notwithstanding, as the old man gradually grew better, she was soon again convinced that a certain amount of firmness was absolutely necessary to manage him. During his illness he had requested me, in his first lucid moments, to receive and open all his letters. And in this way I became aware that he was engaged in "risky" speculations, and that he was making debts unknown to Francis. When he was well enough to talk on such a subject, I ventured to remonstrate with him, and to point out the consequences of persisting in such a course, both for himself and for Francis. He promised me he would give up all such speculations, and excused the past on the grounds that he wished to leave Francis something when he died. I was to make the best conditions I could for him in the sale of the Werve. It was time. Overberg consented to wait; but Van Beek, the executor of the will, a man as inflexible as the law itself, had lost all patience. And I was not yet sure of Francis. Weakness on my part, you will say; but no, it was delicacy—it was the fear of having to cut short my stay. I was afraid of the obstinacy of Francis—that she would not consent to a marriage even though I might have won her heart. I was constantly calling to mind that terrible sentence she had uttered in the garden: "You will not use such language to me again." I shuddered at the very idea that a new attempt on my part might draw from her lips a definite and decided *No*.

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The old General had discovered my intentions—of that I was convinced. He was continually insisting upon a reconciliation with my uncle the minister, and that I should prepare Francis for the sale of the Werve. On this latter point, I assured him Francis would listen to reason, and, armed with his power of attorney, I went over to Zutphen to arrange the preliminaries with Overberg. Van Beek was growing less and less manageable; he had sent in reams of stamped paper to Overberg, and the interest on several of the mortgages was six months over due; in fact the situation of affairs had become desperate. I charged Overberg to write to Van Beek that the Werve would be sold, in all probability, at the same time as my marriage with Francis took place; and I thought this would be enough to keep the lawyers quiet for a few days longer. I brought back some little presents for the General and Rolf, who were both highly pleased; and a plain set of earrings and a brooch for Francis, as the time had not yet arrived when I could offer her the diamonds I intended for my bride.

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On my return, to my great surprise, I found Francis sadder and more anxious than I had left her in the morning. She accepted my present, but seemed to be little interested in it. She retired early, and I followed her example, as I did not find Rolf's company particularly interesting. Most of the night I spent in reflection and conjectures as to this change in Francis; for I had observed tears in her eyes when she bade me good-night. Once more I made up my mind that the coming day should put an end to all my doubts. At breakfast, Francis, less depressed than the night before, told us she had received a letter from Dr. D., of Utrecht, who gave her very encouraging news of the invalid in whom she was so much interested. I wished to propose to her a long walk in the wood; but when I came downstairs from my room, where I had gone after breakfast to make a change in my dress, I met Francis in the hall, arrayed in her riding-habit. This time she had put on an elegant hat and blue veil, and was waiting for her beautiful horse Tancredo, which the son of the farmer led up to the door saddled.

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"Give up your ride this morning, to oblige me," I said to her, with a certain tone of impatience in my voice that could not escape her.

She looked at me in surprise and silence as she played with her riding-whip.

"You can take your ride an hour later," I insisted.

"I have a long ride before me, and I must be back before dinner."

"Then put it off until to-morrow. This is the first opportunity we have had to take a long walk since your grandfather fell ill. Don't refuse me this pleasure."

"You always like to disarrange my plans, Leo."

"To-day I have good reasons for doing so, Francis; believe me, to-morrow it will be too late."

"Really? Your words sound threatening," she said, attempting to smile. "Well, you shall have your way," and she threw aside her riding-whip pettishly. "You'll have to wait until I change my dress; I cannot walk in my riding-habit."

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Tancredo was sent back to the stable, and in much less time than I could have imagined my cousin reappeared in a very neat walking-costume.

"And where shall we go?" she asked.

"Well, into the wood, I suppose."

"That's right, the weather is splendid: we can walk as far as the round point, and rest there on the rustic bench which you perhaps remember."

And so we walked through the great lane towards the wood, silent, just because we had so much to say to each other. I had resolved to speak; but I could not decide in my own mind how to begin the subject. She herself seemed to have a thousand other things to talk about beside the one I wished to come to. At length I tried to change the subject by saying it would be necessary for me to fix a day for my return to the Hague.

"I was expecting it, Leopold."

"And are you sorry I am going away?"

"I ought to say 'No,' by way of opposition, which is the only suitable answer to such a foolish question."

"But I—will come back, if you would like it."

"No, Leopold, I should not like it. And I still believe you would have done better to

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go away the day I first advised you to do so."

"Have I been a burden to you, Francis?"

"You know better than that. You know I have much to thank you for: you have stood by me in days of suffering, and borne my troubles with me; you have been open, frank, and obliging with me; in a word, you have spoiled me, and I shall feel my loneliness doubled when you are gone."

"Not for long, though, for I will come back soon—with—with a trousseau!"

"And, in the name of goodness, for whom?"

"For whom, indeed, but my well-beloved cousin Francis Mordaunt!"

"That's a poor, very poor sort of jest, sir; you know very well that your cousin Mordaunt has no intentions of ever marrying."

"Listen to me, Francis! When we first met on the heath, and you told me your intentions on this point, I had no reasons for trying to dissuade you from them; but to-day, as you yourself know, the case is different. You will recollect the freedom with which I have pointed out to you any defects which I considered a blemish on your noble character. Do you think I should have taken such a liberty if I had not conceived the idea, fostered the hope, of your one day consenting to become—my wife?"

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The word, the all-important word, was at last said.

"Well, indeed, Leo," she began with a profound sigh, "since you force me to speak seriously, I must remind you of my last warning, 'not to use such language to me; it cannot, it may not be.'"

"And why not, Francis? Did I deceive myself when I thought I was not altogether indifferent to you?"

She turned aside her face in silence, but I was sure I heard something like a suppressed sigh.

"Is it possible you are not disengaged?" I inquired, taking her hand gently and placing myself before her so that I could look into her eyes.

"Disengaged! Certainly I am disengaged," she answered bitterly. "I have done my best to remain so; and I have all along told you I must be independent. It is necessary."

