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# DR. ADRIAAN

By

## LOUIS COUPERUS

*TRANSLATED BY ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS*

NEW YORK

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### TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

*Dr. Adriaan* is the fourth and last of the volumes forming *The Books of the Small Souls*. In it the reader renews his acquaintance with all the characters that survive from *Small Souls*, *The Later Life* and *The Twilight of the Souls*.

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS.

Chelsea, 30 March, 1918.

## CHAPTER I

The afternoon sky was full of thick, dark clouds, drifting ponderously grey over almost black violet: clouds so dark, heavy and thick that they seemed to creep laboriously upon the east wind, for all that it was blowing hard. In its breath the clouds now and again changed their watery outline, before their time came to pour down in heavy straight streaks of rain. The stiff pine-woods quivered, erect and anxious, along the road; and the tops of the trees lost themselves in a silver-grey air hardly lighter than the clouds and dissolving far and wide under all that massive grey-violet and purple-black which seemed so close and low. The road ran near and went winding past, lonely, deserted and sad. It was as though it came winding out of low horizons and went on towards low horizons, dipping humbly under very low skies, and only the pine-trees still stood up, pointed, proud and straight, when everything else was stooping. The modest villa-residence, the smaller poor dwellings here and there stooped under the heavy sky and the gusty wind; the shrubs dipped along the road-side; and the few people who went along—an old gentleman; a peasant-woman; two poor children carrying a basket and followed by a melancholy, big, rough-coated dog—seemed to hang their heads low under the solemn weight of the clouds and the fierce mastery of the wind, which had months ago blown the smile from the now humble, frowning, pensive landscape. The soul of that landscape appeared small and all forlorn in the watery mists of the dreary winter.

The wind came howling along, chill and cold, like an angry spite that was all mouth and breath; and Adeletje, hanging on her aunt's arm, huddled into herself, for the wind blew chill in her sleeves and on her back.

"Are you cold, dear?"

"No, Auntie," said Adeletje, softly, shivering.

Constance smiled and pressed Adeletje's arm close to her:

"Let's walk a little faster, dear. It'll warm you; and, besides, I'm afraid it's going to rain. It's quite a long way to the old lady's and back again.... I fear I've tired you."

"No, Auntie."

"You see, I didn't want to take the carriage. This way, we do the thing by ourselves; and otherwise everybody would know of it at once. And you must promise me not to talk about it."

"No, Auntie, I won't."

"Not to anybody. Otherwise there'll be all sorts of remarks; and it's no concern of other people's what we do."

"The poor old thing was very happy, Auntie. The beef-tea and the wine and chicken...."

"Poor little old woman...."

"And so well-mannered. And so discreet.... Auntie, will Addie be back soon?"

"He's sure to telegraph."

"It's *very* nice of him to take such pains for Alex. We all of us give Addie a lot of trouble.... When do you think he'll come back?"

"I don't know; to-morrow, or the next day...."

"Auntie, you've been very fidgety lately."

"My dear, I haven't."

"Yes, you have.... Tell me, has anything happened with Mathilde? Has there?"

"No, child.... But do keep your little mouth shut now. I'm frightened, the wind's so cold."

They walked on in silence, Adeletje accommodating her step by Aunt Constance' regular pace. Constance was a good walker; and Addie always said that, leading the outdoor life she did, Mama grew no older. They had now been living for ten years at Driebergen, in the big, old, gloomy house, which seemed to be lighted only by themselves, by their affection for one another, but which Constance had never brought herself to like, hard though she tried. Ten years! How often, oh, how often she saw them speed before her in retrospect!... Ten years: was it really ten years? How quickly they had passed! They had been full and busy years; and Constance was satisfied with the years that had fled by, only she was distressed that it all went so fast and that she would be old before.... But the wind was blowing too fiercely and Adeletje was hanging heavily on her arm—poor child, she was shivering: how cold she must be!—and Constance could not follow her thoughts.... Before ... before.... Well, if she died, there would be Addie.... Only.... No, she couldn't think now; and besides they would be home presently.... They would be home.... Home! The word seemed strange to her; and she did not think that right. And yet, struggle against the singular emotion as she would, she could not cure herself of thinking that big house gloomy and regretting the little villa in the Kerkhoflaan at the Hague, even though she had never known any great domestic happiness there.... Still ... still, one loves the thing that one has grown used to;

and was it not funny that she had grown so fond of that little house, where she had lived four years, and been disconsolate when, after the old man's death, Van der Welcke and Addie too had insisted on moving to the big, sombre villa at Driebergen?... Fortunately, it was at once lighted by all of them, by their affection for one another; if she had not had the consoling brightness of mutual love, oh, it would have been impossible for her to go and live in that dark, gloomy, cavernous villa-house, among the eternally rustling trees, under the eternally louring skies! The house was dear to Van der Welcke and Addie because of a strange sympathy, a sense that their home was there and nowhere else. The father was born in the house and had played there as a child; and the son, strangely enough, cherished the exact same feeling of attraction towards it. Had they not almost forced her to move into the house: Van der Welcke crying for it like a child, first going there for a few days at a time and living there with nobody but the decrepit old charwoman who made his bed for him; then Addie following his father's example, fitting up a room for herself and making constant pretexts—that he must go and have a look among his papers, that he must run down for a book—seizing any excuse that offered?... Then they left her alone, in her house in the Kerkhoflaan. That had trees round it too and skies overhead. But it was strange: among those trees in the Hague Woods, under those clouds which came drifting from Scheveningen, she had felt at home, though their little villa was only a house hired on a five years' lease, taken at the time under Addie's deciding influence. He, quite a small boy then, had gone and seen the fat estate-agent.... Oh, how the years, how the years hurried past!... To think that it was all so long ago!... Strange, in that leasehold house she had felt at home, at the Hague, among her relations, under familiar skies and among familiar people and things, unyielding though both things and people had often proved. Whereas here, in this house, in this great cavernous, gloomy villa-residence—and she had lived in it since the old man's death fully ten years ago—she had always felt, though the house belonged to them as their inheritance, as their family-residence, a stranger, an intruder, one who had come there by accident ... along with her husband and her son. She could never shake off this feeling. It pursued her even to her own sitting-room, which, with its bits of furniture from the Kerkhoflaan, was almost exactly the same as her little drawing-room at the Hague.... Oh, how the wind blew and how Adeletje was shivering against her: if only the poor child did not fall ill from that long walk!... There came the first drops of rain, thick and big, like tears of despair.... She put up her umbrella and Adeletje pushed still closer, walked right up against her, under the same shelter, so as to feel safe and warm.... The lane now ran straight into the high road; and there, before you, lay the house.... It stood in its own big garden—nearly a park, with a pool at the back—like a square, melancholy block, dreary and massive; and she could not understand why Van der Welcke and Addie clung to it so. Or rather she did understand now; but she ... no, she did not care for the house. It never smiled to her, always frowned, as it stood there broad and severe, as though imperishable, behind the front-garden, with the dwarf rose-bushes and standard roses wound in straw, awaiting the spring days.... It looked down upon her with its front of six upper windows as with stern eyes, which suffered but never forgave her.... It was like the old man himself, who had died without forgiving.... Oh, she could never have lived there if she had not always remembered the old woman's forgiveness, that last hour of gentleness by her bedside, the reconciliation, in complete understanding and knowledge almost articulate, offered at the moment of departure for ever.... Then it seemed to her as if she heard the old woman's breaking voice speak softly to her and say:

"Forgive, even though he never forgives, for he *will* never forgive...."

And it seemed to her as if she heard that voice, rustling with soft encouragement, in the wind, in the trees, now that she was passing through the garden, while the implacable house looked down upon her with that everlasting cold frown. It was a strange feeling which always sent a shudder through her for just two or three seconds every time that she went past the roses in their straw wrappings to the great front door, the feeling which had sent a shudder through her the very first time when she alighted from their carriage ... after being disowned for years, as a disgrace, hidden away in a corner.... It was only for two or three seconds. The rain was now splashing down. She closed her umbrella as Truitje opened the door, with a glad laugh, that mevrouw had got home before it absolutely poured; and now she was in the long hall.... Oh, what a gloomy hall it was, with the oak doors on either side, the Delft jugs on the antique cabinet; the engravings and family-portraits; and then, at the far end, the one door gloomier than the others, that door which led ... simply to a small, inner staircase, for the servants, so that they should not constantly be using the main staircase.... But she had not known this until she moved in and, yielding to an impulse, ran to the sombre door which had always stared at her, from the far end of that typical Dutch interior, as an eternally-sealed mystery.... Pluckily, playing the mistress of the house who was looking into things, while her heart beat with terror, she had opened the door and seen the staircase, the little staircase winding up in the dark to the bedroom floor; and the old charwoman had told her that it was very handy for carrying up water, because there was no water laid on upstairs: a decided fault in the house.... Then she had shut the door again and known all about it: a little back-stair, for the maids, and nothing more.... But why had she never opened the door since, never touched the handle? No doubt because there was no need to, because she felt sure that the maids would scrub the small staircase as well as the big one on the days set aside for cleaning stairs and passages. Why should she have opened the gloomy door?... And she had never opened it since. Once and once only she had seen it open; old Mie had forgotten to shut it; and she had grumbled, had told Truitje that it looked slovenly to leave the door open like that.... She had then seen the little staircase winding up in the dark, its steps just marked with brown stripes against the black of the shadow.... But the door, when closed, stared at her. She had never told anyone; but the door stared at her ... like the front of the house. Yes, in the garden behind, the back-windows also stared at her as with eyes, but more gently, sadly and almost laughingly, with

an encouraging and more winsome look amid the livelier green of the lime-trees which, in summer, surrounded her with their heavy fragrance.... Summer!... It was November now, with its incessant wind and rain, raging all around and against the house and rattling on the window-panes until they shivered.... It was a strange feeling ever and always, though it did last for only two or three seconds, but she could not feel at home there.... And yet during those ten years her life had sped and sped and sped.... It sped on without resting.... She was always busy....

She had sent Adeletje upstairs, to change her things at once, and opened the door of the drawing-room.... It felt a little chilly, she thought; and, while she saw her mother sitting quietly in the conservatory, peering out of doors from her usual seat, she went to the stove, moved the cinder-drawer to and fro to send the ashes to the bottom and make the fire glow up behind the mica doors....

"Aren't you cold out there, Mummie?"

The old woman looked round at the sound of her voice. Constance went into the conservatory and again asked:

"Aren't you cold, Mummie?"

The old woman heard her this time; and Constance stooped over her and kissed the waxen forehead.

"It's blowing," said the old woman.

"Yes, it's blowing like anything!" said Constance. "You don't feel cold?"

The old woman smiled, with her eyes in her daughter's.

"Won't you rather come and sit inside, Mamma?"

But the old woman only smiled and said:

"The trees are waving from side to side; and just now a branch fell ... right in front of the window."

"Yes. Harm'll have plenty of work to-morrow. There are branches lying all over the place."

"It's blowing," said the old woman.

Constance went in, took a shawl and put it over her mother's shoulders:

"You'll come in, won't you, Mamma, if you feel cold?"

And she went back to the drawing-room, intending to go upstairs.

But voices sounded from the hall and the door was opened. It was Gerdy and Guy:

"Are you in, Auntie?"

"Are you back at last?"

"Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"Have you been walking with Adele?"

"Come, Auntie," said Guy, "give an account of yourself!"

He was a well-set-up, fair-haired boy of nineteen, tall and broad, with a fair moustache; and she spoilt him because he was like his father. Really she spoilt them all, each for a different reason, but Guy could do anything that he pleased with her. He now caught her in his arms and asked once more:

"Now, Auntie, where have you been?"

And she blushed like a child. She did not mean to say where she had been, but she had not reckoned on his attacking her like this:

"Why, nowhere!" she said, defending herself. "I've been walking with Adele...."

"No!" said Guy, firmly. "You've been to the little old lady's."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes!"

"Come, boy, let me be. I want to go up and change.... Where's Mamma?"

"Mamma's upstairs," said Gerdy. "Are you coming down soon again, Auntie? Shall I get tea ready? Shall I light the lamp? It's jolly, having tea in a storm like this."

"All right, dear, do."

"Will you come down soon?"

"Yes, yes, at once...."

She went upstairs, up the wide, winding oak staircase.... Why did she think, each time the wind blew, of that evening when she had gone up like that, across the passage, through the rooms, to the great, dark bedstead, in which the wan face of the dying woman showed palely on the pillow?... Then as now the heavy rain rattled against the windows and the tall cabinets in the dark passage creaked with those sudden sounds which old wood makes and which sometimes moaned and reverberated through the house. But one scarcely heard them now, because the house was no longer silent, because now there were always voices buzzing and young feet hurrying in the rooms and along the passages, thanks to all the new life that had entered the house.... Ten years, thought Constance, while she put on the light in her room, before dressing: was it really ten years?... Immediately after the death of her poor brother Gerrit—poor Adeline and the children had moved from their house to a cheap *pension*—came the death of old Mr. Van der Welcke, just as she, Van der Welcke and Addie, going through Gerrit's papers, had come upon this letter:

"Addie, I recommend my children to your care; my wife I recommend to yours, Constance."

It was the letter of a sick man, mentally and physically sick, who already saw death's wings beating before his eyes. And even in that shabby *pension* Addie had taken charge of the children, as though he were their own young father; but, when the old gentleman died and both Van der Welcke and Addie insisted on moving to Driebergen, then the boy had stepped forward boldly as the protector of those nine children, as the protector of that poor woman distraught and utterly crushed by the blow.... Even now, while hurriedly changing her dress, so as not to keep them waiting too long downstairs, Constance still heard her boy say, in his calm, confident voice:

"Papa ... Mamma ... we have a big house now, a very big house.... We are rich now ... and Aunt Adeline has nothing ... the children have only a couple of thousand guilders apiece.... They must all come to us now, mustn't they, all come and live with us at Driebergen, mustn't they, Papa ... and Mamma?"

He said nothing beyond those few simple words; and his confident voice was as quiet as though his proposal spoke for itself, as though it were quite commonplace....

"What is there to make a fuss about?" he had asked, with wide-open eyes, when she fell upon his neck with tears of emotion and kissed him, her heart swelling with happiness in her child....

She had just looked round anxiously at her husband, anxious what he would wish, what he would say to his son's words.... There were fewer scenes between them, it was true, much fewer; but still she had thought to herself, what would he say to this?... But he had only laughed, burst out laughing, with his young laugh like a great boy's ... laughed at all his son's great family: a wife and nine children whom Addie at sixteen was quietly taking unto himself, because his people had money now and a big house.... Since that time Van der Welcke had always chaffed the boy about his nine children. And Addie answered his father's chaff with that placid smile in his eyes and on his lips, as though he were thinking:

"Have your joke, Daddy. You're a good chap after all!..."

And Addie had interested himself in his nine children as calmly as if they were not the least trouble.... Then came the move to Driebergen, but Addie remained at the Hague, staying with Aunt Lot, for the two years that he still went to school. He came down each week-end, however: by the husband's train. Van der Welcke said, chaffingly, to join his wife and children; and he took a hand in everything: in the profitable investment and saving of their two thousand guilders apiece; in their schooling; in the choice of a governess for the girls: he saved Aunt Adeline all responsibility; his Saturday afternoons and Sundays were filled with all sorts of cares; he considered and discussed and decided.... Moreover, Granny, who was now lonely and fallen into her dotage, could no longer be left to live in her big house, with no one to look after her; and Constance had easily managed for old Mamma to accompany them to Driebergen. But the old woman had hardly noticed the change: she thought that she was still living in the Alexanderstraat sometimes, in the summer, she would be living at Buitenzorg, in the viceregal palace, and the children round her went about and talked vivaciously ... as she had always known them to do.... Emilie had refused to leave Constance; and, though she sometimes went to stay at Baarn, she really lived with them: Emilie, so grievously shattered in her young life, so unable to forget Henri's death that she was as a shadow of her former self, pale and silent, mostly pining in her room ... until from sheer loneliness she went to join the family-circle downstairs....

Ten years ... ten years had sped like this, sped like fleeting shadows of time; and yet how much had happened! The children growing up, blossoming into young girls and sturdy lads; Addie studying medicine at Amsterdam, walking the hospitals, until, after passing his examination, the young foster-father at last settled down among them all as a doctor, in the great house at Driebergen; and then that immense change in their lives: his marriage, his dreadfully premature marriage.... Oh, that marriage of her son's!... She had had to summon all her deeper wisdom and to clutch it with convulsive hands ... in order to approve ... to approve ... and not for a single moment to let herself be dragged along by all the prejudices of the old days, the prejudices of the narrow little circle which she had learnt to scorn in her later life, the life which had become permanent!... Now he was really a husband, now he was really a father.

"Aunt Constance ... do come!"

It was Gerdy's voice; and it fidgeted her. They were all very nice, certainly, but also they were all very restless; and she was really a woman for loneliness and dreams—had become so—and

sometimes felt a need to be quite alone ... quite alone ... in her room; to lie on her sofa and think ... above all things, to think herself back into the years which had sped and sped and sped as fleeting shadows of time....

A tripping step came hastening up the stairs, followed by a tapping at the door:

"Auntie! Aunt Constance.... I've made tea; and, if you don't come, it'll be too strong...."

She would have liked to tell Gerdy that she did not care for that calling out all over the house and through the passages: it always jarred upon her, as though the clear, girlish voice profaned that brown indoor atmosphere of the sombre old house which was so full of the past ... as though the old people were still living there and might be shocked by all that youthful carelessness and presumption. But she never did tell her.

"Yes, darling, I'm coming."

She was ready now and turned out the gas. Gerdy ran downstairs again; and Constance found the lamps lit in the drawing-room and Gerdy very busy with the tea-pot and tea-cups. And Constance smiled, for there was a sort of homely peace, in this room, a peace almost of happiness, the lesser happiness which people sometimes find, for a brief moment. Marietje, the eldest of the girls, a motherly little soul from childhood, had coaxed Grandmamma into leaving the conservatory, which was really too cold, had installed her in the back drawing-room, where the old woman now sat, with her shawl round her, her toes on the foot-warmer, her hands trembling in her lap and her head nodding, as though she knew all sorts of things for certain.... Always she sat like that and scarcely spoke, only a few words, quietly living away the last few years of her life and already looking at the rest in panorama ... but quite unconscious of her surroundings.... In front of the fire, close together, sat Adeline and Emilie, both silent, but filled with the strange peace that reigned in both of them, because things around them were so youthful and so bright. For at this hour all the young people were gathered in the drawing-room, all Gerrit's children, except Constant, who was seventeen and at a boarding-school near Arnhem, to Gerdy's great regret, for she and he had always been together, two good little, fair-haired children. Marietje was twenty-two now, had not grown up pretty, was tall and lank, fair-haired, really an unattractive girl, though she had a certain loveliness from always caring for others, especially for Grandmamma: she had acquired this very early, as the eldest sister, because her mother had at once and as a matter of course entrusted her with the care of her little brothers and sisters. Adeletje too was plain and in addition ailing and anything but strong, with her narrow, shrunk chest; and Constance often wondered that the two elders had become like that, because she remembered them as the two pretty little fair-haired children that they used to be, frail, it is true, but rosy-cheeked, sweet little children. Alex also was there; and he too often surprised Constance, when she remembered the naughty rascal that he was, now a boy of twenty, pale and sallow, with frightened blue eyes, shy, reserved, with a trick of giving a sudden glance of terror which made her anxious, she did not know why. She recognized her brother Gerrit most in Guy, who was tall, fair and broad, as Gerrit had been, but who had always been unmanageable, with not one serious thought in his head; he was nineteen years old now and as undecided about his future as Alex himself.... That was Constance's great care and not only hers but Addie's as well; and Van der Welcke often chaffed his son, that it was not an unmixed joy to be the father of nine children. If Alex was gloomy now, with that strange look, sometimes of sudden fright, in his eyes, Guy was undoubtedly attractive, was genial, pleasant, cheerful, foolish, a great baby and the favourite nephew of Van der Welcke, with whom he went cycling, as Addie never had time now: Addie the serious man, the young doctor with an increasing practice. Guy called Van der Welcke Papa; they got on so well, almost too well together: Van der Welcke, who had remained a child for all his fifty-one years delighted in that tall, fair-haired adopted son of Addie's; and, jealous as he was of all the earnestness, the labour and care displayed by Addie, who had hardly a moment nowadays to give his father, he was glad to have found Guy, as though to show Addie:

"I've got another friend, you know, and I can do without you sometimes!"