"Ah, I comprehend, Francis!" I exclaimed, carried away by an absurd jealousy; "you are still waiting for your Lord William."

"I?" she returned with passion; "I waiting for Lord William, who never loved me, who caused me to commit a thousand follies, who broke my heart, and who must now be nearly sixty! No, Leopold; don't humiliate me by pretending to be jealous of Lord William. Could I have told you the history of his stay with us if I still loved him?"

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"Is it then only a whim of Major Frank, who will surrender to no man, but prefers his savage kind of independence?"

"Don't torment me in this way, Leopold. You can break my heart, but you cannot overcome my objections."

"Then I will discover this mysterious power which enthral's you," I cried, full of anger and pain.

"You already know the duties I have to fulfil, Leopold. Why should you throw yourself into this abyss of misfortunes and miseries, in which I am sinking? and I shall never be able to get out of it my whole life."

"I wish to know your miseries, my dear Francis, to share them with you, and help you to bear them. We will overcome them together—be assured of that, my adored —"

Passion was getting the mastery over me; I caught her in my arms and pressed her to my breast. She made no resistance, but, as if wearied with the struggle, she rested her head on my shoulder—her head so charming in its luxuriance of golden curls. Her eyes were closed and her cheeks were crimson. I thought myself in the seventh heaven.

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Suddenly a croaking voice broke the profound silence of the wood—

"Don't let me disturb you. Ah! Now Missy has a lover, it is not surprising she neglects the little boy."

Such were the words we heard close to us, uttered by a hoarse voice and in the coarsest of country dialects.

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## Chapter XXXI.

Francis, pale with terror, disengaged herself from my embrace, and stepped forward a few paces. As for myself, I stood as if thunder-struck.

The person who had spoken these offensive words, and who had doubtless been watching our movements for some time, was an old peasant woman bearing a strong resemblance to the witches in Macbeth. Her sharp black eyes, bare skinny arms, as red and dry as a boiled crab, her face wrinkled and tanned, her blue checked handkerchief tied over her white cap, and the stick on which she supported herself, all contributed to call up before my mind one of those creatures our ancestors would have burned alive. I confess I wished her such a fate when she advanced towards Francis and said, with her ingrained impertinence—

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"Now, miss—now I see what you have been so busy about the last five weeks, that you have never once had time to come and see the child."

"My grandfather has been ill, Mrs. Jool."

"Yes, rich people's sickness—there's no great danger; but the young gent there, that's another thing, eh? I tell you all the village is talking about it."

"About what, Mrs. Jool?" asked Francis, indignantly.

"Your neglecting the child for—"

"Listen to me, Mrs. Jool," interrupted Francis, in a calm and firm tone: "neither you nor the village have any right to interfere with my business."

"Hum! the month is up, and a week gone in the second, and when Trineke<sup>1</sup> is not paid the boy suffers for it."

"You shall be paid to-morrow; but I warn you if the child suffer on account of a week's delay in payment, either at your hands or your daughter's, I will take him away from you. To-morrow, or the day after, I shall come to see him myself, and I shall make inquiries of the neighbours."

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"What! You would disgrace me and my daughter by taking him away? You try it! we shall then see who is the strongest."

And the insolent, vulgar woman set her arms akimbo, as she whined out—

"This is what one gets for defending great folks."

"It has cost you no sacrifices, Mrs. Jool; for you have simply tried to make money out of your daughter's misfortune."

"And he must have shoes and socks, or else he will have to run about bare-legged in clogs like a peasant's child."

"I will provide them, Mrs. Jool; and now I have heard enough. This is the path which leads to the village."

"What a hurry you're in!"

"These are private grounds; do you understand that? Now take yourself off, or—"

"Marry come up! how anxious you are to get rid of me. Well, well, I am going. Otherwise I am afraid this dandy will play the policeman for her." And so she limped off along the path indicated, mumbling all the way.

Francis then turned to me and said—

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"Well, Leopold, this incident will serve to enlighten you; behold a power opposed to my freedom and happiness."



"I understand," I answered, trying to assume a calmness I did not possess; "I understand, Francis—you are too honest to bind any man to you for life, saddled as you are with such a burden. But why did you not confide this terrible secret to me sooner? I will attempt the impossible to save you!"

"But, Leopold, what are you thinking of?" she responded, quite red with emotion; "you surely do not suspect me of anything unworthy? You comprehend that my honour is not herein concerned, though I must suffer for the deplorable consequences of the fault I committed."

"I am listening, Francis; but, excuse me, I do not rightly understand you. Is this not a question of a child which you are obliged to maintain?"

"Yes, certainly; and that's not the heaviest part of the burden. I have also to maintain the mother."

"Francis!" I exclaimed, in a transport of joy and relief.

"Now it is my turn to say I don't understand you," she rejoined, regarding me with an adorable simplicity. "Do you think it a light charge for me, in my position, to bring up a child, and provide for its mother whom I have sent to a private asylum?"

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I thanked Heaven from the bottom of my heart that she, in her innocence, did not suspect the conclusions I had drawn from the words and manner of the old witch.

"This is the fatal consequence of my rash obstinacy with poor Harry Blount," she continued. "You have heard me speak of the accident before. He was carried in a dying state into the cottage of this Mrs. Jool and her daughter. In my despair, I repeated several times: 'It is my fault; I have killed him, I have killed him.' The daughter knelt beside Blount in the wildest agony; and Harry could just murmur, 'My wife, my poor wife; have pity on her, Miss Francis!' I did not know until this moment that they were secretly married. I promised solemnly I would care for her, and even if I had made no promise I should still have done all I have done for her."

"The mother always was, and is, a bad woman; she had, as it were, thrown her daughter into the arms of Blount, whom she considered a good match. After the funeral, she made such good use of my words uttered in despair, and spread such nefarious reports in the village, that I was accused in all earnest of being his murderer. In fact, we were obliged to consult the magistrate, a friend of ours, as to the measures we ought to take to contradict and put a stop to such slanderous charges. This, of course, did not relieve me of my obligations towards the daughter, in whom, very soon after the birth of her child, symptoms of insanity manifested themselves. The child had to be taken from her, and it was given in care to a sister of hers in the neighbouring village, who had just lost her youngest born. Perhaps you would imagine she took it out of sisterly charity; but no, she insisted upon my paying her monthly wages as I should have to do any other wet nurse. Besides, I had to do what I could for the poor mother. It was most fortunate for me that on the occasion of my visit to Utrecht I met with Aunt Roselaer, otherwise I could not have afforded the expense the mother has cost under the care of Dr. D. Mrs. Jool, not caring to live alone, went to the house of her married daughter under the pretext of watching over the little one; but the fact is, she would there have a better opportunity of extorting money from me, and this she does under all kinds of pretences. The child has long been weaned, and ought not to be left in their charge. I am always threatening to take it away from them, but I have not yet done so; for, to confess a truth, I have recoiled from the rumours and false charges such a change would give rise to. The mother and child are now costing me the greater part of my income. My grandfather finds fault with me about it, for he regards it as so much money thrown away. Now, Leopold, do you think I could draw a man I really loved into such a maëlstrom as this?"

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"The man worthy to possess you, Francis, will not be drawn in, but will aid you in getting out of it."

"It is impossible; I will never abandon this child of Harry Blount's."

"I would never advise you to do anything of the sort. I know the way to treat such people as Mrs. Jool. The child must be taken away from her and brought up by respectable farmers; perhaps the Pauwelsens would take him. To-morrow I will go with you to the village——"

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"You will only stir a wasps' nest about your ears."

"Oh, never mind; I am not afraid of a sting."

"It's bad enough that this woman has been playing the spy on us to-day."

"When she sees us together to-morrow she will understand that it is useless

playing the spy on us any longer.”

“But then she will make us the talk of the country-side. You don’t know the wickedness that woman’s capable of.”

“Well, what can she say more than that we are an engaged couple? And is this not true, Francis?” I said, gently taking her hand in mine.

“You come back to the subject again, even now you know all,” she murmured; “but you have not calculated all the troubles and burdens which would fall upon you: Rolf, whom we could not send away from the Werve; my grandfather with his large wants—and small income. Oh yes, I know you are going back to the Hague to reconcile yourself with your uncle the minister, as the General has advised you to do; and I understand why. But don’t do so for my sake, Leopold, for you have yourself said it would demean you.”

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“Reassure yourself on that point, Francis; I may forgive my uncle and seek to be reconciled to him, as my religion bids me; but never for the sake of his favours. But why so many difficulties? Don’t you see I love you, Francis; that during the last few days I have been at some pains to suppress my feelings, and have therein succeeded better than I gave myself credit for; that, now I have told you all, we must either part for ever, or I must have the assurance you will accept me as your husband? I desire it, Francis; I desire it with a firmness of will that despises all objections and will remove all difficulties.”

“Leopold,” she replied, “don’t talk to me like this. No one ever spoke to me as you have done—you make me beside myself. And yet I ought to resist. I don’t wish to be an obstacle in the way of your happiness, whatever it may cost me.”

I took both her hands in mine. “Francis,” I said, “I love you!” This was my only answer.

“You persist? Can it be? May I still be happy!”

“Enough, Francis; you are mine! I will never forsake you; you are mine for life!”

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“For life!” she repeated after me, becoming so pale that I was afraid she would faint. “Leopold, yes, I am yours; I put my trust in you, and I love you as I have never loved before—never before,” she whispered quite low.

“At last!” I cried; and pressed the first kiss of love on her lips.

I need not tell you we came in too late for luncheon. It is true we were not hungry. We returned to the house slowly, and almost in silence, and we even slackened our pace as we drew nearer the Castle. Francis, especially, seemed loath to enter.

“Let us rest on the moss at the foot of this large oak tree,” she said; “it seems to me that all my misfortunes will come back to me as soon as I enter yonder. I cannot yet separate myself from my happiness. Oh, Leopold! I wish we could fly away together, that no one might interpose between us two.”

“We will fly away, dearest; but first we must go through certain formalities which will give us the right to appear in the world as man and wife, and lift up our heads with the best of them.”

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“And then will follow the breakfast, the visits, and the congratulations of mean and false people, who come with a hypocritical smile to wish us joy, whilst behind our backs they will make a mock of the man who has dared to marry Major Frank!”

“Oh, what a supposition!” I replied; “you must pay for that,” kissing her sad face into cheerfulness.

“I don’t understand,” she continued, “how people can treat so serious a subject as marriage with such lightness. The woman especially makes an immense sacrifice—her name, her will, her individual self; a sacrifice which I always considered it would be impossible for me to make, until I met you.”

“And now?” I asked, kneeling before her on the moss, the better to see into her beautiful eyes, which sparkled with happiness and tenderness.

“Now I have no longer so many objections,” she replied with her sweetest smile. “But do not remain in that position before me, Leopold. It is only acting a lie, for I foresee you will be my lord and master. But let us now go in, my dear, otherwise they will be alarmed about us at the Castle. They won’t know what to think of our long absence.”

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“Just let me say, Francis, it must be with us as Tennyson puts it—

“Sit side by side, full summed in all their powers,

Self-reverent each, and reverencing each:  
Distinct in individualities,  
But like each other even as those who love.”

“Exactly my opinion!” she exclaimed, applauding the sentiment.

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<sup>1</sup> Trineke is a diminutive of Catherine.

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## Chapter XXXII.

It was just as well we went in, for we met Rolf and Fritz, who had been sent out in search of us, as the General, though in a good humour, was most impatient to speak to us. When we entered his room he was arranging his papers, and did not give us time to announce our engagement, as we intended.

“Francis,” he cried, “why did you stay out so long when I have such good news to tell you?”

“That’s just what I have to tell you, grandfather; but what can have pleased you so much? You have not been made heir to Aunt Roselaer’s property, have you?”

“It comes almost to the same thing, my child. Know then that the heir to Aunt Roselaer’s property asks your hand in marriage. It is one of the conditions of the will; and I believe he will be agreeable to you.”