After Guy came Gerdy, the beauty of the family, an exquisitely pretty girl of eighteen, who with Guy was the light and laughter of the house; next, Constant, away at boarding-school. The two younger boys, Jan and Piet, were fortunately doing well at their lessons, whereas little Klaasje, twelve years old, had remained very backward and might have been a child of eight, at one time dull and silent, at another wantonly gay, but so silly that she was not yet able to read.... Yes, she had all of them there, all Gerrit's children; she and Addie looked after them; and poor Adeline had come to take it as a matter of course and never decided anything for herself and consulted Constance and Addie about everything....

The wind outside roared and a violent rain beat down upon the windows, as though tapping at them with furious angry fingers. The drawn blinds, the closed curtains, the lighted lamps, Gerdy pouring out the tea with her pretty little ways: it all gave Constance, though she felt tired and would gladly have been alone for once, a caress of soft, homely satisfaction, a velvety sense of being in utter harmony with all around her, even though there was so much trouble, not only with the children, but also sometimes no little difficulty and misunderstanding with Mathilde, Addie's wife. Where was Mathilde now? Where were the two children? Gerdy, fussy and fidgety, pretending to be very busy, with a light clatter of her tea-things, had pushed an easy-chair nearer to the fireplace, where tongues of flames were darting. She now gave Constance her cup of tea, handed a plate of cakes; and Constance asked:

"Where's Mathilde?"

"Mathilde?... I don't know, but ... shall I go and look for her?"

"No, never mind. Where are the children?"

"In the nursery, I expect. Shall I send for them to come down?"

"No, dear, it doesn't matter...."

And Gerdy did not insist. With the wind and rain raging out of doors, it was still and peaceful inside; and, fidgety though Gerdy was, she felt that peaceful stillness and valued it, valued it as they all did. In her heart she hoped that Mathilde would not come down before dinner, because, whenever Mathilde did come down at tea-time, something happened, as though an imp were creeping in between Gerdy's nervous little fingers: she would break a cup or upset things; once indeed she had nearly set the house on fire, because she had tried to blow out the methylated spirit with a furious blast from her excitable little pouting lips.... It was very cosy now: if only Mathilde would remain upstairs a little longer.... And, while the wind and the rain raged outside, indoors there was but the sound of a few gentle phrases, uttered in the yellow circles of the lamps, which Gerdy had placed so that they shone with an intimate and pleasant cosiness.... Old Granny, over in her corner, sat quietly in her great arm-chair, which was like a throne; she did not move, did not speak, but was nevertheless in the picture, thought Gerdy: that waxen face of a very old lady, framed in the white hair; the woollen shawl over the shoulders; the motionless dark lines of the gown; and, in the lap, the fine detail of the fingers, quivering fingers, but for which she would have seemed devoid of all motion.... Near the fire, Constance was talking with Mamma and Emilie; and Gerdy did not know why, but something about those three, as they sat talking together, made her feel as if she could suddenly have cried for no reason, because of a touch of melancholy that just grazed against her, like a trouble dating back to former years and things that were long past.... Then Gerdy made an unnecessary clatter with her tea-cups and spoons and could not understand why she was so sensitive. Marie was doing some needlework and Alex was gloomily reading a book; but Guy was playing backgammon with Adeletje, making constant jokes in between: the dice were rattled in the boxes and dumped into the board; the men moved with a hard, wooden sound over the black and white points; the dice were rattled again and dumped down again.

"Five-three...."

"Double-six.... Double-four.... One more: two-three...."

And Klaasje had come and sat by Aunt Constance, almost creeping into her dress, with a very babyish picture-book in her hand. She pressed her fair-haired little head comfortably in Auntie's skirts, against Auntie's lap and had silently taken Auntie's arm and laid it round her neck. Herself unobserved, she noticed every single thing that happened: Guy and Adele's backgammon, Gerdy's fussing with the tea-things; and she listened to Auntie, Mamma and Emilie; but all the time it was as though she were outside that circle of homeliness, as though she were far away from it, as though she were hearing and seeing through a haze, unconsciously, in her slowly awakening little brains, the brains of a backward child. And, so as not to be too far away, she took Aunt Constance' hand, opened the palm with her fingers and pushed her little head under it: that made it seem as if she were much nearer....

Suddenly, the door opened; and everybody gave a little start, soon recovering, however: Mathilde had entered and only Grandmamma, yonder, more in the background in her dark corner, had remained motionless, with quivering fingers in her lap, white and waxen, trembling in the dark shadow of her dress.... But, near the fire, Constance, Adeline and Emilie were silent and remained sitting, stiffly, Adeline and Emilie without moving. Constance alone forced herself to look round at Mathilde; Alex read on, nervously hunching his shoulders; but Guy rattled his dice and Adeletje had a sudden flush on her cheek and turned pale.... And Gerdy was the most nervous of all: she suddenly ducked down in front of the fire and began poking it desperately.

"Do be careful, Gerdy!" said Adeline. "You'll set us on fire, the sparks are flying all over the place!"

Mathilde had sat down in the arm-chair next to Constance, which made little Klaasje feel a bit squeezed, in between Auntie and Mathilde, and Mathilde's shadow fell across the child's book and prevented her from seeing the pictures, causing such a sudden outburst of temper that, before anyone could stop her, she put out both arms convulsively, pushed with her hands against Mathilde's chair and cried:

"Go away!"

So much enmity was apparent in the child's voice that they all started again: only Grandmamma, in her corner, noticed nothing. But Constance recovered herself at once:

"For shame, Klaasje!" she said, in a chiding tone. "You mustn't do that, you know! What makes you so naughty?"

But the child pushed against the chair with such force that she pushed it aside, with Mathilde in it:

"Go away!" she repeated, pale in the face, with wide eyes starting from her head in hatred.

"Klaasje!" cried Constance. "Stop that at once!"

Her voice rang harsh and loud through the room. The child looked at her in alarm, understood merely that Auntie was angry and burst into loud sobs.

"Oh, very well, I'll go and sit somewhere else!" said Mathilde, pretending indifference.

She got up and sat beside Emilie.

"Haven't you been out?" asked Emilie, gently, for the sake of saying something.

"Out? In this horrible weather? Where would you have me go?" asked Mathilde, coldly. "No, I've had two hours' sleep. Gerdy, have you any tea left for me?"

"Yes, certainly," said Gerdy, in a forced voice.

She poked the fire once more, fiercely.

"But, Gerdy, mind what you're doing!" cried Adeline, terrified, for the sparks were flying out of the hearth.

Gerdy bobbed up from among her skirts and began clattering with her tea-tray. Klaasje had ceased crying, had stopped the moment that Mathilde had moved and was now looking up at Aunt Constance and trying to take her hand again.

"No," said Constance, "you're naughty."

"No-o!" whined the little girl, like a very small child. "I'm *not* naughty!"

"Yes, you are. It's not at all nice of you to push Mathilde away. You must never do that again, do you hear?"

"Oh, let the child be, Mamma!" said Mathilde, wearily.

The child looked up at Constance with such an unhappy expression in her face that Constance put her hand on her head again; and, at once forgetting everything, Klaasje now looked at her book and even hummed softly as she showed herself the pictures.

Gerdy was pouring out Mathilde's tea. There it was again: she had spilt the milk; the tea-tray was one white puddle! However, she mopped it up with a tea-cloth and now handed the cup to Mathilde.

Mathilde tasted it:

"Did you put any sugar in?"

"Yes, one lump."

"I never take sugar."

"Oh!... Shall I give you another cup?"

"No, thanks.... Your tea is weak."

Gerdy's tea was her pride, always:

"Tea gets bitter after standing three quarters of an hour," she said, aggressively, "or, if you pour water on it, it gets weak."

"Then I must always come three quarters of an hour late, for your tea is always either bitter or weak."

"Then make your own tea...."

But Gerdy saw Aunt Constance looking at her and said nothing more.

"Mamma," asked Mathilde, "do *you* know when Addie is coming back?"

"No, dear; to-morrow, I expect, or the next day."

"Haven't you had a card from him?"

"No, dear."

"Oh, I thought he would have written to you!... I might really have gone with him to Amsterdam."

"He had business to attend to...."

"Well, I shouldn't have hindered him in his business...."

She sat silent now and indifferent and looked at her watch, regretting that she had come down too early. She thought that it was six and that they would be having dinner at once. And it was not even half-past five yet.... Should she go upstairs again for a bit?... No, she was there now and she would stay.... She had slept too long that afternoon.... She felt heavy and angry.... What a place, what a place, Driebergen in November! Not a soul to talk to, except three or four antediluvian families.... When was she likely to see the Hague again? The children would be looked after all right: there were busybodies enough in the house for that!... And she remained sitting beside Emilie, without moving or speaking, weary, indifferent and heavy after her long sleep.... She knew it: as usual, her entrance had caused friction. That odious idiot child, pushing



her chair away, with its "Go away!" She could have boxed its ears.... But she had controlled herself. Didn't she always control herself? Wasn't she always being insulted by her husband's relatives?... Why on earth had she married him? Couldn't she have married anybody at the Hague?... In her weary, heavy indifference, mingled with spiteful rancour, she felt herself a martyr.... Wasn't she a very handsome woman? Couldn't she have married anybody, though her father was a penniless naval officer, though there was no money on her mother's side either?... She was a handsome girl; and, from the time when she was quite young, her one thought had been to make a good match, first and foremost a good match, and to get away from the poverty and the vulgar crew that gathered in Papa and Mamma's house.... Oh, yes, she was very fond of her husband; but now it was all his fault: he ... he was neglecting her!... Wasn't she a martyr?

Deep down within herself, no doubt, she knew that she had not married him for himself alone, that she had certainly thought it heavenly, she, a Smeet, plain Mathilde Smeet, to marry Baron van der Welcke ... plenty of money ... a smart match ... even though the family no longer lived in the Hague....

Baroness van der Welcke.... On her cards: *Baroness van der Welcke*.... A coronet on her handkerchiefs, a coat-of-arms on her note-paper: oh, how delicious, how delicious!... What a joy at last to order the gowns in Brussels, to get out of the poverty of her parents' home, which reeked of rancid butter and spilt paraffin, to shake it from her, to plunge and drown it in the past, that poverty, as you drown a mangy dog in a pond....

Driebergen ... well, yes. But it wouldn't always be Driebergen. She would back herself to coax her husband out of that patriarchy, to coax him to the Hague, where he would be the young, fashionable doctor: a fine house, smart acquaintances, a box at the Opera, presentation at court, Baroness ... Baronne van der Welcke....

She had two children now, a boy and a girl. It was irresistible; and yet she knew that she must take care and not let the nurse have too much of it:

"Geertje, have you washed the jonker's hands?... Geertje, I want the freule to wear her white frock to-day?"<sup>[1]</sup>

For she had noticed that the others never used the words in speaking to Geertje or to the maids, never said jonker or freule, always just simply Constant and Henriette, or even Stan and Jet; and so, when the others were there, she copied them and said, "Stan" and "Jet"; but oh, the joy, as soon as they were gone, of once more blurting out the titles to Geertje, the warm rapture of feeling that she was not only a baroness but the mother of a freule and a jonker:

"Geertje, has Freule Henriette had her milk?... Geertje, let the jonker wear his new shoes to-day!..."

No, she simply could not keep from it; and yet she had sense enough to know and perception enough to feel that the others thought it a mark of bad breeding in her, to refer to her babies of one year old and two as freule and jonker.... That was the worst of it, that she had married not only her husband but his whole family into the bargain: his grandmamma, his parents and Aunt Adeline with her troops of children whom Addie—so silly of him, because he was so young—regarded as his own, for whom it was his duty to care.... That was the worst of it; and oh, if she had known everything, known what a martyr she would be in this house, where she never felt herself the mistress—a victim to the idiot child's rude ways, a victim to Gerdy, who gave her sugar in her tea—if she had known everything, she might have thought twice before marrying him at all!...

And yet she was wonderfully fond of Addie, might still be very happy with him, if he would only come back to her ... and not neglect her, over and over again, for all that crew of so-called adopted children with which he had burdened himself.... Oh, to get him out of it, out of that suffocating family-circle ... and then to the Hague: her husband a young, smart doctor, she at court; and then see all the old friends again ... and Papa and Mamma's relations ... and perhaps leave cards on them sweetly: Baronne van der Welcke!...

She was not all vanity: she had plenty of common sense besides and no small portion of clear and penetrating insight. She saw her own vanity, indeed, but preferred not to see it. She would rather look upon herself as a martyr than as vain and therefore saw herself in that light, deliberately thrusting aside her common sense; and then, sometimes, in an unhappy mood, she would weep over her own misfortunes. Her only consolation at such times was that she was handsome, a young, handsome woman, and healthy and the mother of two pretty little children: a jonker and a freule.

She now sat wearily, with very few words passing among them all; the dice in Adele and Guy's boxes rattled loudly and worked on Mathilde's nerves.

Gerdy could stand it no longer: she had run out into the hall and almost bumped against Van der Welcke, who was just going to the drawing-room.

"Hullo, kiddie!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Uncle!"

"Where are you rushing off to?"

She laughed.

"Nowhere, Uncle. I don't know. I'm going to wash my hands. I upset the milk.... There's no tea left, Uncle."

"That's all right, kiddie, I don't want any tea.... Shall we be having dinner soon?"

"It's not six yet."

"Anything from Addie?"

"No, Uncle."

"Has ... has Mathilde come down?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"I see. Well, I think I'll go upstairs again for a bit."

"Oh, don't, Uncle!"

"I may as well."

"No, don't. Why should you? You're always putting her on us and clearing out yourself!"

"I? But I have nothing to do with her!"

"She's your daughter-in-law."

"I dare say, but I can't help that."

"Yes, you can."

"How do you mean? How can I help it?"

"Why, if you had stopped Addie at the time ... had forbidden it ... as his father."

"You young baggage! Do you imagine that I can forbid Addie anything? I've never been able to prevent his doing a thing. He's always done what he wanted to, from the time when he was a child."

"You *can* help it."

"Can I? Well, whether I can help it or not ... I'm going upstairs."

"No, Uncle, you're not to. You must come in. Do be nice. Come along for our sake. You're fond of us, aren't you? You love all Addie's adopted children, Uncle, don't you?"

"Yes, kiddie, I'm fond of you all, though I've lost Addie altogether through you."

"No, Uncle, not altogether."

"Well, what's the use of sharing him with the pack of you?"

"But you can afford to share him a little bit. Tell me: you *are* fond of us?"

"Of course I am, you're a dear, jolly lot. But Mathilde...."

"What about Mathilde, Uncle?"

He bent over her and bit each word separately into her ear:

"I—can't—stand—her.... I hate her as I have never hated anybody."

"But, Uncle, that's overdoing it," said Gerdy, lapsing into reasonableness.

"Overdoing it?"

"Yes, she's not so bad as all that. She can be very nice."

"You think her nice, do you? Well, she's like a spectre to me."

"No, no, you mustn't say that. And she's Addie's wife and the mother of his children."

"Look here, kiddie, don't be putting on such wise airs. They don't suit you."

"But she *is* the mother of his children and you're not to be so jealous."

"Am I jealous?"

"Yes, you're jealous ... of Mathilde and of us."

"Very likely. I never see Addie. If I hadn't got Guy...."

"Well, you've got Guy. And you've got Addie as well."

"No, I haven't.... Do you know when he's coming back?"

"No, I don't, Uncle. And now come along in."

She drew Van der Welcke into the room with her; and, as usual, he went up to the old woman seated silently in her corner, rubbing his hands, trying to speak a few words to her. She recognized him and smiled.... The wind outside raged with a deeper note.... The branches of the trees swished along the windows, the twigs tapped at them as with fingertips.... And amid the eeriness of it all Constance suddenly felt it very strange that they were all of them there, all strangers in the old, gloomy house, which had once belonged to Henri's stern parents. The old woman had forgiven her, but the old man had never forgiven. He had died, his heart filled with rancour. And now they were all there, all strangers, except the son, except the grandson; and he was not there at the moment.... They were all strangers: her mother, in her second childhood, imagining herself at the Hague and very often at Buitenzorg;<sup>[2]</sup> she herself and Gerrit's widow and their children; Emilie: all, all strangers, all with their manifold life and ceaseless bustle filling the once silent and serious house.... And Mathilde, a stranger.... And, so strange, even Mathilde and Addie's children, little Constant and Jetje, were two little strangers, though they bore the family name.... Why did she feel this? Perhaps because she still considered that the great gloomy house belonged to the old man. It was as though he lived there still, as though he still walked outside, in the garden. It was as though the great, gloomy house was still filled with his rancour towards her and hers.... Yes, she had been living here for ten years, but the old man still bore rancour because she was there and because so many of hers had come with her to the house in which they had no business, in which she herself was an intruder as were all who had intruded themselves along with her.... It was a feeling which had so often oppressed her, during those ten years, and which would always oppress her.... And she would not utter it to anybody, for Van der Welcke had given Addie free leave to bring the troop with him; and he himself loved the troop....

Oh, how the angles between her and her husband had been rubbed smooth with the years, whether they passed slow or fast!... How they had learnt to put up with each other!... They were growing old: she fifty-six, a little younger; it was true, no affection had come between them, but so much softening of all that had once been sharp and unkind between them, so that they had been able to go on living, in this house, and together with their child performing the task that seemed to be laid upon them: looking after Gerrit's children!...

And Adeline took it as quite natural; but yet ... how grateful she was to them! How often she told them that she could never have brought up the children alone, that she would have had neither the strength for it nor the money!... Gerrit's death had broken her. She had always quietly done her little duties as a wife and mother, but Gerrit's death had broken her. She had remained among all her children as one who no longer knows. It was as if the simplicity of her life had become shrouded in a darkness wherein she wandered and sought, groping with outstretched hands. Ah, if Constance and Addie had not led her!...