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I smiled, though I found that Overberg and Van Beek had been in too great a hurry to inform the old Baron of the real state of affairs. I had wished to be the first to break this agreeable surprise to Francis.

She stepped forward towards the General, and in a firm voice she said—

“I am sorry, grandfather, to disappoint you. The gentleman comes too late, for I have just promised my hand and heart to my cousin, Leopold van Zonshoven—and that is the good news I came to tell you.”

“But that’s all the better, dear child—all the better; for the heir to Aunt Roselaer’s property and your cousin Leopold van Zonshoven are one and the same person; and on the condition that you should marry the heir.”

Francis, turning on me brusquely, cried, “It is not true, Leopold? Oh, say it is not true!” she exclaimed, violently agitated.

“Then I should not speak the truth,” I answered. “The only difference for you,” I continued, “is this: you thought you were giving your heart to a ‘poor gentleman,’ and now, like a prince in the fairy tales, he turns out to be a millionaire. Can such a surprise be disagreeable to you?”

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“Not a disagreeable surprise to me”—she almost shrieked, with scintillating eyes and flushed cheeks—“to find you have put on a mask to deceive me! Have you not succeeded in inspiring me with esteem for you by your proud and dignified behaviour, and the elevated sentiments you professed? And do you think I can be happy to find that all this was but a comedy? Could a gentleman have treated me so? But you have deceived yourself, Jonker van Zonshoven. I gave my heart to a young man without fortune, whose upright and noble character I admired, and in whom I had more confidence than in myself; but for the intriguer, who, to seize upon my aunt’s fortune and make sure of it, has put on a disguise to win the heart of the woman he was ordered to marry, for this hypocrite, this pretended sage, I have nothing but—my contempt!”

“Be careful, Francis; I know your violent temper often causes you to say that which in cooler moments you regret; but don’t insult in such a manner the man you have just accepted as your husband—a man whom no one ever dared to address in such language, neither will he meekly bear it from any living being.”

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“Need I make any respectful apologies, or do I owe any excuses to you, who have deceived me, lied to me, who have introduced yourself here like a spy, and carried on your mean and degrading speculations up to the very moment when you thought it impossible for me to retract my word? Once more, sir, I tell you, you are

mistaken in my character. I will never pardon a man who has abused my confidence!"

"I have not abused your confidence, Francis," I answered, in as calm and gentle a tone as I could; "I have only been studying your character, and trying to gain your affections, before I would venture an avowal of my sentiments—that is all I have done."

"You have been false, I tell you. How can I any longer believe in your love? You came here to make what is called a good stroke of business, to gain your million. It is true, I loved you such as you were not as you now appear in my eyes. I will not be disposed of in marriage by any person dead or alive; and as for you, I refuse your offer. Do you understand me? I refuse you!"

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Upon this she fell back in an armchair, pale as death.

I was myself obliged to lean on the back of a chair, for I felt my legs trembling under me. Rolf, tender-hearted as ever, had withdrawn to a corner of the room with tears in his eyes. The General, with agony depicted on his face, sat in his chair wringing his hands, and seemed unable to move from the spot.

"Francis, Francis," he said, "don't let your temper overmaster you in this way. Reflect that the Castle is mortgaged to the last stone, and that the last six months' interest is not yet paid. If sold to-morrow it will not fetch a third of the amount for which I have mortgaged it, and it is only by the generosity of Jonker Leopold that the sale can any longer be delayed. He has offered to take it off my hands, together with all the mortgages with which it is burdened, and to allow me a yearly income which will make me comfortable for life; but you must marry him, otherwise all our plans come to nought. Understand that, and don't insult a man who has such generous intentions towards us. He is still willing to forgive you, if you don't persevere in your senseless refusal, I am sure; for I have for some time already been aware he loves you. And we have not to deal with him alone; there is a will made, and executors and lawyers appointed to see its provisions carried out. Now what shall I write to Overberg?"

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"Write, grandfather," said Francis, rousing herself with an effort, "that Francis Mordaunt will not suffer herself to be disposed of in marriage by anybody's testamentary disposition; that she will neither sell herself for one million nor for two millions, and that she has decidedly refused Jonker van Zonshoven's offer of marriage."

Feeling confident Francis would do me justice when more calm and resigned, but feeling also the necessity of not giving way to violence in dealing with a character such as hers, I said—

"I who have your promise and will not release you from it, I request the General to write to Overberg that Miss Mordaunt has accepted my offer, and that the transfer of the Castle de Werve can forthwith be concluded."

"If I will consent to the sale," interposed Francis, still pale and unmoved.

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"I beg your pardon, Miss Mordaunt," I rejoined, "your grandfather is the sole owner of the Castle; and during his life the will by which it is bequeathed to you has no force nor value."

"Ah! if she could only be brought to see all the circumstances in their true light," sighed Von Zwenken.

"Well, uncle, you write what I have requested you to write; you know only too well the consequences of any other decision."

"He wants you to write lies!" cried Francis, exasperatingly; "he'll stick to his million, that's clear."

"Francis," said the General, with the tone of a supplicant, "if you knew all I know! You are insulting a man who is generosity itself, who has power to ruin us all, and yet who seeks to save us if you will simply take the hand he holds out to you. Remember he can force us to sell the Castle if we do not consent to hand it over to him, however much against our own will."

"It is possible that he has secretly acquired the power to drive us out of the Werve like beggars, but he cannot compel me to marry him."

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"We shall see about that," I rejoined, proudly.

"You dare to talk to me of constraint—to me!" she cried, becoming furious, and advancing towards me—"you, Leopold," she added, with an accent of real pain.

"Yes, Francis," I answered, resolved to follow up my advantage, "you shall submit to the constraint of your own conscience, which must tell you that you owe me an apology. I am going away. Farewell. Try to reflect on this in your calmer moments. You have touched me to the quick; you have wounded my feelings of honour and my heart. Do not let me wait too long, or the wound will become incurable."

I gave her a last look of gentle reproach, but her glassy eyes seemed insensible to all around her. I shook hands with the old Baron, who, with bowed head, was weeping like a child. Rolf followed me to my room, and besought me not to leave the Castle in such haste.