And Constance in her turn was grateful to Van der Welcke, for was it not his house in which she lived with her nephews and nieces, was it not with his money, for a great part, that she brought up those children?... Oh, if the old man would only cease spreading that rancour around them, filling the whole great sombre house with it because they had intruded, because they were living there on his money, though that money now belonged to his heir! At every guilder that Constance spent on her swollen household, she felt the old man's rancour. And it made her thriftier than she had ever been at the time when she and Henri, though their needs were far from small, had had to live on a few thousand guilders a year. Though she now lived in this big house, though twelve and often fifteen of them sat down to table, she was comparatively thriftier in her whole mode of life than she had ever been in her little house with her husband and child.... It was the old man's money, a large fortune, and it was Henri's money now, of course, but it was first and foremost the old man's money!... The curtains in the drawing-room were sadly faded, but she would not buy new, though Van der Welcke himself had begged her at least to buy some for the front room. Her everyday table was very simple, simpler than she had ever been accustomed to. And this gave her the remorse that she was feeding Henri, now that he was growing older, more simply than she had in his younger days. And she urged him daily to buy a motor-car....

He was sensible, refused to do anything of the kind. Buying the "sewing-machine," well, yes, that was one big initial outlay ... but the most expensive part of it was the upkeep of it, the chauffeur, the excursions. He feared that, once he possessed the "machine," it would become a very costly joke.... And all those ten years, though he had often thought of a car, he had never bought the old sewing-machine. Then Constance felt so violently self-reproachful, at using Henri's money for her brother's children, that she discussed it with Addie. Those discussions about the motor had recurred regularly every year. Addie thought that Papa was right, that it was not the initial outlay that was so burdensome, but all the further expenses. Then again motor-cars were being so much improved yearly that, when once Papa had caught the fever, he would get rid of his sewing-machine yearly to buy a new and more modern one. No, it would be a very expensive story.... And Van der Welcke had never bought his sewing-machine, had barely, once in a way, hired one.... Constance felt a lasting self-reproach because of it....

They were rich now; and yet ... what *was* their fortune, with so many burdens! Burdens, moreover, which were not even the natural burdens of one's own children growing up! Burdens of Gerrit's children!... And so she economized more and more, wearing her gowns till they became shiny, till Addie said that Mamma was losing all her daintiness in her old age. He had always known his mother as a well-dressed woman and now she went about in blouses that shone like looking-glasses. He used to tease her; there was one which he always called the looking-glass blouse. Constance laughed gaily, said she no longer cared so much about clothes. Well off though she now was, she spent upon her dress not half of what she used to in the old days.... And

Mathilde, who sprang from a poverty reeking of paraffin and rancid butter, Mathilde, who would have liked to be surrounded with luxury at every moment, Mathilde thought her mother-in-law above all things stingy, decided that stinginess was the outstanding feature of her character....

- [1] *Jonker* is the title borne by the sons of Dutch noblemen until they come of age, when, as a rule, they bear the same title as their father; *freule* is the title of all the unmarried daughters.
- [2] The governor-general's house near Batavia.

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## CHAPTER II

It was six o'clock. Constance and Marietje had taken Grandmamma upstairs, for she no longer had her meals with the rest, but went to bed very early in the evening. And they were now in the dining-room, sitting at the great dinner-table: a table, Constance considered, of strangers—her brother's children—gathered round her husband, who alone had any right to live there, in the old man's house, and to sit at his table.... And yet it seemed quite natural that Emilie should be sitting there, that Adeline should be sitting there with her four girls, Marietje, Adele, Gerdy and Klaasje, and her two big boys, Alex and Guy; it seemed quite natural that, after the soup, the parlour-maid should set the great piece of beef in front of Guy for Guy to carve: one of the few things that he did well, as Van der Welcke told him, without thinking, for there was some truth in the jibe. It was the same simple fare daily: soup, a joint, green potatoes, vegetables and a sweet, so that Van der Welcke sometimes said:

"But, Constance, how Dutch you have grown in your taste!"

"Well, if there's anything you fancy, you have only to say so!" she would answer, gently.

And yet she was afraid that he would name something, some game or poultry, that would be much too expensive for so large a table and such appetites as the children's: wasn't she spending more than enough as it was, with that good, simple homeliness and wasn't the butcher's bill absurdly high, month after month?

And Guy carved the beef in fine, heavy slices, falling neatly and smoothly one on top of the other, with a dexterity which he remembered learning when quite a small boy from his father, when he recollected very well indeed carving the meat in the little dining-room in the Bankastraat.... That was Guy's duty, to carve the meat neatly; and he would have gone on carving till it all lay in neat slices on the dish, if Constance had not warned him:

"That ought to do, Guy."

The boy was just handing the dish to the maid, for her to take round, when a carriage drove into the front garden.

"Listen!" said Constance.

"That must be Addie!" exclaimed Gerdy, joyously.

"It's Addie, it's Addie!" cried Klaasje.

"Yes, it must be Addie," said Van der Welcke.

There was a loud ring at the bell; and at the same time a key grated in the latch.

"It's Addie!" they now all cried, with cheerful, expectant faces, rejoicing that he was back.

And Gerdy, in her restless way, got up. Mathilde would have got up too, but, finding Gerdy before her, she remained sitting. Gerdy's clear voice rang in the hall:

"Addie, you're back, you're back! Oh, but how cold and windy it is!"

The maids, likewise glad, fussed about, three of them to one handbag. Gerdy had left the door open and the draught penetrated to the dinner-table. But Addie was now in the room; and all their radiant faces were raised to his. They had done without him for five days.? They had missed him for five days.

"Good-evening, everybody!"

He flung off his wet great-coat: Truitje<sup>[1]</sup> caught it and took it out of the room. He gave a nod here and there, but kissed nobody and shook hands with nobody. He looked tired; and his collar was limp with the rain.

"Won't you go and change first, Addie?" asked Constance, smiling with content, because he was there.

"No, Mamma, I'd rather not. I'm hungry. Give me a glass of wine."

They saw at once what was the matter. He was out of humour. All their radiant faces fell immediately; and they were silent. Guy, who was nearest to him, poured him out a glass of wine, without a word. Addie drank down the wine. His eyes glanced up wearily from under their lashes;

his gestures were nervous and jerky. When Addie was out of humour, they were silent, subduing the sound of their voices and the light in their eyes. Nobody knew what to say. And it cost Constance an effort to ask:

"How were things in Amsterdam?"

"All right."

He answered coldly, as though begging her to ask no more questions about Amsterdam. Nobody else asked anything; he would be sure to tell what there was to tell later. They began to talk among one another in constrained tones. They were sorry that Addie was out of humour, but they did not take it amiss in him. He must be tired; he had had a busy time. Yes, he must be tired. It was not only his collar: his coat also hung limp from his shoulders; his grey-blue eyes were dull. Oh, how serious his eyes had become, now that he was a man of twenty-six! How serious his forehead was, with those two wrinkles, above the nose, which seemed to unite with the tawny eyebrows! In face and figure alike he was older than his years, almost too old, as though bowed down with premature cares. He stooped over his plate; and they were all struck by his air of weary exhaustion. What was it that had overstrained him so? He did not speak, but ate on in silence and drank rather more wine than was his wont. Alex looked at him for a long time, with a touch of anxious surprise. And at last, glancing, almost in alarm, at their faces, he suddenly perceived how forced and confused they all were in their attitudes, sitting and staring in front of them or into their plates—even his father, even his mother—and he understood that they sat and stared like that because he had not returned in a cheerful mood, after his five days' absence. He had a feeling of remorse, did violence to his fatigue and his ill-humour, steadied his nerves. He smiled—a tired smile—at his mother; asked his wife:

"How are the children, Mathilde?"

It was at once evident to them all, from his tone of addressing Mathilde, that he was making an effort and no longer wished to be out of humour and tired. They were thankful that he was making this obvious effort, because, with Addie gloomy, a gloom fell over all. Even Alex seemed to breathe again. And they could none of them bear it when Mathilde just answered, coolly:

"All right."

Nevertheless his endeavour succeeded. He now spoke to his father; and Van der Welcke answered with a jest. There was a laugh at last; Gerdy led the outburst, about nothing; the voices broke into a hum....

After dinner, Addie went upstairs; and, when he had changed his things, he found Mathilde in her own sitting-room. Constant and Jetje had gone to bed. Out of doors, the night seemed to be wilder and stormier than ever; and the house creaked, the windows rattled. Mathilde sat staring before her, her ears filled with the sounds of the night. Nevertheless she heard her husband come in; but she did not move.

"Tilly...."

There was now an undoubted tenderness in his voice, in his deep, earnest voice. She was certainly very fond of him, she thought, if only he did not neglect her. She just raised her head towards him, sideways. She was a handsome woman; and her young, healthy blood seemed to give her a complexion of milk and roses. Her features were not delicate, but they were pure; her eyes were gold-grey and large, clear and bright; her hair had a natural wave in it and was almost too heavily coiled. Beneath her black silk blouse her bust was heavy, with a low breast and a naturally wide waist too tightly laced. She had the full, spacious form of a young and healthy woman and lacked all the morbid distinction of finer breeding. Her eyes seemed to stare at a vision of physical delight; her lips seemed ready to salute that delight; the grip of her large hands was greedy and decisive. Her foot, in its substantial shoe, was large, too large for a woman of fashion. Nor was she that: she was rather a woman of health. She had no delicacy of wit: she had rather common sense; and the only morbid part of her intelligence was an irrepressible vanity. She had no delicate taste: she wore a simple black blouse and a black skirt, both from Brussels; and yet there was a coarse line and a heavy fold in both. The brilliant on her finger gleamed insolently, white and hard. It was very strange, but she saw this herself. Her mamma-in-law had given her that brilliant during her engagement, out of her own jewels, because she had once admired the ring on Constance's finger, where the stone seemed to throw out sparks of fire....

"Tilly...."

She smiled at him now, made him come and sit beside her. Twenty-six years of age, a young husband and father, he looked quite ten years older, had aged more particularly, she thought, during the three years of his marriage. Now, however, that he had washed and changed, now that he no longer looked tired and wet, now that he was laughing under his fair moustache, now that his grey-blue eyes were filled with laughing kindness, now his aging no longer struck her so much; and she knew him again and he was hers again, in this one moment when her husband and she were alone....

"Tell me," he said. "How have you been getting on ... these five days?"

She felt a kindly affection for him; and she loved this in him. She let her hand remain in his two hands; she allowed him to kiss her and returned his kiss. And she answered lazily, with a movement of her shoulders:

"How have I been getting on? Oh, as usual!..."

"You mean, all right?"

"Yes, quite all right."

"I believe, Tilly...."

"What?"

"That you're telling a fib. Your voice is very abrupt."

She shrugged her shoulders and gave her little laugh, which meant that she couldn't help it.

"You ought to talk candidly to me for once," he said.

"Yes," she answered; and her tone was more intimate. "We don't do that too often."

"I'm very busy sometimes."

"You're always busy. Why did you have to go to Amsterdam suddenly? I hardly know the reason."

"It was for Alex."

"And did you succeed?"

"Possibly."

"Oh, I'm not asking to know!" she said, at once, in a tone of piqued indifference which he appeared not to notice.

"I have been thinking things over, Tilly...."

"Thinking things over? When?"

"At Amsterdam."

"I thought you were so busy!"

"I used to think in my room, in the evenings. About you."

"About me?"

"Yes. Tell me, wouldn't you rather have your own house? You might feel happier if you had a home of your own."

She was silent.

"Well, what do you say?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course I would rather have a home of my own. I told you so at once ... when we married."

"Yes, but at that time...."

"Well?"

"I didn't see it so clearly ... that you would not be happy in this house."

"Oh ... happy? I don't know."

"You're not happy here."

"I would certainly rather have my own house ... at the Hague."

"At the Hague. Very well. But, if we move to the Hague, Tilly, we shall have to be very economical."

"Very economical?"

"Well, of course! I'm not making much yet."

"And you're always busy!"

"Yes...."

"You have patients here, at Driebergen, and all around."

"Yes," he said, with a laugh, "but they don't pay me."

"No."

"Why not?"

He shrugged his shoulders:

"Because they can't."

She shrugged her shoulders also:

"It's very noble of you, Addie.... But we have to live too."

"Yes. But don't we live?"

"If we moved to the Hague, though ...?"

"We should have to be very economical."

"You're well off."

"I'm not well off.... Tilly, you know I'm not. Papa has a pretty considerable fortune. But he has a good many calls...."

"Calls!... why, you're his only son!"

"He might give us an allowance ... until I was making more money.... But even then we should have to be economical ... and live in a very small house."

She clasped her large, white hands:

"I'm sick of economy," she said, coarsely, "sick and tired of poverty. I've never had anything in my life but poverty, decent, genteel poverty. I would rather be a beggar, simply; I'd rather be a poor girl in the street than go through decent, genteel poverty again."

"It wouldn't be so bad as all that."

"Not so bad, perhaps, but still a small house, with one servant, and seeing how far a pound of meat will go and watching every half-penny that the servant spends. No, thank you, it's not good enough."

"Then, Tilly...."

"What then?"

"Then I see no chance ... of moving to the Hague."

"Well," she said in her dull tone of piqued indifference, "then let's stay here."

"But you're not happy here."

"Oh, what does my happiness matter?"

"I should like to see you happy."

"Why, you no longer love me!"

"I do love you, Tilly, very much."

"No, you don't love me. How could you love me? Do you think I don't see it? You love all of them here, all your relations: you don't love me. You hardly love your children."

"Tilly!"

"No, you hardly love your own children."

"Tilly, you've no right to speak like that. Because I'm fond of Uncle Gerrit's children, is that any reason why I shouldn't be fond of you ... and of Stan and little Jet?"

She had risen, tremulously. She looked into his grave eyes, which gazed at her long and almost sorrowfully, from under his heavily-knitted, tawny eyebrows. She had intended to overwhelm him with reproaches; but on the contrary she threw herself on his breast, with her arms around his neck:

"Tell me that you love me!" she cried, with a great sob.

"I love you, Tilly, you know I love you."

He kissed her. But she heard it through his voice, she felt it through his kiss: he no longer loved her. All at once, suddenly, the certainty of it poured a coldness as of ice into her soul. She held him away from her for a moment, with her hand against his shoulders. She stared at him.... He also looked at her, with his sorrowful eyes, and he spoke, but she did not hear what.... Then she heard him say:

"Are you coming downstairs, Tilly? They will be wondering what's become of us!"

"No," she said, calmly. "I have a headache and I'm going to bed."

"Won't you come down?"

"No."

"Do, Tilly! Please come down with me. I shall be so glad if you will."

"I'd rather not," she said, softly and calmly. "I really have a headache ... and I'm going to bed."

She looked at him gravely, for one more moment, and he also looked at her, very gravely and very sorrowfully. But their souls did not come into contact. She kissed him first:

"Good-night," she said, softly.

He said nothing more, but he returned her kiss, very fondly. Then he left the room; and she heard his steps creaking softly on the stairs.

"Dear God," he thought, "how am I to find her! How am I to find her again!..."

[1] Gertrude, Gertie.

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### CHAPTER III

Addie remained in the drawing-room for only a second:

"I'll go and keep Papa company for a bit," he said.

And he went and looked up his father in his room, where Van der Welcke always smoked his three or four cigarettes after dinner, alone.

"Daddy, am I disturbing you?"

"Disturbing me, my dear fellow? Do you imagine that you ever disturb me? No, you never disturb me.... At least, I can count the times when you have disturbed me."

"But I've come to disturb you this time...."

"Well, that's a bit of luck."

"And have a talk with you."

"Good. That doesn't happen often."

Addie knitted his brows, which gave him an expression of sadness:

"Don't be satirical, Father. How can I help it?"

"I'm not being satirical, my dear boy. I accept the inevitable. I've been accepting it now for five days. After dinner I would come up here quietly and smoke my cigarettes in utter resignation. Of those five days, two have been windy and three have been stormy. And I sat here calmly and listened to it all."

"And ...?"

"And ... that's all. Life's an insipid business; and the older I grow the more insipid I find it. I don't philosophize about it very much. I never did, you know.... But I do sometimes think, nowadays, what a rotten thing life is, with all its changes. At least, I should have been glad to let it remain as it was...."

"How, Daddy?"

"As it used to be when you were a small boy. I have gradually come to lose you entirely ... and I have so little, apart from you."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Yes, I have gradually come to lose you entirely.... In the old days, when you were a schoolboy ... then you belonged to me. Then came your time at college: that took a bit of you from me. Your eighteen months in the hospitals at Amsterdam: I never saw you. Your year, after that, in Vienna: I never saw you. I was lucky if I got a letter now and again. Then you came back, took your degree. And then ... then you went and got married."

"And we have always remained with you."

"And every year I lost a bit more of you. You no longer belong to me. There was a time when I used to share you with Mamma; and you remember that I used to find that pretty hard occasionally. But now I share you ... with all the world."

"Not with all the world, Daddy."

"Well, with half the world then. With your wife, with Aunt Adeline and your nine adopted children, with all your outside interests."

"Those are my patients."

"You have a great many of them ... for a young doctor. And...."

"Well, Daddy?"

"Nothing, old boy. I only wanted to give you a piece of advice; but who am *I* to advise *you*?"

"Why not, Daddy?"

"I don't count."



"Now then!"

"I never have counted. You used to manage me; and I just did what you told me to."

"Give me your advice now. Haven't we always been pals?"

"Yes, but you were the one with the head."

"There's not much head about me just now. Give me your advice, Daddy."

"You won't take it from me."

"Out with it, all the same!"

"Well, my boy, listen to me: keep something of your life for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"You're giving it all away. I don't believe it can be done. I believe a man to stand as much in need of a healthy egoism as of bread and water."

"I should say that I was egoist enough."

"No, you're not. You keep nothing for yourself. You'll think it funny of me that *I* should talk to you like this; but, you see, the older I grow and the more cigarettes I smoke the more I notice that...."

"That what?"

"That both your parents have never—considering your character—taken your *own* happiness into account: Mamma no more than I."

"I don't agree with you."

"It is so, all the same. The years which you spent as a child between your two parents made you an altruist and made your altruism run away with you."

Addie smiled and gazed at his father.

"Well? What are you looking at me for?"

"I'm looking at you, Father ... because I'm amused to see you so utterly wide of the mark."

"Why?"

"I may have had a touch of altruism in me, but of late years...."

"What?"

"I have thought a great deal of myself. When I got married ... I was seeking my own happiness. I wanted to find happiness for myself in my wife and children, for my own self ... and hang the rest!"

"Ah, was that your idea? Well, it was a healthy idea too."

"A healthy idea, wasn't it? So you were wide of the mark, Daddy. I wanted a wife who belonged to me, children who belonged to me: all forming one great happiness for myself."

Van der Welcke wreathed himself in clouds of smoke.

"So you see, Daddy, the advice which you gave me I followed of my own accord."

"Yes, old boy, I see."

"That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes. Well, that's all right, then."

"I'm glad to have had a talk with you. But now I must talk not about myself but about something else."

"Of course. You can never talk for more than two seconds about yourself. However, you're right, I know now; and you had already followed my advice ... of your own accord. What else did you want to talk about?"

"Daddy, I've been to Amsterdam."

"For Alex. Well, is that settled ... about the Merchants' School?"

"Yes, he can go up for his examination. But afterwards...."

"Well?"

"I went to Haarlem. Near Haarlem."

"What took you there?"

"Someone sent for me."

"A patient?"

"A dying man."

"Who?"

Suddenly, from the look in Addie's face, Van der Welcke understood. He went very pale, rose from his chair and stared in consternation into his son's sad eyes:

"Addie!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice. "Addie, tell me what you mean! I had no idea ... that you knew anyone near Haarlem! I didn't know ... that you had a patient there!"

He seemed to be trying to deceive himself with his own words, for he already understood. And Addie knew by his father's eyes and his father's voice that he understood; and, speaking slowly, in a gentle voice, Addie explained, as though the name had already been mentioned between them:

"Six days ago ... I received a letter ... written in his own hand, a clear, firm hand.... The letter was quite short: here it is."

He felt for his pocket-book, took out the letter and handed it to his father. Van der Welcke read:

*"Dear Sir,*

"Though I have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, I should consider it a great privilege if I might see you and speak to you here at an early date. I hope that you will not refuse the request of a very old man, whose days are drawing to an end.

"Yours sincerely,

*"De Staffelaer."*

Addie rose, for his father was shaking all over; the letter was fluttering in his fingers.

"Daddy, pull yourself together."

"Addie, Addie, tell me, *did* you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him. I was with him twice."

"And ... and is he dying?"

"He's dead. He died this morning."

"He's dead?"

"Yes, Daddy, he's dead."

"Did you ... did you speak to him?"

"Yes ... I spoke to him. He was very clear in his head: a clear-headed old man, for all his ninety-two years. When I arrived, he pressed my hand very kindly and nicely, made me sit beside his chair. He was sitting up, in his chair. That's how he died, in his chair, passing away very peacefully. He told me that he had wanted to see me ... because I was the son ... of my mother.... He asked after Mamma and made me describe how you two had lived ... at Brussels. I told him about my childhood. I told him of my later life. He took a strange interest in everything ... and then ... then he asked after you, how you had been, how you were ... asked if I was attached to my parents ... asked after my prospects ... asked after my aims in life.... I was afraid of tiring him and tried to get up, but he put out his hand and made me sit down again: 'Go on, go on telling me things,' he said. I told him about the Hague, told him how we were now living at Driebergen. He knew that Uncle Gerrit's children were here. He seemed to have heard about us.... When I went away, he said, 'Doctor, may the old man give you something?' And he handed me three thousand guilders: 'You must have patients, Doctor, who can't afford things,' he said. 'You won't refuse it, will you?' I thought it right to accept the money. It was an obvious pleasure to him to give it me.... Next day—that was this morning, when I went again—he was much less lucid. He just mentioned Mamma; and, when he spoke of her, I could see that he imagined that she was still quite young. Still he understood that I was her son.... Then he gave me his hand and said, 'I am glad, Doctor, to have seen you.... Give my regards to your mother ... the old man's regards ... and to your father too.' Then I went away; and, when I called again in an hour to enquire, the butler told me ... that he was dead...."

Van der Welcke sat in his chair, motionless and bent, with his hands hanging between his knees. He stared in front of him and did not speak. The past, the times of bygone days rose tempestuously before his eyes. It was as though that which had once existed never perished, as though nothing could ever change in what had once begun.... Life slid on unbrokenly.... His eyes saw Rome, an old palace, a lofty room ... Constance fleeing down a back stair, himself standing like a thief in the presence of the old man ... the good old man, who had been like a father to him.... Now ... now the old man was dead.... And Addie had been at his death-bed! And Van der Welcke's son was bringing the dying man's message, his last message, his forgiveness!...

Van der Welcke stared and continued to stare, motionless; and a sob welled up in his breast. His eyes, which were like a child's with their ever youthful glance, filled with great tears. Nevertheless, he controlled himself, remained calm; and all that he said, quite calmly, was:

"Addie, does Mamma.... know?"

"No, Daddy.... I wanted to tell you first ... and to bring you ... the old man's message and...."

"Yes?"

"His forgiveness...."

Van der Welcke's head drooped lower still; and the great tears fell to the floor. Addie now rose and went up to his father:

"Daddy...."

"My boy ... my boy!"

"The old man sent you this message: 'Tell your father ... that I forgive him ... and tell your mother so ... too....'"

Addie flung his arm round his father's neck; and Van der Welcke now sobbed on his son's breast. He could restrain himself no longer. He gave one great, loud sob, clutching hold of his own son, like a child.... Had it not always been like that, the child the consoler of his father? The son now his mother's consoler?

The emotion lasted but a moment, because of the calmness of older years; but it was a moment full as the whole soul and the whole life of a small being. The older man felt all his soul, saw all his small life. Was *that* coming for him: forgiveness? Was it coming to him through his son? Because of his son, perhaps ... mysteriously, for some mysterious law and mystic reason?... He felt it ... as an enlightening surprise ... though he merely said, after a pause:

"I'm glad, Addie ... that you went. And now you must tell ... Mamma."

"I'll tell her this very evening, Father."

"This evening?"

"Yes, I can't wait any longer. Those last words ... are lying like a weight ... on my heart: I must hand them on...."

"To Mamma also...."

"To feel relieved...."

"Then go to her," said Van der Welcke, very calmly.

And he remained sitting in his chair. His fingers mechanically rolled a fresh cigarette. But in his eyes, which had always remained young, there was seen a faint inflexion, of surprise, as though for the first time they had looked into the deeper life. His son kissed him, gently, went away, closed the door. And Van der Welcke's fingers continued to fumble with a newly-rolled cigarette. He forgot to light it. He stared in front of him....

Outside the house the wind blew moaning along the walls and drew its tapping fingers along every window, as along a vast keyboard....

Forgiveness, the very possibility of it, whirled before his staring eyes....

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## CHAPTER IV

When Addie came downstairs he met Constance. A gas-jet was burning with a small flame in the brown dusk of the oak wainscoting. She was obviously tired:

"I am going to my room," she said.

"I was looking for you, Mummy."

"Come along with me then."

"Perhaps you're tired, perhaps you want to rest ... and sleep."

"I can rest as well when you are with me as when I am alone. Come."

She put out her hand, took his and drew him gently up the stairs. She turned up the gas in her sitting-room. She changed quickly into a tea-gown; and he thought that he would not speak to her that evening, because she really seemed very weary.... While she was busy in her dressing-room, he looked round him and felt the years of his boyhood. The room was so exact a copy of the little drawing-room in the Kerkhoflaan that the past always came back to him here. And it brought with it the strange melancholy of all things that had been and no longer were....

"Hark how it's blowing!" she said. "It reminds me...."

"Of what, Mamma?"

"Of an evening, more than ten years ago, at the Hague. It was after the death of Grandmamma van der Welcke. I had returned from here, from the room which is now Papa's bedroom. I had

been to Grandmamma ... and it was stormy weather, like to-day, and, when I got home, I was fanciful and frightened: the wind seemed to me so gigantic and I ... I was so small.... Then you came home ... and I was so frightened ... I crept into your arms ... I looked into your eyes, Addie.... In those days, it was very strange, they changed colour, they turned grey.... Now they are sometimes quite dark-grey, but sometimes I see a gleam of blue in them. I used to feel so sorry ... that they changed colour.... Do you remember? It was not long before Uncle Gerrit died.... Oh, how frightened I felt ... for days and weeks before!..."

"And why are you thinking of those days, Mammy darling?"

"I don't know why. Perhaps only because it's blowing.... How small our country is by the sea!... It's always blowing, always blowing.... One would think that everything that happens is blown to us, across the sea, and comes down upon us, in heavy showers of rain...."

He smiled.

"Oh, my boy, sometimes I feel so terribly heavy-hearted, without knowing why!..."

"Is it the house?"

"The house? No, no, it's not the house."

"Don't you like the house even now?"

"Oh, yes ... I'm pretty used to the house!"

"Is it the wind, the rain?"

"Perhaps both.... But haven't I known them for years?"

"Then what is it that makes you heavy-hearted?"

"I don't know."

"Come here, to me...."

"Where, my boy?"

"On my knees, in my arms...."

She sat down on his knees and smiled, sadly:

"It's an age...."

"What?"

"Since I sat on your knee like this.... Do you remember? Do you remember? When you were quite a boy ... and I felt frightened ... I used to creep up to your little study and creep into your arms and look into your blue eyes.... I never do that now."

He clasped his arms round her:

"Then do it again. There, you're doing it now.... My lap's bigger now.... My eyes have changed colour...."

"Everything, everything has changed!"

"Has everything changed?"

"Yes ... I've lost you!"

"Mamma!"

"I have lost you.... Hush, dear, it was bound to come!... Does a son belong to his parents?... Does a son belong to his mother?... A son belongs to everybody and everything ... but not to his parents, not to his mother.... It is a cruel law, but it is a law...."

"You're regretting the past ... and there was not so much peace and quiet in the past, Mummie.... Do you remember, do you remember ... how you used to be ... you and poor Father?... Now everything is much calmer ... everything has smoothed down so ... because life has gone on."

"Yes, life has gone on.... I had you ... and I have lost you!...."

She was sobbing on his shoulder.

"Mamma!"

"Dear, it was bound to be! Didn't I consider ... that it would be so ... years and years ago?... When you were a little boy, I often used to think, 'I've got him now ... but one day I shall lose him irrevocably?' Now it has come. ... I must accept it with resignation...."

"But am I not living with you all? Have I ever been away ... except to college ... and sometimes on business?"

"Dear, it's not that. It's the losing each other, the losing each other ... out of each other's souls...."

"But it's not that."

"That's just what it is.... And it's bound to be so, dear.... Only, because I no longer feel any part of you in my soul, I no longer know anything about you.... I have known nothing about you for ages.... I see you going and coming—it's the patients, it's the children, occupying you ... in turns—but what do I know, what do I know about you?... It has become like that gradually ... and since ... since you got married, it has become irrevocable."

"Mamma...."

"I oughtn't to talk like this, dear. I mustn't. And I should be able to overcome this melancholy, if I knew ... that you were happy in yourself...."

"Why should you doubt it?"

"I don't know. There's something about you...."

"Mother," he said, "how strange it is that you and Father...."

"Well?"

"Have never really found each other! You so often think the same things."

"Did Papa also think ...?"

"Just now ... almost the same as you."

"We have learnt to bear with each other, darling."

"But you have never found each other," he said, faintly; and his voice broke.

She looked at him; she understood that he too had not found his wife. She saw it: he was not happy in himself. A sword seemed suddenly to cut through her soul; and she was filled with self-reproach as from a well. Was it not all her fault, that her son was not happy now?... Was it not the result of his childhood, the result of his up-bringing?... The melancholy that had come after the excessive earnestness of his first youth ... was it not her fault?

But she merely answered his words mechanically:

"No," she said, "we have never found each other."

He would have wished to tell her now ... about his journey, about the old man, who had died, over there, near Haarlem. But he could not; a feeling of discouragement prevented him. And they remained sitting without speaking, close together, with her hand in his. After his father, after his mother had both, so soon after each other, spoken to him of his own happiness ... now that feeling of discouragement prevented him, because he saw life enveloping in clouds of darkness at his feet ... black darkness out of an abyss ... so that he did not know whither the first steps would lead him.... Black darkness and emptiness ... because he no longer knew, no longer knew what it would be best to say and do.... He could no longer speak now of the old man who had died yonder, who had sent for him to tell him that he forgave the two of them—his father, his mother—who had once injured him: he could not do it. Whereas, at the time of his father's words, the black darkness had only whirled in front of him, now that his mother, so strangely, was saying the same to him ... it had suddenly become an abyss ... pitch-dark ... because he no longer knew anything.... He no longer possessed the instinctive knowledge by which he must tread his path, which, while still so very young, he thought that he knew how to tread in clear self-consciousness of a clear soul that felt its own vocation. Oh, how often of late years had he no longer known! He no longer knew what was right to do, because, whatever he had done of late years, the heaviness had sunk within him, as an insufficiency, giving him that feeling of discouragement.... He had felt that discouragement by the bedside of his needy patients.... He had felt that discouragement in between his cares for Uncle Gerrit's children.... He had felt that discouragement when he was with his wife, with his own children....

Oh, world of feeling born just of the emptiness of self-insufficiency, because self, alas, was never sufficient, because something was always lacking and he did not know what!... And, when this came over him, this night of sudden chaos, the word died on his lips, the movement on his fingers, the deed on his will.... Oh, world of darkness, which then suddenly spread like the expanse of clouds outside over all the clear sky of himself!... He knew he wanted what was right; and yet the insufficiency swelled up.... He knew his powers of alleviation and consolation; and yet it was the night without a smile ... as now, when he sat with his hand in his mother's, with no words after their first, save that she shuddered and said:

"Hark ... hark how the wind is blowing!..."

He drew her to him, until her head sank on his shoulder, and they remained like that, in the night.

The gale outside was like a living immensity, a vast soul raging with world-suffering, thousand-voiced and thousand-winged, and under its raging agony, which filled all the air above the land, the house that contained the life of them all was small as some tiny casket....

And that night he was unable to tell her....

## CHAPTER V

Now at last, after days, he was himself again! Alone, all alone, in the night, in his study, while everyone in the house slept, while only the night itself was awake: the night and the immense wind tormenting itself and struggling, raging and tearing round the house. Now at last he was alone and himself again, after Amsterdam and after Haarlem, after the troubles and comings and goings, the excitement—needy patients, visited by stealth; the Merchants' School; the old man, the old man especially!—and, tired as he was, yet he could not make up his mind for bed. In the study which was now getting dusky-brown to his eyes in the light of the lamp, he sat in the low leather chair; and his head wearily drooped on to his hand. Now that he had no more need for action, waves of indeterminate darkness surged and floated all around and within him, bearing on their crests the mood of self-insufficiency. No one else knew him as he now knew and felt himself: not his parents, not his wife, not one of Uncle Gerrit's children, not one of his needy patients, who only saw him composed and steady of nerve, a little sombre-eyed, but so four-square and firm, so calm and confident in his knowledge, always sure what would be good for all of them, who were ill and wretched.... No one knew him as he was now, weighed down with such despondency in his leather chair; and all who saw him four-square and firm, calm and confident in his knowledge, would never have believed that he knew nothing at all ... for himself. Oh, however much he might know for others, with that almost mystic knowledge which healed as though by a suggestive force deep down within himself, however much he might know what was good for their bodies and souls, for himself he knew nothing, least of all for his soul!... To them his young life seemed to move from one goal to another, always certain of itself through the windings of its course; yet that was all on the surface; and he knew nothing of himself!... His own disease was insufficiency; and of recent years he had felt it swelling within him fuller and fuller, eating into him deeper and deeper....

He saw himself again as a child—his first recollection—between his two parents, his father taking him from his mother's lap, his mother taking him from his father's arms; and amid the unconsciousness of his earliest childhood he had always felt the jarring and jealousy between them. Very soon his blood made him speak, that calm unfevered Dutch blood; and his unfevered Dutch nature could be seen in his serious eyes; from the first his Dutch seriousness and steadying composure had been able to find, if not always words, at least sounds of consoling reconciliation, of riper tenderness for that mother, who hugged him in her arms, for that father, whom he came to regard so soon as a bigger and older brother. And this when he was still a little fellow. It had been like that ever since he could remember; from the time when he was a child in the nursery, stroking Mother's tearful eyes and bringing a laugh to Father's pouting mouth; and, as he grew older and bigger, he remembered, it had always been like that: he knew himself to have been their comfort.... It was small wonder that, when still quite young, he had begun to think of the comfort that he was and had then known for certain that he was their comfort.... He knew it then, as child and boy—no longer in unconsciousness but in assured, unshakable knowledge—and then it had become his destiny. So very early it had dawned on his consciousness and afterwards glittered before his eyes:

"I must help them, I must be to him and to her what is dear to them and what comforts them."

So naturally had he taken that destiny upon his young shoulders that it never became too heavy for him; and there had grown up with him an inclination to comfort and alleviate those who were not quite so near to him. Quite naturally he had spread his wing over all Uncle Gerrit's children, to care for them, to bring them up. Quite naturally, he sought what he could find to alleviate and comfort, whom he could cure, whom he could care for ... and this farther still from him, not close to his home, but in outlying villages and distant towns.... Thus had his nature grown and thus did he act, naturally, in obedience to his nature.... But the conflict between his parents, coming immediately, in the first, unconscious years of childhood, had made his tender nerves tremble with an incessant thrill, like a stringed instrument that is never silent.... And under the calm, earnest glance, under the laugh of comfort or composure, under the sturdy breadth of his young and manly strength, the strings had always vibrated and never consented to betray themselves.... They had betrayed themselves once, once only, when his very earliest childish pain had given him a violent shock, in a despair too great to be borne.... But immediately afterwards he had known within himself that he must be strong to overcome the cruelties of life.... Since then the cruelties had blown against him, like piercing winds ... without causing the sensitive strings to vibrate visibly or audibly to others.... Oh, did he not remember that suffering of his childish soul when he fancied that all his childish love had been wasted, because his parents in despite of it were going to separate, each grasping at the happiness that had smiled to him!... no one had seen that suffering and vibration. After the first suffering, no one had seen anything. And it was as if the too-great sensitiveness of the ever-vibrant strings had hardened in the robust young years of manliness; the god had stood before him so sharply defined: yonder!... Yonder!...

He had felt young and robust; and that too-sensitive vibration had only developed his soul mystically, so that it should heal, wherever it directed its magic.... It had been very strange to him; but just with the medical studies, which should have made him a materialist, there had developed within him a conscious mysticism, enquiring into the essence of life, which the medical books failed to teach him. When he discussed it with his student friends, they answered with the scoff of growing positivism, the barren philosophy which clings to most men from their medical studies, because they ask only for the visible manifestations of the life which it is their business to tend and not for the invisible source, the holy well of life, whence everything flows in a

radiance that grows gradually dim ... until the first radiance is no longer visible....

So it had happened with his student friends; and theirs had become the common materialistic doctor's career. His eyes had always been set on the essence of life, the source of the radiant spring.... And, with his increase in practical science and positive knowledge, the strange, mystic certainty had increased in him, the certainty that he was able to heal if he wished ... that he could heal through sheer force of will.... It was not a matter for discussion, it was in him, a great instinctive knowledge.... Oh, that glorious certainty, which had shone out before him so early, sending its rays abroad.... Since he had felt it, very early, so clear and certain in himself, he no longer spoke about it; at most there was a very rare word to his mother, an occasional word to his father; but for the rest he would not touch his secret power with words: they were breath to dim a mirror's lustre!

Oh, why had he not this knowledge for himself! Why, of late years, had he sunk deeper and deeper in the vagueness of that self-insufficiency! Why was the balance disturbed, why did he feel a consciousness of blame welling within him!