"She is like this," he said, "when anything goes wrong with her. Within an hour she will regret what she has said, I am sure; the storm was too violent to last long."

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But my mind was made up. I packed up my luggage, slowly, I must confess, and always listening for a well-known step and a knock, which should announce Francis repentant and seeking a reconciliation. But she did not come.

I was miserable beyond all expression. It was like being shipwrecked in the harbour after a long voyage. To think this was the same woman at whose feet I had kneeled an hour ago, and whose hand I had kissed in a delirium of pleasure. And now she had turned upon me like a fury and declined my offer with contempt! I reflected that I ought to have acted more frankly and straightforwardly with her. For a moment the idea occurred to me to renounce all my rights as to Aunt Sophia's property; but, after all, what good end could it serve—it would only reduce us both to poverty. I promised myself that, once arrived at Zutphen, I would send her in writing a complete statement of how affairs stood, and enclose aunt's letter, which, out of delicacy, I had so far kept to myself. I would add a few words of explanation, and I doubted not that, in her calmer moments, she would do me justice.

And thus I acted; but as all the documents together made up too large a packet for the post, I confided them to a waiter at the hotel, who was to hand them over to a carrier calling every day at the Werve for orders. I flattered myself I should speedily receive an answer, and all the following day I passed in a feverish excitement, only increased in the evening when no answer came. During the night I never slept a moment. Another day passed, and still no answer; and now I gave myself up to the most complete despair. There was nothing for me to do but settle my affairs in all haste at Zutphen and return to the Hague.

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I kept Overberg in the dark about my rupture with Francis, only telling him pressing business called me back to the Hague. I signed all the papers he put before me, and told him I would return as soon as possible. The fact was I felt seriously unwell, and, as you know, home is the best place under such circumstances; I thought I could there immerse myself in my favourite studies, but I only remember feeling an unbearable weight of oppression come over me.

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## Chapter XXXIII.

Instead of regaining my usual calm in my own "sweet home," I fell seriously ill the first night after my return. I was attacked by a nervous fever, and remained for several days insensible. My landlady now proved herself a faithful and attentive nurse, and she tells me that my life was almost despaired of for some days. I am convalescent at last, and I shall travel. You will ask where? I don't know yet; nothing is decided.

When I was able to look over the papers which had accumulated on my table during my illness, I found a card from my uncle the minister, who had called to make inquiries about me. My worthy uncle had heard the report that I was a millionaire. I also found quite a heap of letters from Overberg and Van Beek, which I had not the courage to read; one, however, marked "Important," I broke open. It announced the death of my uncle Von Zwenken, and I was invited to the funeral. The date told me that the letter was three weeks old! What had become of Francis?

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Doubtless she was still ill-disposed towards me. She seemed to be unaware of my illness, since she had invited me to the funeral of her grandfather. What must she have thought of my silence? Not a single word of comfort or encouragement from me. What annoyances she might already have suffered from the lawyers. I was

expecting my doctor every moment, and I had determined to ask his permission to start immediately for Zutphen, when I heard some one coming up the stairs, whom my landlady was endeavouring to call back, she being very strict about my being kept quiet. But, in spite of all her efforts, Rolf burst into the room—Rolf, whom I had ended by loving almost as much as I detested him the first few days of our acquaintance.

“My General is dead,” he said, with tears in his eyes—“died in my arms. Francis is gone—”

“She is not ill, however?” I interrupted quickly.

“Not in the least, she is in excellent health; but—she has turned me out of the Werve.”

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“What do you say?”

“Oh, it was not done in anger or malice; but because she herself will be forced to leave the Castle very soon. In fact, she has already hired a room at farmer Pauwelsen’s; but she will tell nobody what she intends to do.”

“But tell me all the particulars of the General’s death.”

“Well, the General had not the courage to resist her, and write to Overberg in the sense you advised him. And as everything was vague and uncertain because of your answering nobody’s letters, the lawyers lost patience; and Overberg, egged on, I believe, by that quill-driver in Utrecht, wrote to Freule Mordaunt to know for certain whether or not she was engaged to you. You will guess her answer, short and dry, but without a word of reproach as far as you were concerned, I can assure you. I know she reproaches herself bitterly, and has done so since the day you left, as I told you would be the case.”

“Even after she had received the packet from me?”

“She never received anything from you.”

“That’s very surprising!”

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“No, it’s not at all surprising, for everything was in the utmost confusion with us from the fatal Friday you left—But I see this is sherry, may I help myself?”

“Certainly, Captain; I beg your pardon, I ought to have thought of asking you sooner.”

“Well, then, after you were gone she fainted. Such a thing never happened to her before within my knowledge. I felt almost ashamed of her; but she loved you so much, as she later confessed to me weeping! When she came to herself again, and whilst, as we thought, she was reposing in her own room, she had stealthily gone off to the farm, ordered Tancredo to be saddled, and ridden away at full gallop. At dinner we became dreadfully uneasy as she did not put in an appearance, and neither the General nor myself could eat. But it was much worse when, in the evening twilight, young Pauwelsen came to say Tancredo had returned to the stable alone, without saddle and white with foam.”

“An accident!” I cried, beside myself. “Do tell me the worst at once. What has happened to her?”

“Oh, it was not so bad after all, Jonker—only a sprained foot; we found her lying on the moss at the foot of an oak, to which she had been able to crawl to rest herself a little.”

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“I know that oak!” I exclaimed. “I feel what she must have felt there. She loves me still!”

“I believe so, Jonker, for she said we were to leave her there to die, and to tell you where she died. It appears she had ridden towards the town, and then, suddenly changing her course, was returning to the Castle through the wood; but either she must have pressed Tancredo too hard, or dropped the reins—she cannot explain it herself. But certain it is, the noble animal, no longer recognizing the hand of his mistress, galloped home, and she fell out of the saddle. We carried her home, and laid her on the sofa in the drawing-room. The surgeon declared there was no danger, but said she must not be moved for some days.”

“And why did you not send me word immediately?”

“Hum! I wanted to write to you, and she also. I ought not to tell you perhaps, but she wrote a note to you.”