He now sat on wearily; and, though everyone in the house was in bed, though the blowing wind, gigantic and plaintive, moaned up over distant heaths and slid along the walls and windows with its sombre, swelling howl, he could not make up his mind to go to bed, as though he knew that, if he did, he would not sleep. And, as if to know for himself how the discouragement could have overmastered him, he dived back into his memories, saw himself a boy again, healthy, strong and composed, loving his Dutch horizons and Dutch skies, with the deep, growing conviction that he had within himself the secret power which he could pour forth to heal all who suffered in body or in nervous soul.... He saw once more the disappointment of his parents, especially Papa, and of Grandmamma, because he would not enter the diplomatic service, because he wanted to become a doctor.... But he had carried his wish, backed up by Mamma, who seemed to understand him.... His rapid power of study, which allowed him to attain in feverish haste the aim which he saw so close before his eyes: matriculating out of the fifth class at school; putting in a short time at Heidelberg before he went to Leiden: he was so very young, only seventeen; passing his first examination in a year, his second in eighteen months, taking three intermediate courses in the next five years, during which period he also acquired practical experience with a demonstrator at Vienna; and lastly taking his degree at the age of twenty-six. His parents rejoiced when, after those nine years at the university and abroad, he settled down with them at Driebergen, when they had him back in their house, where, despite the presence of all Uncle Gerrit's children, he had left a feeling of emptiness.... A short spell of the tenderness of living with them all again; and his love for mankind had developed so quickly, making him find his patients inevitably among the poorest of the rural population, or sometimes in the villages, or even at Utrecht or Amsterdam.... He never spoke about them, maintaining an earnest silence about the things which he did, even as he was silent about the secret force which he so certainly knew himself to possess.... Never had he spoken to anybody over that poor little girl, a child of twelve, the daughter of two wretched labourers, a cripple since the age of five, whom, with the veriest trifle of material assistance, but more particularly through his sure power of will, he had gradually helped to raise herself from her bed of straw, enabled to move herself about, until she could now walk on her frail and yielding little legs.... He might have been ashamed of a cure so incredible, for he had never talked about it, not even to his mother, not even to his father....

Oh, it lasted such a short time, the tenderness of that time when he lived with them all again, with his parents and the others!... When he reflected upon the strange double projection of his soul, when he was meeting the girl, who was now his wife, at the Hague: meeting her just now and again. A strange projection one of them? Perhaps not, after all; but, because of the stormy night wind, sombrely sending its howl over the sombre heaths, he was not able ... to read his own thoughts plainly.... Mathilde! The few meetings, at the Hague; then that feeling, when he chose her, of having been irresistibly compelled; and, combined with a vague wonder within himself, the pride also of introducing that good-looking and healthy young woman into his family.... He was proud that she did not belong to their class, especially on her mother's side, because it gave her an opportunity of triumphing over their arbitrary divisions; proud too that she was healthy, with her complexion of milk and roses, and above all did not suffer from "nerves," that all too common complaint among them all.... But they had not shared his pride; and after his marriage, some hint of antagonism seemed inevitably to arise between him and his father; his mother, too, for all the liberalism that had come to her late in life, remained antipathetic to this girl, whose gait and voice, whose movements and utterance all suggested a different environment from that to which Constance was accustomed; it was as if Aunt Adeline, Emilie, Uncle Gerrit's children, all their big household, had been unable to receive Mathilde in their midst without a certain supercilious mistrust.... They could none of them understand why he had married this woman.... And he had not failed to see how they always stirred themselves to be gentle and amiable towards her—because, when all was said and done, she *was* his wife—stirred themselves especially not to let her see that they all thought her not *quite*, really not *quite*.... Her downfall was heavy, her voice not high-pitched enough; in everything that she did or said they marked that sometimes infinitesimal difference which betrays a difference of station. He had not failed to see it, but his pride had lain low and had never allowed them to notice that he saw it, because he thought it so small of them, so small-souled, that they could not blind themselves to that infinitesimal difference between Mathilde and themselves, yes, because he considered even their assiduous amiability small-souled. They showed it her so graciously sometimes, priding themselves, all of them, willy-nilly, upon their greater native and acquired distinction, all thinking themselves finer and better and higher than his wife, whom nevertheless they did not wish to

wound.... He saw this last even in his mother, in the boys, in Adeletje and in Gerdy—though Gerdy never succeeded—and he really preferred the undisguised aversion of little Klaasje, who clearly showed that she could not bear Mathilde....

And he now saw that, in marrying this woman, who was not quite of their class, he had wanted to display pride in particular against the arbitrariness of those whom he called his people—his parents, his family—he had wanted to show that there was no longer any distinction of class, especially no distinction in those minor shades of class. If they were going to think about distinctions, she had the distinction of health ... while his own people were all sick, in body and soul, not, it might be, suffering severely, but all affected or tainted with those "nerves" of their time.... Perhaps his pride had just contained a desire to place his wife, Mathilde, before them as an example:

"Look here now, here's a woman who is healthy and simple."

For that was how he looked upon her soul and body. Because he looked upon her thus, he had felt for her the love that had driven him towards her, his soul taking that direction of positivism and materialism which, after his student days, had at that moment mastered the mysticism of his soul.... For he had known then, those moments in which he—tired of his text-books or hardened in the operating-room—had felt the mysticism within him temporarily fading; and it was especially during those intervals of materialism that the young doctor had experienced Mathilde's attraction, the attraction of a healthy, pink-and-white woman who would give him healthy children. At such moments he saw the world, all mankind, renewed by careful selection; the vigorous life-force of the future bursting into luxuriant rose-blossoms which would overwhelm the sickly lilies of these days of "nerves...." When, afterwards, the secret forces spoke more loudly within him, then he would suddenly feel himself far removed from his wife, as though he had lost her; and especially in his dark, vague self-insufficiency he lost her entirely, feeling himself nerveless and without power even to return her kisses with any warmth, while his voice in speaking to her remained dull and his grey glance cold, whatever he said and however hard he tried to force himself back into his healthy, positive love for the healthy mother of his two children....

Then he would feel guilty towards her. And the inner conviction of his guilt increased. Was it her fault that he had been able only to give her one half of his soul, that he had it in his power to love her only with the positive half of his nature—however sincere it might be—while he gave her nothing of what worked and moved in him more profoundly and gloriously, the true web and woof of himself? Was it her fault and was he really entitled to take her, if he could not give her more than half of himself, while all that was higher—and he well knew what was higher in him—escaped her and always would escape her?... But often in his black insufficiency, even as now in his weary nocturnal mood, his consciousness of guilt, though it pained him, became suddenly too dreamy and unreal; and he now comforted himself tranquilly:

"She is a simple woman. She has never thought of other than simple and uncomplicated things, has never lived among them; and she will never miss this, all that I do not give her, she will never know the lack of it, because she is simple, because she is simple: a healthy, normal mother, the handsome, healthy mother of my two dear children...."

Then again, tired and undecided to go to bed, he was pricked by his consciousness of guilt, he thought of her unhappy in the house that was dear to him, and he knew that he was incapable to-day—and so often, so often!—of giving her that love, that positive half, that one half of himself.... Sinking and sinking in his self-insufficiency, he now listened to the wind howling round the house, the storm that had lasted for days, and he seemed to hear voices that came moaning up over the wide heath, as though the wind were alive, as though the storm were a soul, as though it concealed weeping souls, complaining souls, and were their one manifestation: souls blowing up again and again, souls which now, in the night, tapped with soul-fingers at the trembling panes.... Round about this house, in which his grand-parents had lived so long and in such loneliness, until now life had come to fill all the empty rooms, it suddenly seemed to him as though he heard something of their voices, moaning plaintively through the storm ... accusing him first and then pitying him: the old man's voice, the old woman's voice. But what they moaned he did not understand in the ever shriller howl upon howl that floated despairingly along the swishing trees ... until suddenly the window, fastened only by the latch, blew open with a fierce tug, the Venetian shutter flapped to and slung open again, banging against the wall of the house.... The wind entered and with one breath blew out the lamp. The room now dark, the night luridly visible outside, the window so desperately pulled open took on new outlines.... Adriaan, groping, knocking against the chairs, moved towards the window, seized the flapping, banging shutter, closed it, closed the window, firmly this time, turning the old latch that was stiff with rust.

The rain poured in torrents; the wind moaned and sobbed with sorrowfully entreating voices and tapped its fingers against the trembling panes.

That night he did not sleep, tired as he was. And he kept thinking:

"Am I at fault?"

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## CHAPTER VI



The old lady was sitting silently at the window—in the grey morning, which seemed spent and weary with the wind out of doors—and her thoughts were following a far course of their own in misty days of long ago. Klaasje came up to her. The child had two heavy books under her arm, bound volumes of *The Graphic* and *L'Illustration*, and walked bent under them; then she dropped them, clumsily.... Cross with the weight of the books, she beat them angrily, but the hard boards hurt her little hand; and so she decided to drag them to Granny, the naughty books which refused to come: she dragged them by the open bindings which had hurt her so; she tore them a bit, but that was their own fault, because they wouldn't be carried.... Satisfied with her revenge in tearing the books, she closed the bindings contentedly; the books lay at Granny's feet, against her foot-warmer; and now Klaasje dragged up a hassock too, pushed it against Granny's dress and, kneeling on the hassock, asked Granny, in a motherly fashion:

"Granny!... Granny!... Granny like to look at pictures?"

The old woman, with a vague, misty glance, slowly turned her head towards the child, whose fair hair fell loosely round the rather thin, sharp little face, from which the over-bright eyes shone strangely, hard and staring. The voice—"Granny look at pictures?"—rang strangely kind, but too childish for a big girl of twelve, with a maturing figure. It was too maternal towards the old woman:

"Granny!... Granny like to look at pictures?"

The old woman, vaguely, fancied herself at Buitenzorg, in a large white palace among mountains, which stood out against a blue sky, and coco-trees, which waved gently like ostrich-feathers; and she thought that her little daughter Gertrude was kneeling by her and wanting to look at the books with her. Her old mouth wore a little puckered smile; and she put out her hands for the book, which Klaasje held up clumsily. But the old woman was too weak to pull the heavy book on to her lap and it slipped obstinately down her dress to the floor, against the foot-warmer. Klaasje grew angry:

"Naughty books, naughty books!..."

She flew into a temper and struck the books again; but her little hand was hurt and she suddenly began to cry.

"Ssh!... Ssh!..." said Granny, soothingly.

She bent painfully in her big chair and laboriously pulled up the heavy, obstinate book; and Klaasje, with her eyes still wet, pushed up from below, till at last it lay in Grandmamma's lap. Then Klaasje sighed, after the final victory:

"Turn over," she said.

She turned over the heavy, clumsy binding and said:

"Klaasje will explain...."

But the black pictures, the dark portraits held no story for her; and, pointing her finger at the picture or the portrait, she could not make one up, could not find her tongue:

"Turn over, turn over," she repeated.

She was longing for colours, yellow, blue and red; but the pictures contained black, all black stripes and black patches, and she thought them ugly.

"Turn over, turn over, turn over," she kept repeating, excitedly yearning for them to become yellow, blue and red.

The old woman, with her puckered smile, patiently turned over the pictures. For her too they held no story, because they were black and sombre; and she was already seeing colours for herself, the dead-white and deep-blue, the bright, lacquered green of houses, sky and trees in Java. Here, under the sombre oppression of the skies, here, in the sombre pictures, the old woman and the child found nothing to charm them.

Then Klaasje became very angry and dragged the heavy book from Granny's lap and beat it, heedless of the pain, and scolded:

"Ugly books ... ugly, black books!"

"Ssh!... Ssh!" said the old woman soothingly, laying her veined hand on the girl's fair head.

"Build a tower!" said Klaasje, with a gurgle of laughter suddenly beholding a beautiful vision.

She sprang up quickly. On a table in a corner of the room she found a box of dominoes. She brought the box, beaming with delight, but the smooth lid slid out of the box and the dominoes rattled on the floor. Klaasje stamped her foot, but the beautiful vision still shone before her and hurriedly and passionately she scrabbled them into her little pinafore. Then she brought them to Granny, like a harvest, like so much booty, and rattled them down at her feet. With a great effort she again pushed one of the heavy books on to Granny's lap; and the old woman helped her, pulling while Klaasje pushed.

"Build tower!" cried the child.

Granny held the book, held it straight, while Klaasje placed two, three, four pieces on their narrow edges. Upon these she went on building the rickety black-and-white tower.

"A door and two windows," the child explained, lost in her game.

But the tower fell in with a crash.

"Granny mustn't move!" she whimpered.

Balancing the heavy book on Granny's knees, she went on building, hurriedly, so as to get very high.

"Granny mustn't move again.... Tower ... with a wall round it.... Higher ... the tower ... one more stone on the wall ... one more stone on the wall...."

But the wall and the tower came down with a crash.

"Naughty Granny!... Naughty Granny!"

"Ssh!" said the old woman, soothingly.

Addie had entered; and the child, dropping the book and the dominoes, crowed with delight and ran up to him. She called him uncle, not realizing that he was her cousin:

"Uncle Addie!" she cooed.

He opened his arms wide, lifted her a few inches from the floor:

"Look in Uncle Addie's pockets," he said.

"What have you got? What have you got?"

She fumbled in his pockets.

"No, that's Uncle's pocket-book.... No, that's his watch.... Here, look, what's this?"

He now helped her find the little parcel. She tugged hurriedly at the paper and string; and he opened the parcel for her. It was a little kaleidoscope.

"Look through it...."

"Lovely!" said the child, gleefully. "Lovely ... blue, red, yellow!..."

"Now shake it...."

She shook the kaleidoscope: the colours, from a square, changed their figure into a star.

"Green, blue, red!" the child cried.

"Now shake again...."

"Blue and yellow."

"There, what do you say to that?"

"Lovely!... Lovely!..."

She sat down on the floor, suddenly quiet and good, peered and shook the little cylinder, peered and shook it again. In the gaudy star she suddenly beheld a paradise:

"Green, yellow, blue."

Addie relieved Grandmamma of the book, put it down and began to arrange the dominoes in the box.

"It's been blowing," said the old woman, pointing through the window. "There are great branches lying in the garden."

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## CHAPTER VII

Then Adeline came in, looking for Addie. He was so tired yesterday that she had not cared to ask him the result of his visit to Amsterdam, but now, while he was still playing with Klaasje, she glanced at him with questioning eyes. She was still a young woman, no more than forty, for she had married Gerrit early and then borne him a child every year; but, despite her gentle, round, fair face, she was no longer young in appearance. Her lines had become matronly; and, especially after the great sorrow, after her husband's suicide, which had plunged her and the children into perpetual shadow like an indelible twilight, she had become so spiritless in all her simple energies that she came like a child to Constance or Addie about anything that concerned any one of them: mostly to Addie, whom she had taken to regarding as her inevitable protector. She looked up at him with respectful confidence; she always did literally what he told her to; it was he who controlled their whole little fortune, investing it as profitably as possible for the children; notwithstanding his youth, she turned to him in all that concerned her boys; and the boys

themselves accepted it, inevitably, that their cousin, who was only six or seven years older than they, should look after their interests with paternal earnestness. But Adeline was well aware that Addie was very angry that Alex had had to leave Alkmaar. At first, things had gone fairly well in the secondary school at the Hague; after the third form—he was seventeen by this time—he had just succeeded in passing his matriculation; but, when he took two years over his first examination and failed in the second, Addie himself had considered that Alex had better look out for something different, however much his mother, with her mind full of Gerrit, would have liked to see her eldest son an officer....

By this time, he was nearly twenty; and it was so late for him to go to the Merchants' School at Amsterdam that Addie had decided first to obtain all the details for himself and therefore had gone to Amsterdam, to see the head-master.... That was why, this morning, Adeline came to talk to Addie, a little nervously, rather frightened of what he might say, because he had been exceedingly dissatisfied about Alex, discouraged, not knowing what to do with him next.... He would like to have a talk with Alex, he said; and Adeline, sad about her son and rather frightened of Addie, went to fetch Alex and brought him back with her. He was tall, slender, pale, fair-haired: he did not look strong, although he had resembled his father, especially as a child; every year his features seemed to become more and more fixed and his face became like a spectral mask of pallor, with the look in the eyes a little shy under the lashes, as with a timorous, bashful and at the same time deep inner concealment of invisible, silent things.... Now that his mother had come to fetch him from the room where he sat reading, he came in with her, evidently nervous about the coming talk with Addie. But Addie said:

"I ought really to be going out, Aunt.... Alex, can you go with me part of the way? Then we can talk things over as we walk. The roads are too wet for cycling."

Addie's eyes and voice set Adeline's mind at ease, as though he were telling her that it would be all right at the Merchants' School....

The cousins left the house together. The trees dripped with water; and the swift and angry wind chased the great clouds farther in one direction; but the sky remained grey and lowering. The far-stretching, straight country-roads vanished at last in a melancholy drab mist; and the two young men at first walked along without a word.

"Well, I went and enquired for you yesterday," said Addie, at last. "You can go in for your exam, Alex ... and you can go on working there for some time yet.... I hope things will go better this time, old chap.... You're nearly twenty now.... If they don't...."

He made a vague gesture; and Alex took his arm:

"It's awfully good of you, Addie, to take so much trouble about me. I too hope ... that things will go right ... this time...."

"Mamma would have liked to see you in the army."

"Still, I'm really not cut out for a soldier.... It's a pity I didn't think of it before I went to Alkmaar.... But, when I was there I felt it at once: there's nothing of the soldier about me."

"And in that way years were lost.... Well, I do hope that now, when you're at the Merchants' School, you won't suddenly discover ... that you're not cut out for a business-man ... that you're not fit for 'trade.'.... You can become a consul, you know."

"Yes ... perhaps...."

"It's a pity, Alex, that you don't know things for certain in your own mind ... that you have no settled ideas...."

"Yes ... that's just it!..."

"But you must become something, mustn't you? You have no money, you fellows; and, even if you had ... a man must be something ... in order to do any or get any happiness out of life ... for himself and those about him...."

"Yes, Addie...."

"Promise me now, old chap, to do your best.... You see, I'm playing the father to all of you, even though I'm only six years older than you are. I feel a sort of father to you ... and I should like to see you all happy ... and prosperous.... But you must help me, Alex. Show a little energy. If you hadn't thrown up the sponge at once at Alkmaar, you'd almost have had your commission by now...."

"Yes...."

"Like your father. Mamma would have liked that. But we won't talk about it any more and we'll hope that things will go better at Amsterdam...."

"Addie ... do you remember Papa well?"

"Of course I do."

"So do I.... I was eight years old, when he died.... I even remember...."

"What?"

"That evening ... though I didn't understand at the time ... why Mamma cried and screamed like that ... or why Aunt Constance and Uncle Henri were there.... It was not until later, oh, years later, that I understood!... But I saw.... I *saw* Papa lying ... with blood all round him; and that's a thing which always ... always ... hovers before my eyes. *I'm always seeing it, Addie!*... Tell me, Addie, do you know why Papa did it?... There was nothing, surely, to make him so unhappy as all that?"

"He was very ill."

"He thought himself incurable."

"Still, he was strong?"

"Physically."

"He was like Guy, wasn't he?"

"Yes, Guy is very like him, to look at.... He was tall, broad, fair-haired...."