"Which I never received."

"No, for young Pauwelsen was charged to deliver it into your own hands at Zutphen; but when he arrived there they told him you had left, and he brought back the letter, which the Freule tore up, with a bitter laugh saying—

"I deserved no better."

"Oh, if I could have foreseen all this!" I cried, wringing my hands.

"I advised you to stay," replied the Captain; "why need you go off in such a hurry?"

"My dear Captain, I felt I was going to be ill; I was ill already. But how was it she did not receive my packet? I waited until the third day for an answer."

"What could you expect? Everything was turned upside down. Fritz had orders to place all letters on the General's writing-table, and he had taken such an aversion to anything in the shape of a communication from the lawyers, that he never opened one of them. Miss Francis was scarcely able to move about again when those accursed creatures set to work and threatened to send in the bailiffs, and Heaven only knows what besides. Then she had to attend to everything, for the General had a second attack of paralysis: those people have been the death of him, and I could not prevent it."

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The Captain forgot to add here, what I afterwards learnt, that he had himself hastened the General's end by administering a glass of old cognac to him under the pretext of strengthening him for the occasion of meeting the bailiffs.

"As soon as his eyes were closed," he continued, "the lawyer from Arnheim, who was in possession of the General's will, and Overberg advised Francis to arrange matters with you in an amicable manner; but she would not listen to them. You understand, it was in your name these proceedings had been taken against her grandfather."

"Whilst I lay unconscious on a bed of sickness."

"That's what the Pharisees knew, but they had your power of attorney; and Francis said—

"Behold the constraint with which he threatened me! And he imagines I shall give way? Never! You should have seen her, how pale she was, but firm; when the men came to make the inventory of all there was in the Castle!"

"Afterwards she took me aside. 'Rolfie,' she said—it was her word when she wanted to get anything out of me—'Rolfie, now tell me honestly, have you not sacrificed the greater part of your fortune to the wants of my grandfather?'

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"Well, certainly not, Maj—Miss Francis; we have only spent that small sum which we won in the lottery. The General would make use of his part of it to try his luck once more; but I preferred spending my part on a few extras for the table that we might all enjoy it together.'

"Then that story of yours about an inheritance was a pure invention?' she demanded severely.

"Pardon, Freule, I have inherited a nice little farm in North Brabant, where I always intended to end my days, if the Freule should' (marry, I would have said, but I was afraid) 'wish to dispense with my services.'

"And can you live comfortably on it, Captain?'

"Very; and, besides, I have my pension. Living is very cheap in that part of the country; if the Freule can make up her mind to go with me, we should have a very pleasant life of it together. Though it is no castle, the best room in the house is set apart for your service.'

"I thank you most cordially, my good Captain; I was most anxious to know whether you were provided for. But we must separate, my dear Rolf.'

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"And where will you go, what will you do?'

"I cannot tell you that; but one thing is certain, you cannot go with me."

The Captain plied himself well with sherry to keep up his spirits, and concluded by saying—

"And so we parted, Jonker. But I thought to myself, I'll pass through the Hague; and here I heard of your illness, and said to myself, 'Probably the Jonker is

ignorant of all that has occurred.”

“Do you know what you must do, Rolf? Go back to the Werve at once. I shall give you a letter for the lawyers to stop all proceedings, and you will take command of the fortress until I come. Retain Fritz in the service, and try to find the packet. I shall be with you to-morrow or the day after, if my doctor will give me permission to leave my room.”

“Oh, the packet will be at Overberg’s with the rest of the General’s papers.”

“Then try to find out where Miss Francis is, and induce her to return to the Werve; but don’t tell her I am coming there.”

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At the same moment my landlady brought me the following telegram from Overberg—

“Your immediate presence indispensable; no arrangement possible; F. M. has left the Castle.”

I did not hesitate any longer. Without awaiting the doctor’s leave, I got Rolf to pack my portmanteau, and we were off before he could stop us. These thick-coming events called forth all my strength, and I forgot how weak I really was.

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## Chapter XXXIV.

When I arrived at the hotel in Zutphen, I was surprised to find a letter awaiting me from Rudolf, who was still travelling through the provinces of Guelderland and Overysseel with his troupe, which was now performing at Laren fair. It ran as follows—

“If you wish to prevent Francis from committing the greatest folly she has yet been guilty of in life, try to meet me at the ‘Half-way House,’ between Zutphen and Laren, to-morrow morning about nine o’clock.”

I promised myself I would not neglect this appointment. I then sent for Overberg, who confirmed all I had heard from Rolf, and explained many things I thought inexplicable. It was Van Beek who had pushed matters to extremities, and he (Overberg) had been quite willing to grant any reasonable delay. He told me one thing I was still ignorant of. A lawyer had sent into Van Beek a copy of a codicil to Aunt Sophia’s will, drawn up by her order on the eve of her death, by which she bequeathed to her grandniece, Francis Mordaunt, a yearly income of three thousand florins in case she did not marry Jonker van Zonshoven; and I was bound to pay this pension on condition she made no marriage without my consent. A very far-seeing woman this aunt of mine! I charged Overberg to make known this codicil, and to hand over to Francis the packet which he had found amongst the General’s papers. He had sent it to the Castle, but too late; Francis was already gone. I requested him to do his best to find her out, and to deliver it into her hands.

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Next morning, when I arrived at the appointed place, a little country inn, the landlady told me that a lady and gentleman were already awaiting me upstairs. I hastened into the large assembly-room, and at the bottom of it I could perceive Rudolf and Francis, almost hidden behind a platform which had been erected for the musicians. Francis stood with her back to the door at which I entered. I wished to give her warning of my presence, but I could not speak; and as I advanced all of a tremble, I heard Rudolf saying to her—

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“*Nonsense, my dear!* you have no idea of the sort of life you wish to lead. You talk of liberty and independence; but I tell you it is slavery and the whip into the bargain. Do you know our bed-room is in the stable with the horses? Do you think the women are much respected because they are so politely assisted to mount their horses during the performance? I can tell you Madame Stonehouse herself is not spared by her gracious husband. And you would cast in your lot with us, susceptible and haughty as you are!”