"Yes, that's how I remember him. I was eight years old then."

"You were a jolly little tribe."

"And now we're nothing but a burden ... to you...."

"Nonsense, it's not as bad as that!"

"I hope things'll go better ... Addie ... at Amsterdam...."

"Why aren't you more talkative, Alex?... You haven't been for a long time."

"Haven't I?"

"You never talk, at home ... to the others. Only once in a way to me ... when we are alone. It was after Alkmaar that you became so silent. It wasn't surely because I was angry at the time?"

"Perhaps, partly...."

"Well?"

"I daren't tell you."

"Tell me, Alex, if there is anything I can do for you."

"You do so much as it is, Addie.... You do everything."

"But speak quite openly. Perhaps there is something more that I can do for you."

"No, what could there be?"

"Something's upsetting you."

"No...."

"You're unhappy."

"No...."

"You're so reserved."

"I ... never talk much."

"Try and trust me, Alex."

"I do trust you."

"Well, then, talk to me."

"But I ... I've nothing to tell you, Addie."

"I know, Alex, that you must have something to tell me...."

"No...."

"I know it, Alex."

"No, Addie, really.... I've nothing to tell you...."

The lad tried to release his arm from Addie's, but Addie held him tight:

"Walk a bit more with me."

"Where are you going?"

"I have a couple of patients to see.... Take me there, Alex ... and speak, speak openly...."

"I can't speak."

"Then try and find your words. I'll help you."

"Not to-day ... not to-day, Addie, out here, in the roads.... Perhaps another time ... indoors."

"Very well, then, another time, indoors. I'll keep you to your word. And now let's talk of nothing but the Merchants' School...."

And, with Alex still hanging on his arm, he told him about the head-master, the staff, the lessons there ... making a point of holding out hopes to Alex that everything would go easily and smoothly. Did Addie not know, did he not diagnose that the boy was so terribly afraid of life, of the days to come, because a twilight had always continued to press down upon him, the twilight of his father's suicide?... It had given the child a fit of shuddering in so far as he had realized it at the time; and things had suddenly grown dark, about his child-soul; and, when the power of thought had developed in him later, there had always remained the fear in that darkness, because the unconscious life went on daily ... and because his father—why, why?—had torn himself out of the unconscious life and committed suicide.... That—though Alex had not spoken—was how Addie diagnosed him, that was how he really diagnosed his state, with that strange look of penetration, with that strange vision.... And, when he looked into another in this way, he no longer thought of himself, his self-insufficiency fell away from him and he seemed to know on the other's behalf, to know surely and positively, to know with instinctive knowledge ... as he never knew things for himself....

While they walked on, arm in arm, he thought that the boy's heavy step was becoming more rhythmical and even, that his answers—now that they went on talking about Amsterdam and the master in whose house he would be—were becoming firmer, as though he were taking greater interest.... There was no note of doubt in Addie's voice: his voice made the two years' schooling at Amsterdam, the whole subsequent life as a busy, hard-working man, stand out clear in the mist that hung under the trees and over the roads, made it all take on bright colours as a life spreading open, with unclouded horizons of human destiny, as though all the unconscious life would run easily along ordered lines.... He himself had never known that fear of the days to come, because he had seen his goal before him in the future. Yet why, then, that morbid sense of insufficiency?...

He refused to think of it; and at once it passed from him like a ghost. Even after his sleepless night, he now felt the energy circulating strongly within him, felt the magic pouring out of him as vital warmth. He must make that boy by his side realize the life before him, he must take away his fear of the future. An unknown force inside him ordained that he should make the future shine with hope and promise for this boy, ordained that he should purge the days to come of their sombre terror.

And, when he had taken leave of Alex, because he did not wish him to know where his patients lived, the lad went back easier in his mind, with his fears pressing less heavily upon him, with the sullen sky growing gradually brighter ... however much he might have to think always of his father, however much he had to see his father's blood-stained corpse daily more and more clearly before his eyes....

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## CHAPTER VIII

The household took its everyday course of a morning: the everyday life, driven indoors by the merciless winter, the grey skies and blustering wind, rolled on softly and evenly in the rooms and passages of the big house. Not much came from outside, where the great trees in the garden dripped with chill rain; nothing to stir the big house, which stood there like a great lonely block on the villa-road, amid the sombre mystery of its wind-blown trees. For the occupants of the big, gloomy house had made as few acquaintances as possible among their neighbours, though in the spring and summer Gerdy would take her racket daily to the tennis-club.... In the winter, it was a quiet life indoors, varied only by a walk, or a visit to a sick or poor neighbour, a quiet life between the walls of the big rooms, with the wind tapping at the window-panes....

The old grandmother sat mostly in the conservatory and looked out into the garden, sagely nodding her silver-grey head. She no longer recognized all the children and as a rule thought herself back at Buitenzorg, in the midst of her own family; even when Klaasje sat playing at her feet, she would think that it was little Gertrude, Gertrude who had died, as a child, at Buitenzorg.... Constance, a zealous housewife, active despite her fifty-five years, moved about the house incessantly during the morning, with Marietje or Adeletje to help her. Twenty-two and twenty-one respectively, they were always with Constance: Marietje already full of unselfish consideration and Adeletje delicate, not speaking much, sitting with her needlework upstairs in their room; and, because of Alex' strange melancholy, it was only Guy and Gerdy that represented joyous, healthy youth in the house, that rich health and radiance which reminded Constance of their father, of her brother Gerrit, who had been so noisy, broad and strong until he fell ill, too ill to go on living....

Klaasje was very troublesome in the mornings, very restless, full of freaks and cranks, always bothering the others to play with her or at least to make a fuss over her; and Constance was so sorry that Klaasje could not be upstairs in the nursery with Jetje and Constant, but Mathilde would not have her there. And the poor, innocent child, twelve years old by now, was jealous of Constant and Jetje and hated Mathilde, as though, unconsciously, she felt in the children a

childishness that was natural and as though she knew that, after all, she herself was much too big to play about like that and build houses with cards and dominoes....

Above the great sombre house, against the great sombre skies and inside the house itself there was always a strange melancholy of things that had been.... It floated through the passages and creaked in the furniture; it could be felt in the old grandmother's sitting at the conservatory-window, in the pale, unchangingly sad face of Adeline, who was so helpless; it appeared in the silent sorrow of Emilie, who was spiritless and never spoke much these days. In the sombre house they sat or moved in an atmosphere of bygone things which mingled with the atmosphere of the house itself, as though they were small, pale souls, broken by life and sheltering in the safe house, now that the winter seemed endless and the heavy clouds were so oppressive.... A cloud of recollection hung over the old woman, as she sat silently staring, as she played with Klaasje, who would never grow up; a last reflexion of sombre tragedy lingered around the simple mother of so many children, as though her husband's suicide still struck her with tragic wonder that life could strike so suddenly and fiercely and cruelly; it was as though a strange psychological secret slumbered in the sad eyes of Emilie, who was still a young woman; a secret which she would never speak....

Sombre was the house and sombre the everlasting wind that blew around it; full of strange voices, of things of long ago; and they did not brighten the house, those three sad, silent women, so different in age, so sombre in their equal melancholy. They did not brighten the morning which they spent there together, in the house on the long, rain-swept road; and it was Constance herself, followed quietly by Marietje or Adeletje, who woke the house, stairs and passages to life with her active footfall and the shrill rattle of her keys.... The sound of a piano came harshly from Mathilde's sitting-room upstairs; and it had only to be heard to make the other piano in the drawing-room downstairs cry out in pain under Gerdy's furious little fingers, until Constance was startled at so much noise and hurriedly whispered to Marietje:

"Do tell Gerdy not to play when Mathilde is playing upstairs!..."

Marietje would then rush to the drawing-room and rebuke Gerdy; and, because it was Aunt Constance' request, Gerdy's piano suddenly fell silenced, leaving Mathilde's runs and flourishes to triumph overhead.

The children drove out daily with their nurse in the governess-court, whatever the weather: it was Addie's principle and they thrived on it; and their youthfulness, stammering its first words, was like a bright, rosy dawn of the future, as they went along the sombre stairs and dark passages and rooms, casting a sudden golden radiance in that atmosphere of the past, as though they were suddenly powdering through the brown of the shadows, as though they were sprinkling the sound of children's voices through the brown air, which had not caught a childish sound for so many years....

When Addie was out, visiting his patients, Van der Welcke remained in his room, reading and smoking, Uncle Jupiter, as Gerdy called him, because he usually sat enveloped in the blue clouds of his cigarette; and Guy did a little work, for his examination as a clerk in the postal service, except when he went to Utrecht, where he was receiving private tuition in geography. But when he was working at home, in his little room, up on the third floor, his young, healthy restlessness constantly made him get up and run downstairs, to borrow an atlas of Van der Welcke, hang round Uncle Henri for a bit, smoke a cigarette with him, then go back upstairs. He would look at his books and maps for three minutes and then jump up again, stretch himself, take up his dumb-bells, feeling stiff from the long sitting, and go downstairs once more.

Constance met him in the hall:

"Aren't you working, Guy?"

"Yes, I am, Auntie. Where are you off to?"

"To the store-cupboard."

He went with her and Marietje to the store-cupboard, conducted a raid among the almonds and raisins, talked a lot of nonsense and made Constance laugh, until she said:

"Come on, Guy ... run along upstairs."

But, because Adeletje looked after the flowers in the conservatory and he saw her carrying a watering-can, he assisted her and even sponged the leaves of an aralia, while Klaasje played at Grandmamma's feet, building houses with cards, which she loved for the shrill colours of the court-cards, and aces<sup>[1]</sup> and for the pretty figures of hearts and diamonds, clubs and spades. He built a house for her; he teased Gerdy, who was back at her piano, now that Mathilde had left off overhead, until Truitje came to lay the table for lunch and he raced up three flights of stairs, terrified, to work at all costs ... hang it all, yes, to work!... He sat with his hands to his ears, so as not to hear, and his eyes fixed on the maps; and, when the luncheon-bell rang, he deliberately waited a few minutes, pretended to himself to be annoyed because a morning passed so quickly and never came down to lunch less than five minutes late, making the excuse that he had been working so hard....

Now, in the winter, the short days passed in peaceful, sombre domesticity: in the afternoon, Constance went for a walk or to see a poor person, generally with Adeletje; paying or receiving a visit was quite an event, which happened only three or four times during the winter; only Gerdy

sometimes entertained her tennis-club and gave the members tea, upstairs in the girls' sitting-room, as though striving for a little sociability from the outside.... And, in the yellow circle of light shed by the lamps, the evening drowsed on gently after dinner, with the wind whistling round the house, with Gerdy's bustle amid the chink of her tea-things, with Guy and Adeletje rattling the dice:

"Two and five...."

"Double six.... Once more.... Imperial.... Once more.... Three and five...."

And Mathilde sat with a book in her hands, her eyes expressing a weight of silent boredom, while the room seemed full of things of the past, and the voice of the wind outside and the mourning women—Granny, Adeline, Emilie—like three generations of dreaming melancholy depressed her until Addie came in, for a brief hour, before going upstairs again to his reading....

- [1] The aces in Dutch packs of cards are set in brightly-coloured pictures, usually town-views.

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## CHAPTER IX

It was raining on the morning when Adolphine alighted at Zeist-Driebergen and hurried to the tram which was on the point of leaving. She looked very weary and lean, with bitter lines round her thin, spiteful lips and a reproach in her sharp eyes; and suddenly she reflected that she was sorry that she had not put on a better cloak.

"Conductor, will you stop at Baron van der Welcke's villa, please?"

"We don't pass the villa, ma'am, but it's quite close to the road."

"Then will you tell me where to get out?"

The conductor promised; and Adolphine suddenly became very uncertain of herself. All those years, all the years that Constance had been living at Driebergen, she had never been once to look them up: really out of anger, because they had stolen Mamma, because Mamma had gone to live with them. In all those years, she had never seen her mother, had seen Constance only once and again, at Baarn, after Bertha's death; at the Hague, casually, exchanging a few words with her when they met, by accident, at Aunt Lot's; and Addie also she had seen but very seldom. She was sorry for it now, it looked so strange, to arrive like this, all of a sudden; and then she had not announced her coming, because she disliked writing the letter.... If only Constance wasn't out, or away, or perhaps gone to Utrecht or Amsterdam for a day's shopping ... which was possible.... She was coming quite like a stranger; and her heart was thumping; and she was almost sorry now that she had taken this step. There were plenty of other doctors besides Addie, who was still such an inexperienced boy, and yet ... and yet ... In her unstrung condition, the tears came to her eyes and she felt overcome with her sorrow, with all the bitterness of the last few melancholy years. It was all very sad at home: Van Saetzema, retired on a pension and now ailing ... with cancer in the stomach; the boys—Jaap in the Indian Civil, Chris in the army, Piet a midshipman—never writing home, now that they no longer needed the paternal house; Caroline soured by not marrying; and the youngest, Marietje, so weak lately, so queer, that Adolphine did not know what to do with her! Added to all this, because, notwithstanding her economy, they had lived on too lavish a scale in her striving after Hague grandeur, they had run into debt and were now living in a small house, really vegetating, without seeing a spark of grandeur gleaming before their eyes. It was all over, there was nothing left for them: it was all loneliness and dying off ... relations and friends; there was no family circle left at the Hague and it seemed as though such family-circle as had survived was now united—how strange!—in Van der Welcke and Constance' house at Driebergen.... Adolphine had long cherished a wonderful jealousy at this, as though, after Van Naghel's death and Bertha's, it ought to be her house which the family, however greatly dispersed, would look upon as the family-house.... It was not that she was hospitable by nature, but her vanity was injured; and to satisfy this she would not have objected even to taking Mamma to live with her, however doting and tiresome Mamma might have become. But there had never been any question of that. No, Mamma had at once gone to Constance; and Adolphine could feel, by the way in which Paul, Dorine, the Ruyvenaers and even Karel and Cateau spoke, that they all, with varying degrees of affection, looked upon Van der Welcke's house at Driebergen as still remaining the family-centre! A nice state of affairs! Adolphine was angry now, because she never succeeded in anything, because she never *had* succeeded.... And now she had actually set out for Driebergen, with the very object of asking those two, Constance and Van der Welcke, to do her a favour, though she refused as yet to picture it so clearly as such....

She was very nervous when the conductor, at a halt, told her to get down, showed her a road, pointed to a house distantly visible between the bare, dripping trees. The great block loomed massive-grey through the black boughs; the outline of the long, straight roof stood out harsh and unwelcoming against the grey winter sky. It was only the fancy of overstrung nerves; but in the windows of the front, with their reflecting panes and blinds half down, Adolphine seemed to feel reserve, repulsion, pride, grudge, refusal.... It all shot very quickly through her, made her hesitate to go on ... and yet, now that she had come so far, now that she was approaching the gate of the front-garden, she realized that it was too late, that she must go on, round the beds

with the straw-wrapped roses; and she rang at the great gloomy front-door. She rang shyly, too softly; the bell did not sound; and she stood waiting under her dripping umbrella. Her heart was beating as she pulled a second time, rather harder, in spite of herself.... Truitje now opened the door and she recognized her as the maid, the same maid, for whom Constance had rung, years and years ago, in the Kerkhoflaan, to show her the door, after their last private interview. She was surprised to see the girl, looking older, but still recognizable; and, because her thoughts were carried back to so many years ago, the sight gave her such a sense of hesitation that she could hardly speak, especially as Truitje, equally surprised, was also staring her in the eyes. Adolphine felt that she was going to stammer, now that she had to open her lips; but there was no way out of it; the question must be put:

"Is ... is me-mevrouw ... is mevrouw at home?"

"Yes, ma'am ... mevrouw's at home."

Adolphine had entered trembling; and the maid closed the door behind her and took her wet umbrella from her. Standing on the mat, she saw the long hall before her, with the brown doors, the antique cabinet, the portraits and engravings. It gave her the impression of a very sober and serious Dutch house, but an impression, too, of reserve, repulsion, pride, grudge and refusal.... And, with her eyes anxiously fixed on the open oak door at the end of the hall, she stammered once more almost imploringly, with an irresolution in her voice which she could not overcome:

"I'm not ... I'm not disturbing her?"

"Not at all, ma'am: pray come in."

Then the door of the drawing-room opened and Constance herself stood before her:

"Adolphine!"

There was surprise in her voice, if not gladness: surprise at finding Adolphine there, Adolphine whom she had never seen at Driebergen, whom she had never seen lately, for the matter of that, except once or twice, casually, at the Hague or Baarn ... when poor Bertha had died.

"Adolphine!"

"I've come to see how you are getting on, Constance ... you and ... and Mamma...."

Adolphine's voice wavered, jerkily, beseechingly, uncertain of itself; and it was so strange for Constance to see Adolphine, to hear her uttering such words, in so hesitating a voice, that she was put out for a moment and could not frame a phrase of welcome, could not even make a show of cordiality. But she saw that the door at the end of the hall stood ajar; and she said to Truitje, almost angrily:

"Truitje, why is that door open again? You know I want it shut."

"It opens sometimes with the draught, ma'am," replied the maid.

Truitje closed the door and went back to the kitchen; and the two sisters were left alone.

"Come in, Adolphine."

"I'm not disturbing you?"

"Of course not. I'm glad to see you again."

She forced a note of geniality into her voice.

"We haven't met for years," said Adolphine, in hesitating excuse.

"Not for ever so long. I go to the Hague so seldom. Here's Mamma."

The old woman was in the conservatory, gazing out of the window.

"Mamma!" said Adolphine, with emotion. "Mamma!"

She went nearer:

"Good-morning, Mamma...."

The old woman looked at her vacantly:

"It's windy," she said. "The garden is full of big branches...."

"Mamma," said Constance, "here's Adolphine come to see you."

The old woman did not recognize her daughter. She looked at Adolphine vacantly and indifferently. Then she said:

"It's not right for Gertrude to run about in the garden when it's so windy.... There are big branches falling from the trees."

"No, Mamma, I'll go and fetch her in."

"Gertrude?" asked Adolphine.



"She means our poor Klaasje," whispered Constance.

"But doesn't Mamma know me?"

"Not ... just now. She'll recognize you presently.... Mamma, don't you know Phine?"

"Phine?" repeated the old lady.

"Adolphine, Mamma. Look, she's come to give you a kiss."

"She's dead," said the old woman ...

"Mamma! Adolphine *dead*? Look, she's *here*!"

The old lady shook her head:

"She's dead," she said, unshakably. "She died ... years ago."

Adolphine turned her head away and began to sob.

"She'll recognize you presently," said Constance, gently, consoling her. "She's sure to know you presently. Adolphine, I'm so glad to see you."

But Adolphine was sobbing violently: "Mamma doesn't ... *know me!*"

"My dear, she hasn't seen you for so long. I know she'll recognize you later on.... You're staying to lunch, of course...."

"I ... should like to.... Constance, I've come to...."

"Yes?"

"To ask something.... But presently, not now ... I'm too much upset...."

"Let me help you off with your things."

"I'm dreadfully wet ... it's raining so...."

"You've chosen a bad day."

"I didn't want to wait any longer."

"Tell me, what is it, what can I do for you?"

"I can't tell you yet."

Gerdy peeped round the open door:

"Is that Aunt Adolphine?"

"Yes," said Constance.

Marietje and Adeletje followed:

"Is that ... Aunt Adolphine?"

They came in and shook hands.

"Is Klaasje out in the garden?" asked Constance.

"I saw her running about just now."

"You have a busy household ... Constance," said Adolphine, waveringly.

"Yes," said Constance, smiling, "and yet I should miss them if they weren't there. All my daughters ... and my boys."

The girls stood round her: Gerdy, looking very handsome; Adeletje, weak and pale; and Marietje, tall, lank and plain.

"And then you've got ... Emilie ... and Adeline," said Adolphine, counting them shyly.

"Yes," said Constance. "We all keep together now.... Children, Aunt Adolphine's staying to lunch."

Something in her words seemed to ask the girls to leave her alone with Adolphine. In the conservatory, the old woman sat gazing up at the clouds, which came sailing along big and grey, and she heard nothing, paid no attention.

"Adolphine," said Constance, when they were alone once more, "we have a moment before lunch. Come upstairs to my room, then we sha'n't be disturbed."

She put out her hand. Adolphine took it; and Constance led her sister almost mechanically through the passages and up the stairs.

"It's a gloomy house," said Adolphine, with a shiver at the sight of the oak doors.

"Yes, it is rather gloomy.... Fortunately, it's large; there's plenty of space."

"Really?" asked Adolphine, growing interested. "Have you many rooms?"

"Oh, a great many!... When the old man was alive, they were all empty. Now they are nearly all full."

"Nearly all?"

"Very nearly.... This is my own sitting-room."

They went in.

"It's the furniture from your drawing-room at the Hague," said Adolphine.

"Yes. I can imagine myself at the Hague here."

"Do you like the Hague?"

"I'd rather live there than here. But Henri and Addie are attached to the house: it's their family house."

"They are fine, big rooms," said Adolphine, in humble praise. "I'm living in a *very* small house now."

"Ah, but there are so few of you!"

"That's true."

"How's your husband?"

"He's not very grand ... Marietje neither."

"Isn't she well?"

"No. She's very full of nerves. I consulted Dr. Berens, to ease my mind."

"What does he say?"

"He ... he suggested that...."

"That what, Adolphine?"

"He said ... that Addie was beginning to make such a name ... as a nerve-specialist. He advised me to go to Addie ... and talk to him about Marietje. Perhaps one day, when he comes to the Hague, he might see Marietje.... Do you think he could be persuaded to, Constance?"

"Certainly, Adolphine. Of course he will, gladly."

"I hear such good accounts of him ... as a doctor."

"Yes, he is getting a very big practice."

"And making a lot of money...."

"Well, not so very much, I believe."

"Ah, perhaps he's right, as a young doctor, to be reasonable in his charges!... You see, Constance, that ... that's really why I came down."

"You were quite right, Adolphine. Addie will be home presently and then you can talk to him yourself.... Poor Marietje: I'm sorry she's so ill. How old is she now?"

"Twenty-six."

"I remember: she's a year younger than Addie."

"Who would have thought, Constance, that you would come and live here ... with Mamma ... and Adeline ... and the children?... But Mamma always liked you best. *I* should have been glad to have Mamma with me ... but it's better as it is; our house is so tiny.... Does Addie come to the Hague often? Would he be able to treat Marietje regularly?"

"He would go specially."

"He hypnotizes, doesn't he?"

"Very often, I believe."

"Do you like that?"

"Addie often gets very remarkable results."

"I don't very much fancy it. I shouldn't like him to hypnotize Marietje. But, if it's essential...."

The gong sounded.

"Is that for lunch?"

"Yes. Will you come?"

Van der Welcke and Addie were downstairs. They had just come in, but had heard from the girls that Aunt Adolphine was there; and Van der Welcke welcomed her conventionally. Oh, what fights they had had in the old days! But so many years had passed since those bygone times; and

what did a pressure of the hand and a kind word cost? He had acquired a certain genial earnestness in his big house, filled with his wife's family. He would have missed them, all those big children ... even though Guy and Gerdy were the only cheerful ones.... But those two were the sunshine of the house; and the others still clung to him with sympathy: their gratitude created a sympathetic atmosphere round Uncle Henri....

At the long luncheon-table, Marietje cut the bread-and-butter. Granny did not sit at the table; and Mathilde came down very late. No one had told her that Aunt Adolphine was there and she stood amazed in the doorway before bringing herself to offer a non-committal greeting. She was aloof in her manner, thought Adolphine, middle-class, put on airs as she sat down. It was striking how her personality failed to blend with that of the others, as though she remained a stranger among them. In the grey winter morning, hovering sullenly along the dark walls of the dining-room, she was a fresh, handsome woman; her full face was the colour of milk and roses; her lines swelled with health. Gerdy, beside her, was nothing more than a pretty little smiling thing; Marietje and Adeletje were very plain: Marietje so lank and yellow; Adeletje looking quite old with her sickly face. Klaasje was very tiresome, ate uncouthly and sat beside Constance, who kept on gently reproving her and cut up her bread-and-butter for her as though she were a baby. Guy carved the cold beef. All of them were silently wondering what Aunt Adolphine had come down for and their conversation sounded constrained; but Van der Welcke talked nonsense calmly with Guy and Gerdy. Adolphine, to keep the pot boiling, talked about the Hague: Uncle and Aunt Ruyvenaer and the girls had returned to India ever so long ago and were not coming back to Holland, now that Uncle and Aunt were older and preferred to live in Java; Louise was living with Otto and Frances; Frances always had something or other the matter with her; and Louise looked after the house and Hugo and Ottelientje, who were now thirteen and fourteen. Then there were Karel and Cateau, Ernst, Dorine, Paul....

"We don't see much of one another nowadays," said Adolphine, sadly. "Ah, Mamma's Sunday evenings! They were very pleasant, say what you like. We didn't always agree, perhaps, but still...."

She started, became confused, pecked awkwardly at her food. She felt that the illusion of an united family—Mamma's great illusion in the old days—was quite dispelled; and, older, more melancholy and still bitter as she was, she felt sad about it, sad about something which possibly she had never valued but which she now missed. And she could not help feeling acute envy that Constance was living in so big a house and harbouring so many relations; and suddenly she asked, sharply:

"Your house is rather damp, isn't it, Van der Welcke?"

"Well, it's mostly on the ground-floor," said Van der Welcke, good-humouredly. "And we've had a lot of rain."

"One's feet get so chilly."

"Guy, give Auntie a footstool."

Guy fetched a stool; Adolphine let him push it under her feet.

"There are so many trees round the house," she said. "*That's* what makes it gloomy and chilly. You should have them thinned out.... It must be very lonely, living here."

"Don't you see the others regularly?" asked Constance, trying to change the subject.

"No. Karel and Cateau pay me a visit now and again. It's not much of a pleasure to anyone: it's never more than a visit!" said Adolphine, criticizing her brother and sister-in-law and forgetting that, in the old days, she herself never honoured Constance and Van der Welcke with more than a "visit." And she went on, "Paul one never sees; nor Dorine; and Ernst ... you know he has not been very well lately?"

Constance gave a start:

"No, I didn't know. I saw him only three weeks ago.... I wish he would come and live here, at Driebergen, say in a nice, bright room at a good boarding-house. I really think the country life would do him good and he probably feels rather lonely at the Hague.... But he wouldn't do it.... He's been living all these years in the same room and seems so much attached to that room that he simply can't leave it ... and yet he is never satisfied with the landlady and her brother. That brother is his constant bugbear.... And yet I thought that he was living quietly enough.... Is he still always calm, however self-absorbed he may be? You say he hasn't been well lately?"

"Well, he's not as bad as he was—how long ago is it?—ten or eleven years ago."

"Eleven years."

"He's not like that. But he looks very queer at times ... and...."

"I'll go to the Hague to-morrow and look him up," said Constance, with decision.

"My dear!" said Adolphine, in an aggrieved tone. "I assure you that he's nothing out of the way. Besides, *we* are there ... if anything should happen."

"He's living by himself too much. I've thought it for a long time. And I reproach myself...."

"I've seen Uncle Ernst once or twice lately, Mamma," said Addie, to calm her. "He was just as usual; no worse. I pressed him then to come and live at Driebergen. He refused ... but he was quite calm about it."

"He has *not* been calm the last few days," said Adolphine.

"I shall go to the Hague to-morrow," Constance repeated, tremulously.

"Would you like me to go?" asked Addie.

"Really, Constance," Adolphine resumed, in a superior tone of mock moderation, "you needn't get into such a fluster. If there should be anything wrong ... we're there ... and Karel ... and Dorine and Paul. You can leave Ernst to us quite safely. It's just as though we didn't count!"

"It's not that, Adolphine ... but...."

"But what?"

"You don't trouble about him ... and I feel remorseful that I myself, lately.... But I am very busy ... and...."

"Busy?" echoed Adolphine, in amazement. "Here, at Driebergen?"

The atmosphere of the room was filled with a sudden tremor of nerves becoming too highly strung; the girls looked anxiously at Aunt Constance. She felt, she realized that she was losing control of herself and made an effort to keep calm. But her eyes and lips trembled. She saw, however, the concern overcasting the features of all of them—except Mathilde—and she now mastered herself entirely, though the tremor remained, very deep down within her.

"Yes," she replied, in a gentler voice, "we are really rather busy here ... all sorts of things, you know. Of course, Adolphine, it is comforting to feel that you are all there ... at the Hague ... in case anything should happen to Ernst."

The tension was relaxed, the luncheon ended quietly; only Adolphine said:

"Is this home-made jelly?... Why do you have it made so sweet, Constance?"

In her secret heart she thought the sweet jelly delicious.

"Aunt Adolphine wants to talk to you, Addie," said Constance, when the meal was over.

Adolphine now felt very humble. Yes, she would like to talk to Addie; and she went out with him alone.

"She's come about Marietje," said Constance, when Adolphine and Addie had left the room.

"But why didn't she write," asked Van der Welcke, "instead of coming down?"

Suddenly the sound of Adolphine's sobbing reached their ears from the next room.

"Is Marietje really bad, Auntie?" asked the girls.

And they sat expectantly. The voices of Adolphine and Addie sounded one against the other from behind the folding-doors. They listened in spite of themselves.

"She must certainly change her present environment," said Addie.

Adolphine sobbed:

"That's what our doctor said ... and ... and Dr. Berens of the hospital," she hiccupped through her tears.

Constance did not want to listen any more; but, though she had controlled herself just now, her nerves were still on edge. Pretending that she was waiting for Adolphine, she went through the drawing-room and sat down beside the old lady in the conservatory.

"Yes, yes," mumbled Mrs. van Lowe. "If it goes on raining like this ... we shall have floods again ... just as we did last year."

Before her staring eyes she saw the tropical floods of Java.

Half an hour later, Adolphine and Addie came to look for Constance. Adolphine was suffering under the influence of great emotion, with red eyes which she kept on wiping. Constance went up to her:

"Adolphine, dear," she said, "you must have confidence in Addie."

Motherly pride mingled with the pity in her voice.

"I have, Constance," said Adolphine. "Only...."

"Only what?"

"What am I to do with the child? Change of environment, our doctor said. So did Dr. Berens, of the hospital. And yet we're very nice to her.... Why this change of environment? And where's she to go to?... I haven't the money to ... to take her to the country for any length of time.... In this

season too ... in the autumn!... What ... what am I to do with the child?"

"I was thinking...." said Addie.

He looked at his mother.

"Well?"

"If you and Papa approved ... I could observe and treat her best *here*."

Constance suddenly stiffened.

"I don't know, Addie," she said. "I don't know that Papa would agree to that."

How tactless it was of him to say this in Adolphine's presence! She regretted that she had not told Adolphine, before lunch, in her sitting-room, that the house was full, quite full. But he continued, quietly:

"I should like to ask Papa. Marietje could have Guy's room and Guy the little room next to it."

"That's too small for Guy. You must remember, he's got work to do."

He was conscious of the reluctance in her words. Nevertheless he said:

"Guy could do his work in my study. I am never there in the mornings."

"No, no," said Adolphine, joining in. "No, Addie, it wouldn't do. Your mother's busy enough as it is...."

"It's not that I'm so busy," said Constance, "but...."

"Well, Mamma?"

"Our weekly books, you know...."

He had never known his mother so hard or so cruel. And he now said:

"Of course, Mamma, if you think it can't be done ... I'll see what I can do for Aunt Adolphine ... somewhere in the neighbourhood. Perhaps Marietje could go and live in a family at Zeist."

"Do you think you know some one there?" asked Adolphine, mournfully.

But suddenly Constance felt very yielding. She became so yielding because Addie had said this; all her hardness and cruelty melted away in remorse at her last words; and she said:

"Addie ... go upstairs and ... and ask Papa...."

Adolphine looked up with wonder in her red eyes. She was struck that Constance was altering so suddenly in tone, from reluctance to assent; and she was also struck that Constance did not apparently wish to decide and that she was leaving the decision to Van der Welcke.

Addie went upstairs at once. The sisters remained silent and alone; the old lady was sitting in the conservatory.

"Oh, Constance!" said Adolphine. "*Do* you think that Van der Welcke ...?" She did not complete her question, but went on, "Yes, I suppose your weekly books are very expensive?"

"They *are* heavy," said Constance. "You understand it's...."

"What?"

"It's my husband's money ... spent on *my* relations."

"But Gerrit's children have something."

Constance shrugged her shoulders:

"You know exactly how much they have. A couple of thousand guilders apiece."

"Well, that's something."

"We keep it for them ... and don't touch it."

"Really?" said Adolphine, in surprise. "But then there's Mamma."

"Mamma?"

"Yes, you have her money too," said Adolphine, looking Constance in the eyes.

Constance returned the look: "My dear Adolphine," she said, gently, "as Mamma is not fit to attend to her affairs, her money is in the hands of our solicitor at the Hague; and he controls it for her."

"And the income ...?"

"It's invested. We get none of Mamma's money. Surely you knew that?"

"No, I didn't."

"The books can be seen at the solicitor's by any of the brothers and sisters."

"Why do you do that?"

"Because we don't want to touch Mamma's money."

"But why not? She's living with you!"

"We want to avoid unpleasantness with any of the brothers or sisters."

"But which of us would create any unpleasantness?" asked Adolphine, very humbly.

"By *our* way ... there's no question of any unpleasantness."

"Yes," said Adolphine. "Still, I thought...."

"That we received all the interest on Mamma's money?"

"Yes. The money's lying there quite useless."

"There will be all the more for her grandchildren later on."

"Yes," said Adolphine, greatly surprised, remembering her long conversations during those many years with Saetzema, Karel and Cateau ... because Van der Welcke and Constance at Driebergen were quietly taking Mamma's money for themselves. "I wonder the solicitor never told us!"

"I thought you knew all about it."

"No," said Adolphine, humbly, and did not add that the solicitor had once told Karel, but that they had all refused to believe it. "So Mamma ... is really living at your expense!"

Constance smiled:

"Her needs are so small ... poor Mamma!"

"But you keep a special maid for her?"

"Yes, that's the only thing."

"Still, it makes everything dearer, in food ... and taxes."<sup>[1]</sup>

"Yes," said Constance, calmly.

She heard Van der Welcke and Addie come down the stairs; they entered the room. And it was strange to see the father and son together: Van der Welcke with his irrepressibly young, bright face and his boyish eyes, though his hair was turning grey and he was becoming a little stout from his sedentary life; and Addie beside him, with his serious directness of mind, like a very elderly young man, his grey eyes filled with thought and care.

"Addie tells me Marietje's not at all well," said Van der Welcke, by way of preamble.

Adolphine gave a great sob that shook her whole body; she nodded and began to cry.

"Well," said Van der Welcke, who was always moved by tears, "if Addie would like to have her here ... to keep her under better observation, you know ... let her come, Adolphine, by all means. We'll find a bed for her somewhere. It's the family hospital, after all!..."

And, when Adolphine began to sob violently, he added, with a little pat on the shoulder:

"Come, cheer up and hope for the best.... Addie's sure to make her all right again."

[1] There is a tax on all servants in Holland.

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## CHAPTER X

Ernst was still living in his rooms in the Nieuwe Uitleg, surrounded by his collections, surrounded by his hobbies. A man of fifty now, he led a silent, solitary life amid his books, his china, his curiosities; and the landlady looked after him and cooked his meals, because he paid well, paid too much indeed. He saw little of the family because the others really lived as secluded as he did, Paul in his rooms, Dorine at her boarding-house, though she was never satisfied and was constantly changing her boarding-house; and no family-tie drew him to Van Saetzema's house or Karel's. In this way a separation and estrangement had grown up among all of them; the bond between them had perished, now that Mamma was no longer at the Hague to gather them all around her on Sunday evenings in her big house in the Alexander Straat; and Constance, of late years, had often pressed him to come and live at Driebergen. But he obstinately refused; and yet, on the rare occasions when he saw her at the Hague, he would take her hand and sit knee to knee with her, unbosoming himself of all his stored-up discontent with the rooms, the meals, the landlady, that brother of hers: the brother especially, whom he could never stand, the vulgar bounder, as he called him. Constance then felt him to be an aging, always lonely man, who never uttered his thoughts and who, because of this continual silence, bottled up within himself the thousands of words which he now poured forth to her all in one torrent with a timid look, as if he

were afraid that the landlady and her brother were standing behind the door, listening. When Constance, at such times, tried to persuade him to move to Driebergen, he shook his head obstinately, as though some part of him had grown fast to that room of his, as though he could not tear himself out of it; and his eyes would glance at his books and his china, as though to say that it was impossible to remove all that. And, because he was calm and no trouble and quiet in his behaviour, she let him alone, because this was what he preferred: to live within himself, among his hobbies, solitary, shy and eccentric. Five years ago, it was true, he had been ill again, had talked to himself for days on end, had wandered about in the Wood. Paul wrote to Constance and she had come over; but Ernst had soon grown quiet again, afraid no doubt that he would have to go back to Nunspeet, afraid of a change of residence, afraid of keepers, of nurses, of the things which he had never been able to forgive any of them, not even Constance. That was years ago, five years ago; and lately Constance and Addie too had never seen Ernst other than calm and peaceful, though a good deal of strange and silent brooding seemed to lurk behind the silent cunning of his dark, staring eyes. But then, months and months would again pass without their seeing him, without their hearing of him; they were all accustomed to his strangeness; and the months would drag past without the threatened crisis coming. No, nothing came, even though the man was strange, though he did talk to himself, though he was full of bottled-up grievances; and, when they saw him again after a lapse of months, they were struck by a certain artistic method in his rooms with their beautiful warm colouring, struck by some new arrangement of the furniture, by some new purchase; and he, as though conscious that he was on trial, would talk almost normally, terrified lest they should drag him from his rooms, to which he was attached even though the landlady and her brother always stood spying behind the door....

Constance, feeling suddenly upset and filled with self-reproach at neglecting Ernst, went to the Hague with Addie the day after Adolphine's visit; and the two of them arrived unexpected in the Nieuwe Uitleg.

"Meneer is out," said the landlady.

"In this rain?" asked Constance.