“There’s nothing else I can do,” replied Francis. “I can manage a horse, but I cannot become a governess and undertake the care of young children any more than I could earn my bread with my needle. I will not be guilty of the sin of suicide. I have a duty to fulfil in life, though to me life is but a martyrdom. And this is my only resource.”



"But, you foolish girl, why don't you seek a reconciliation with your Cousin van Zonshoven? You would then have all a woman could wish for—your castle back, a beautiful fortune, and a husband who would love you truly. Upon that I'll wager my head."

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"Yes; he's a man of rare loyalty, indeed, and has shown himself such!" she answered with a choking voice.

"Bah! at the worst he has only acted a little insincerely; white lies, my dear, white lies may be pardoned. Forgive him his peccadillo. He will have much to forgive in you, as you have confessed to me yourself. Tell him you are sorry for what you have said. He will then embrace you and all will be well."

"It is impossible, I tell you; it is too late."

"Why too late, Francis?" I exclaimed, as I stepped forward, unable to restrain myself any longer.

"Leopold!" she cried, turning deadly pale, and covering her face with her hands.

"Francis," I went on gently, "nothing is changed; I still regard you as my betrothed wife."

And saying this I tried to take her hand in mine. But the touch pained her; she sprang back as if she had received the discharge of an electric battery.

"Your betrothed! You have given me to understand this by the manner in which I have been treated!"

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"It grieves me to the heart, Francis—I cannot tell you how much. I come now from a sick-bed, and what the lawyers did whilst I lay insensible in the fever was in opposition to my wishes, and quite contrary to my intentions."

"And was it contrary to your intentions to cause my grandfather the shock which led to his death?"

"Most certainly it was, and I did my utmost to prevent it; but you would not assist me, and afterwards it was too late. It was the executors carrying out the last will and testament of the deceased, and it was out of my power to interfere with them. And if the consequences hastened your grandfather's death, you cannot blame me, Francis. For after a calm consideration of all the facts, you will be bound to agree that I was a better friend both to him and to you than you have been to yourselves. Because of a little misunderstanding which I could easily have explained, you have brought all this trouble on yourself, and caused me the most acute suffering. Still all may be well."

"All may be well! Oh, Leopold, Leopold! how can you say so, when the gulf between us is so wide," she replied, with a profound sigh. "You threatened me with force, and you have meanly carried that threat into execution! You had it in your power to drive me to extremities, your one fixed idea being to compel me to marry Aunt Roselaer's heir. I have heard this so often I am sick of the subject; and though I acknowledge you are right from a worldly and material point of view, I had given you credit for better things. Don't you understand, that were I to marry you now under constraint, I should tug at my chains until they made life unbearable to us both, or until they broke!"

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"I agree with you, Francis, if you regard our engagement in this light, and I release you from your promise."

"Thank you, but I had already taken measures which render such generosity on your part unnecessary. I am going to travel about in the world, and I have taken steps to separate myself from the past entirely. I have made my contract with Mr. Stonehouse, to whom Rudolf is to introduce me as soon as he arrives here to sign the same."

"Your Uncle Rudolf came here, my dear, to dissuade you from such a step; and if you are awaiting the arrival of Mr. Stonehouse, you will have to wait a long time," responded Rudolf, coolly. "Did you think me such a fool, Francis, as to assist you in your insane idea?"

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"Then you never delivered my letter to your master?"

"Certainly not, I did much better. I warned your Cousin Leopold that you were going to commit a folly which would lead to your inevitable ruin."

"Oh, I see! this is another plot against me. Enough; as I cannot trust any one but myself, I will ride off at once and ask to see Mr. Stonehouse in person."

"You will do nothing of the sort," I said, authoritatively, seeing that she rose to depart. "The General is dead, Rudolf civilly dead, and I am consequently, in the eyes of the law, your nearest male relation. Therefore I forbid your entering this abyss, from whence no one ever rises again, in the flower of your age."

"What am I to do?" she cried passionately, yet with an accent of submission in her tone.

"You have simply to return to the Werve," I answered, "where you will find a friend actively preparing for your reception." [319]

"A friend!" she repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes, Rolf; who is to stay there until further orders. Don't be afraid—I shall not importune you with my presence, for I am going to travel."

This latter declaration seemed to make a great impression on her. She regarded me with a strange kind of look, and replied in a tone of voice which betrayed something more than pride and anger—

"In very sooth, Leopold, you are going to travel? Well, then, I will stay at the Werve. Farewell."

And she escaped from the room quickly, shutting the door after her. We soon heard the pawing of her horse outside, and we trusted she would ride back to the Castle.

"Ought I not to follow her?" Rudolf inquired of me.

"No; any mistrust on our part would offend her."

"She is in an unusual state of excitement, and such a reckless rider. Only lately she had an accident."

"That's true; for Heaven's sake follow her! But if you should be recognized yourself?" [320]

"Never fear, I am too well disguised for that. In my present dress I made more than one visit to the Werve during my father's last illness. I have pressed his hand on his death-bed; and he has given me his signet ring. Out of prudence I do not wear it on my finger, but like this, in my bosom, attached by a cord round my neck. And Francis," he cried in triumph, "has accepted assistance from me during these last days of trial. When the *Kermis* at Laren is over, we shall leave this country; and I shall never more set foot on my native soil," he added, sadly, as he mounted his horse; and pressing my hand for the last time, took an eternal farewell of me. [321]

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## Chapter XXXV.

Our surprises were not yet at an end.

On my return to Zutphen I found Overberg waiting for me at my hotel. He had just received from England a packet addressed to Francis, which Fritz had refused to take charge of, as he did not know where to find her. I assured him that Miss Mordaunt had now returned to the Castle; and I offered my driver double fare if he would go at once to the Castle, and bring me back a *reçu* from Francis. I should then have proof positive of her return to the Werve. I was very anxious to find out what this packet could contain; and I was in despair as to any suitable means of satisfying my curiosity, when early next morning old Fritz arrived at the hotel with a note from his mistress. He had his orders not to deliver it into anybody's hands but mine. I broke the seal with trembling fingers, and read as follows— [322]

"COUSIN LEOPOLD—I must speak to you once more before you start on your travels; it is absolutely necessary. You once assured me you were always ready to oblige a woman who exercised the privileges of her sex. May I hope you will come to the Werve to have a last interview with me? Instead of writing I should have preferred to come to your hotel to see you; but I was afraid of scandalizing you by such a liberty. Please send word by Fritz the day and hour I may expect you.

F. M."

I had but one answer to this note; it was to order out the hotel carriage, and drive back with Fritz. My hopes and fears as we drove along I will not attempt to

describe; they are better left to your imagination; but everything seemed to turn round before my eyes as we passed over the old drawbridge, and drove up to the hall-door. Rolf was awaiting me at the entrance; and he led me into the drawingroom without a word, only expressing his delight by the manner in which he swung about his cap.

Francis was seated on the sofa which I remembered so well, her head cast down, paler than on the preceding day; but charmingly beautiful in her mourning-dress. She rose hastily, and advanced to greet me. [323]

"Thank you, Leopold, for coming so soon. I knew you would come; I had confidence in your generosity."

"And—am I then no longer contemptible in your eyes, Francis? You have received my packet, and read Aunt Sophia's letter?"

"I have received all the documents, read all—more than was necessary to convince me I had done you an injustice, and ought to apologize to you. Now I am ready to confess it before all the world that I did you wrong; will you pardon me without reserve?"

"Need you ask me that, Francis? But you must never doubt me more, never more, Francis."

After a moment's silence she answered in a low voice—"Never more, Leopold!"

So saying, she pressed my hand with ardour, as a sign of reconciliation. Still, there was a constraint about her manner which prevented my pressing her to my heart as I desired to do.

"Sit down, Leopold," she said; "now we are reconciled I have to ask your advice as my nearest relation and my most trusted friend." [324]

At the same time she unfolded the packet which she had received from England.

"Lord William is dead," she went on; "will you read this letter addressed to me, together with a copy of his will?"

I could scarcely control myself sufficiently to read the letter; but I obeyed mechanically. This letter contained a few words of serious advice, breathing nothing but words of paternal love; though I read between the lines that it had cost him a struggle after her confession to regain this kind of calm affection for her. He had left with Cupid's arrow in his heart. The letter concluded with the most ardent wishes for her happiness; and he expressed a hope she would one day find a husband worthy of her, begging her to accept as a marriage portion the legacy he had left her by his will. Finally, he said, she must allow no considerations whatever, especially money considerations, to induce her to marry a man whom she did not love with all her heart.

The family name with which this letter was signed is one of the most illustrious in the scientific as well as in the political world.

There was also a second letter from the nephew and heir to Lord William's title and immense fortune. He assured Francis of his intentions scrupulously to fulfil the last will of the deceased. Francis was to receive from the estates an annuity of three thousand pounds for the term of her natural life. [325]

"Ought I to accept it, Leopold?" she demanded.

"My opinion is you cannot refuse it, Francis. Your greatest desire has always been to have an independence; and here it is offered you by the hand of a friend."

"You are right, Leopold; I shall follow your advice and accept it. Now I shall not be forced to marry any one; and if I should choose a husband, he cannot suspect me of having done so for the sake of his money. Shall I be rich enough to buy back the Werve?"

"No, Francis; the Werve is in the possession of one who will not sell it for money. If you still desire to become Baroness de Werve, you must take another resolution."

"Leopold," she said, rising, "you say that independence has always been my chief desire. It is possible; but now I understand that my greatest happiness is to be dependent on the man I love. Leo, Aunt Roselaer has left me an annuity which I decline to accept, as a matter of course; but her intentions towards me were kindly, and I will follow her advice. She has forbidden me to marry without your consent." [326]

Then with an indefinable mixture of grace, confusion, and malice, she sank down

on her knees before me, and said—

“Leo, I wish to marry my Cousin van Zonshoven; have you any objections?”

“Heaven forbid! I have no objections!”

And with what rapture did I raise her, and clasp her to my breast, where she shed many tears, whilst my own eyes were not dry. We had loved so much, and suffered so much for each other.

---

What can I tell you more, dear William? We walked out in the grounds, and again visited all the places which had become endeared to us by our former walks. We made all sorts of plans for the future. We wrote letters to Van Beek and the other men of the law, informing them in a grave tone that all the bills would be paid at maturity, or on presentation.

[327]

The fact that Francis was in mourning for the General served us as a pretext for being married privately, and in as quiet a manner as possible, an arrangement in accordance with both our wishes. An old college friend of mine, vicar in a small town near the Werve, married us.

Little Harry Blount is already confided to the care of the farmers Pauwelsens. His mother has perfectly recovered, and will one of these days, we trust, marry young Pauwelsen, a son of the farmer, who had already fixed his eyes on her before her engagement to Blount. This good news has removed an immense weight from Francis’s mind. We are going to make a long journey, and try to enjoy ourselves thoroughly; the trials we have both passed through have taught us to appreciate our present happiness.

During our absence the Werve will be restored, and Rolf will be left in charge.

To conclude, dear William, I have got Francis to enclose you a note in her own handwriting.

*Geneva, 1861.* LEOPOLD VAN ZONSHOVEN.

“That it is becoming in Leo to have sketched the doings of Major Frank in all their shades and peculiarities, even for a friend, I shall never allow; but I feel that in his delicate position it was necessary for him to ease his mind to some one, and that it was better he should do so to a friend across the seas. Therefore I have pardoned him. Now I will request you not to have his letters printed in any of your Indian papers! That would be too bad! Not that Francis van Zonshoven would attempt to defend such a person—oh no! It appears to me no such person ever existed. But there are family secrets in the letters, which I must seriously recommend to your discretion.

[328]

“Don’t wait until your term of service in India expires, but get your leave of absence and visit us at the Werve. All the windows are now glazed, and there is room enough for Leo’s friend, though he came with a whole family.

“FRANCIS VAN ZONSHOVEN.”

Unwin Brothers, The Gresham Press, Chilworth and London.

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