"Yes, ma'am, he went out early this morning."

"How has he been lately?"

"Pretty well, ma'am. As usual. Meneer is always odd, you know, but he is not troublesome. He is fairly well."

"Not like ...?"

"Some years ago? No, ma'am. Meneer has been talking to himself rather more of late, but that's all. Will you wait for him?"

"Yes."

"He is sure to be back by twelve o'clock or so. He is very regular in his habits. Won't you come upstairs?"

Constance and Addie went upstairs and waited in Ernst's room.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" said Constance, with emotion.

She did not know what was the matter with her, but she felt full of self-reproach. Oh, were they not leaving him too much alone, sunk in his solitude? How she wished that she could coax him to go back with her to Driebergen and to live there, not far from them, in a little villa, with some people who were in the habit of looking after invalids! Oh, not in their own house, not in their own house! She would never have dared suggest that to Van der Welcke; nor had Addie ever proposed it. No, not at home, not at home, but somewhere near, so that she could see him at any moment and not worry herself with the idea of his suddenly having a nervous breakdown with no one by him to take his piteous soul-sickness to heart.

And, as she sat thinking, she looked around her and was struck by the manner in which the eerie lines of the old porcelain and new pottery curved against the sombre hangings and furniture. It was very strange, stranger than she had ever noticed. The setting enhanced the eeriness of it all. As the years passed, the vases had become more and more of a disease, blossoming in eerie lines and glowing glaze like some vicious orchid, high against the walls, rising to the ceiling, in a riot of exotic forms, like a vegetation reaching up, stretching up, stretching up necks and hands with the necks and handles of the vases, as though trying to rise higher and higher beyond the grasp of profane mortals.

"Why does Ernst put his vases so high up?" Constance wondered, as she looked round the room.

Suddenly he entered. The landlady below must have told him that his sister and his nephew, the young doctor, were upstairs, for the movement with which he turned the door-handle was abrupt, his glance as he stood and looked from the one to the other was laden with suspicion and his voice trembled violently as he asked:

"What are you here for?"

He stood before them an old, trembling man. His neglected clothes hung in old, slack folds about his angular limbs; his hair already almost entirely grey, hung long and lank around his lean,

trembling features and dark, staring eyes, which looked with a martyred glance from the one to the other. And yet, however neglected and soul-sick this trembling man might be, who looked an old, old man though he was not more than fifty, a gleam of intelligence shone deep down in his suspicious glance; and his long, lean fingers were those of an artist: impotent to paint or model, in lime, colour, wood or sound, the fluttering, ever-present dream of a beauty only just divined.

They both strove to reassure him, said that they happened to be at the Hague and so had come to look him up; and, after the first shock, he really did not strike them as strange or more ill than usual. Suddenly even a ray of sympathy seemed to shoot through him and he sat down between them, took their hands and delivered himself of his complaint:

"Hush! They're always listening behind the door, the brutes!" he whispered, timidly. "The landlady and her brother! I can't call my soul my own; they're always spying.... When I'm undressing, when I go to bed, when I have my meals ... they're always spying. I can hear them grinning.... They're standing there now, to hear if we're talking about them.... And, when I open the door, they're gone in a moment ... so quickly, just like ghosts.... The other day, he lay under my bed all night. I'm getting used to it, I no longer mind.... But, properly speaking, I can't call my soul my own. Any one with less steady nerves than mine simply could not stand it, could never stand it...."

"But, Ernst, why don't you move?"

He knew the question well, he recognized the motive. He gave a kind and condescending little smile, because they did not know, because they were so coarse of fibre.

"I can't very well move," he said. "You see ... I have everything here ... everything here...."

His glance and his gestures became very vague, as though he did not wish to say more. And Addie saw how it was: Uncle Ernst still believed, had always, all those years, believed in the souls that swarmed around him, the souls that had been conjured like spirits out of books, curiosities and old vases. But he never spoke of the souls now, because he remembered only too well how stupid and wicked his people had been in the old days. After that attack twelve years ago, he had gone on believing in these brain-and soul-phantoms of his, but he had learnt to keep silent about them, to talk as the stupid people talked. Or by preference he did not talk at all.... But this very silence had caused his mistrust to develop into a mania that he was being persecuted, a mania that made him constantly look round, timidly.... He would open the door, look into the passage.... And Constance knew that, in the street, he was for ever looking round, attracting the attention of the passers-by with this frightened, suspicious trick of his.

Addie saw it: Ernst believed in the souls which lay crowding around him, which linked themselves with chains to his soul, which he dragged with him through the mud of the streets and the wretchedness of life, the souls that thronged in agony around him, until they weighed down his chest and stifled him so that he longed to run half-naked into the street to cool himself in rain and air, to gulp down the wind. And very deeply bedded in the sick soul Addie saw hypersensitiveness hiding as an adorable tenderness which, instead of turning to a disease, might have developed into the profoundest qualities of sympathetic feeling, not only to feel, but also to know and understand, because of the slumbering spark of intelligence, because of the knowledge so eagerly gleaned.... And now these were wasted gifts, morbid qualities, now it was all useless and sick and had become more sick and more useless as the sick years of shadow drearily dragged on their misty-melancholy introspection and increasing distrustfulness. It was all, all lost. And, in his pity at this fatal waste, at this tenderness which had soured almost into madness and was devoted to shadows while the poor world stood in such real need of tenderness and feeling, Addie remembered how once, years ago, he had felt conscious of a longing with a single word to cure the sick man: but which, which word? It was as though he knew that one word to be hovering in the air around him, while he was still too young and ignorant to catch it as he might have caught a butterfly with his hat! And now, now he knew for certain—after all those years of misty-melancholy introspection and increasing distrustfulness—that it was too late and that the man could not recover and that he would die as he had lived in the almost proud hallucination which brought around him for protection the numberless oppressed, persecuted and martyred souls, suffocating him in the cloud of their frail tortured and complaining bodies. And it was not only the souls: the living who sought him out were also included in his proud illusion; they also needed his support, because he alone was strong and all of them were weak.

It was too late for a cure; but still Addie longed, though he knew for certain that no cure could ever take place, to free that lost and impaired quality of noble feeling from everything that could shock or offend the silent, suffering man; and he swore to himself to get Uncle Ernst out of the Hague, out of these rooms, where he was taking root and at the same time being tortured. He happened that day to feel very restful, very calm, even though, deep down in the subsoil of his soul, black self-insufficiency lowered as usual. He would not know what to do for himself; for this sick man he did know what to do! For himself, he groped around in a dark labyrinth; for the man of stricken brain and soul he knew it all suddenly, with a bright ray of clearest perception, knew with a sacred, instinctive knowledge! And yet there was not a touch of joy, not a touch of ecstasy or fervour in his sombre, melancholy glance, in his deep, sombre voice, when, with his customary earnestness of words and manner, he said to his mother:

"Mamma, you must leave me alone with Uncle Ernst."

She looked at him. And, despite his quietness, his earnestness, his calm and sombreness, she



knew her son too well not to feel, suddenly, that he knew.

"Very well," she said, "you stay with Uncle Ernst. I'll go round to Aunt Adolphine and see Marietje. When and where shall I see you? This evening, at the hotel?"

He shook his head:

"No," he said. "You had better go back by yourself to Driebergen, with Marietje. As for me...."

He paused, as though reflecting, passed his hand across his forehead:

"As for me, you'll see me to-morrow," he said, "or the next day...."

"At Driebergen? At home?"

"Yes."

"And ... your uncle?"

He made a sign with his eyelids; and she understood him, partly, and asked no more. She took leave of Ernst and moved to go; but Ernst kept her for a moment at the door:

"Constance...."

"What is it, Ernst?"

"If there's anything ... that I can do for you, you'll tell me, won't you? Tell me frankly.... It's very difficult for me, I know ... to look after all of you ... but, if I don't, nobody else will.... So tell me plainly if I can help you in any way...."

"There's nothing at the moment, Ernst...."

"But later on?..."

"Perhaps."

"Then I shall be very glad to help. You must ask me straight out."

"I will."

"Look here ... you must be careful...."

"Of what?"

"Of the brother.... The fellow's a scoundrel. Take care, don't speak too loud: he's standing behind the door. You see, he can't reach so high."

"What do you mean?"

"He can't reach up to my poor vases. He would have to take the steps ... and he won't do that in a hurry."

"What used he to do to the vases, Ernst?"

"Take them in his hands."

"I dare say he admired them."

"No, he used to break them ... on purpose. He ... he...."

"What, Ernst?"

"He used to throttle them. Hush! He used to wring their necks with his vile fingers."

Then he realized at length that he was saying too much and he gave a loud, kindly laugh:

"You don't believe that he used to throttle them. Well, at any rate, they're safer up there."

"At least, he can't break them."

"No. What's the matter with Addie? He's not looking well."

"Nothing. He's staying on to talk to you."

"Is there anything I can do for him?"

"Perhaps there is, Ernst. Have a talk with him."

"You people are a heavy burden on me...."

"I must go now, dear."

She kissed him good-bye.

"Be careful," he whispered.

Suddenly, he swung open the door:

"There!" he cried, triumphantly. "Did you see? The scoundrel slips away so quickly. Just like a ghost. No, more like a devil."

She gave a last glance at Addie; her eyelids flickered at him and she went away. Ernst closed the door very carefully.

"He simply can't go on living by himself," thought Constance, as she hurried to the Van Saetzemas'.

It was a very small house in a side-street at Duinoord; and she found Van Saetzema sick and ailing in a stuffy little sitting-room; she saw Caroline, too, bitter-eyed and bitter-mouthed, generally embittered by her dull existence as spinster of nearly thirty, with no prospect of marrying. Meanwhile, Adolphine kept her sister waiting. She had obviously run upstairs to put on a clean tea-gown. At the back of the little house, under the grey sky, which sent down a false, morning light through the heavy rain-clouds, the atmosphere seemed full of bitterness ... bitterness because they were ill and poor and disappointed; and all this dreariness was scantily and narrowly housed between the father, mother and daughter, in the little room where they kept getting in one another's way. A melancholy born of pity welled up in Constance; and she tried to talk cheerfully, while Van Saetzema coughed and complained, Caroline, bitter-mouthed and bitter-eyed, sat silent and Adolphine suddenly, with no attempt at preamble, observed to Constance:

"It's splendid air here, at Duinoord.... And the house is extraordinarily convenient...."

But her boasting voice choked as she completed her sentence more humbly:

"For the four of us."

"And where is Marietje?" asked Constance.

"Upstairs. She likes being upstairs, in her own little room...."

"How is she to-day?"

"Just the same."

"May I see her?"

Adolphine rose with some hesitation. But she took Constance upstairs and opened a door:

"Marietje, here's Aunt Constance."

The girl rose from her chair in the grey light of the little room. She was tall and pale and, in that light, seemed suddenly to blossom up like a lily of sorrow, with the white head drooping at the neck, a little on one side. The very fair hair hung limply about the temples. It was heavy—her only attraction—and was wrung into a heavy knot which she wore low at her neck. The movements of her long arms, of her long, thin hands betrayed a listless, lingering anæmia; and her blouse hung in folds over her flat bosom. She was twenty-six, but looked younger; her lacklustre eyes were innocent of all passion, as though she were incapable of ever becoming a woman, as though her senses were dying away like some fading lily on its bending stalk.

"Good-morning, Auntie."

The little room was grey and white as a nun's cell, with the cloistered simplicity of a hermitage.

"I'm so glad to see you, Marietje."

"Auntie, Mamma said that you and Uncle...."

"Yes, Marietje, we'll be glad to have you with us. Mamma has told you, hasn't she?... Then Addie can...."

"It's very kind of you, Auntie. But ... but I would rather not come."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I would rather stay here.... There's not much about me to cure; and I'm not anxious to be cured. And in your house...."

"Well?"

"I should be so gloomy. I am never bright or cheerful, you know. And I hardly ever come downstairs."

Adolphine's eyes filled with tears.

"It's true," she said, softly. "She lives up here."

"You would be cheerful enough with us, Marietje."

"No, Auntie, I should feel uncomfortable with you ... because I am not cheerful. I should depress you all."

"We are not so easily depressed. And the chief thing is that Addie could treat you regularly."

Marietje gave a pale smile.

"Why won't you go, dear?" asked Adolphine.

The girl retained her pale smile. She seemed to be wrestling with a temptation that opened up soft and peaceful visions in her pale life as a constant invalid; but she did not wish to yield.

"Come," said Constance, "you had much better, really."

Suddenly Marietje felt herself grow very weak. She saw death, saw the end so very close before her eyes; and the soft, peaceful visions would never be more than a very brief hallucination, which after all she might as well accept. And, because she suddenly felt as though in a dream, she had no strength to resist the gently persuasive voices of her mother and her aunt, which were luring and luring her, like voices from very far away, voices which she seemed to hear through the haze of vague and enticing distance. Yet her own wan voice did not reveal what she felt, as she continued feebly objecting:

"I should be too much trouble. An invalid is so depressing."

"It would be very difficult for Addie to look after you here."

"Besides, you have Grandmamma...."

"She's no trouble."

"And little Klaasje."

"Yes, but that's different."

"How are Marietje and Adele?"

"Quite well, very well indeed. We'll go on calling her Marietje and, if you come down, we'll call you ... let's say Mary, to avoid confusion."

"Mary...."

"Will that do?"

"But your house is so full as it is."

"Guy is giving you his room."

The girl uttered more faint words and phrases, but they were like little waves which carried her softly and tenderly towards the gentle vision and the dream.

"Very well, Auntie," she said, at last. "You are very good to me."

"It's only natural, as far as I'm concerned. But, when you're at Driebergen, you'll thank your uncle, won't you?"

"Of course. It's his house."

"Yes."

"Won't it be rather damp ... for Marietje?" asked Adolphine, hesitatingly.

"I don't think so," said Constance.

"Constance," said Adolphine, taking her hand, "it is so kind of you ... and I am so grateful...."

Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"My dear, what a fuss you make!" said Constance. "I'm your sister and Marietje is my niece. But...."

"But what?"

"It certainly is kind ... of Henri."

"Yes, it's very nice of your husband."

"You see, it's his house."

"Yes ... and he had so many calls on him," said Adolphine, humbly. "Constance, won't you let me pay something ... for Marietje's keep? So much a month, I mean ... until she's a little better...."

"You'd better not bother to do that, Adolphine."

"You have so many expenses."

"Yes, but you've plenty of use for your money too."

"What I mean is ... it's your husband's money."

"I know. But Henri would rather you didn't pay anything ... really."

"Really?"

"I'm sure of it. If you or Van Saetzema wrote him a line ... he'd like that."

"Of course I shall. I shall thank him myself."

"And you'll come and see the child whenever you like, won't you, Adolphine?"

"Yes, Constance, I will.... What a pity it is that you don't live in the Hague!"

"Why?"

"Oh, the Hague is so much *our* town, our family town; and your house, now that Mamma is so old, is certainly *the* house ... of the family, the centre, so to speak...."

"It's Henri's house."

"Yes, that's what I mean."

Constance stood up to go:

"Then will Marietje come down with me to-morrow?"

"Yes, we'll pack her trunk."

Marietje rose suddenly, threw her arm round Constance and sobbed excitedly:

"Auntie ... Auntie ... I do think it so...."

"So what, dear?"

The rapture died out of her voice; and she concluded:

"I think it so kind ... of Uncle ... of Uncle and you ... to have me ... to live with you, to live with you...."

Van Saetzema downstairs had a violent attack of coughing; and Adolphine rushed anxiously out of the door.

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## CHAPTER XI

Days had come of endless flaking snow; and the hard frost kept the snow tight-packed in the garden, alongside the house, the silent, massive building whose thick white lines stood out against the low-hanging snow-laden skies: one great greyness from out of which the grey of the snow fell with a sleepy whirl until it was caught in the grip of the frost and turned white, describing the outlines of villa-houses and the branching silhouettes of black and dreary trees with round soft strokes of white. The road in front of the house soon soiled its whiteness with cart-tracks and footprints; and with the snow there fell from the sky, like so much grey wool, the pale melancholy of a winter in the country, all white decay and white loneliness: days so short that it seemed as though the slow hours slept and, when awake, but dragged their whiter veils from grey dawn to grey twilight, so that dawn might once again be turned to night. And the short days were like white nights, sunless, as though the light were shining through velvet, as though life were breathing through velvet, velvet cold as the breath of death, the breath of death itself, striking down and embracing all things in its chill velvet....

In the big house reigned the silent warmth of domesticity in big heated rooms and passages, with the rich browns of the heavy old carpets and curtains which had lived long and were beginning to grow worn in weary attitudes and folds of chamber contemplation, as though the dead stuffs looked down and dreamed and breathed in sympathy with all that lived among them, while in the snowy light reflected from outside the mahogany furniture also gleamed with its own life or cast back things of long ago, past sufferings of small people and past sentiments. The silent moods of old and lonely people seemed to rise up from the old, solemn furniture, which smiled good-humouredly because so much new life had come into the midst of it from the outside: the chair-springs moaned, the cupboard-doors creaked, the looking-glasses grew dull and bright in turns, the china became chipped, the silver became scratched, full of the serviceable humility of those very old, wearing things of daily life, which had long been used and were dying off slowly, while all around and about them blossomed the new movement of the new life from without. And yet, despite that new movement and that new life, a soul of the past seemed to hover through the long passages, up the brown stairs, to skim along the dark doors, even though these, when opened, gave admission to the rooms of the new life. Even in the rooms themselves, something still hovered of that soul of the past; and the furniture reflected that soul, as though it were vaguely clinging to material things, a soul catching at earthly things when itself had not yet died out entirely....

In among these reflections of the soul-things of the past there lingered a remnant of biblical piety, because of the titles of certain books in the book-cases, because of certain old-fashioned engravings in the dark rooms; and at certain hours of silent twilight there passed through the house a sort of hover of prayer, which Constance sometimes felt so intently that, on Sunday mornings, she always insisted that the girls at least should go to church, as though they were almost bound to do so out of reverence for the old people who used to live and pray here ... and especially for the old man. And the thought that she herself did not go troubled her so greatly that, very occasionally, she accompanied the girls, though she continued insensible to any impression derived from liturgical religion. And the things of the past that flickered and hovered and formed the intangible atmosphere of the dark passages and the rich-brown rooms, in which the only gay note was struck by the blue-and-white of the Delft pots and jars: those things of the

past all unconsciously harmonized with the mood only of Van der Welcke, because something of his childhood was wafted and reflected in them, and of Addie, because of his vague sense of inheriting not only the material but also the immaterial things with which the big house remained filled. Though he felt a stranger to the old man, he felt related to the old woman, with a strange retrospect of what he knew of her and remembered of her later, silent, mystic years, when liturgical piety was not enough to satisfy her.

But for the rest the house remained as it were one great hospitality, though alien in blood to so many who had found a shelter in it and a sanctuary: the old, doting woman at the window, peering out at the snow-grey garden-vistas; the mourning and still young mother, with her grown-up children; and Emilie, full of silent mystery. And, the other day, in a drifting blizzard, Constance had brought home Marietje van Saetzema—Mary, as they decided to call her—and they had given her Guy's room, now that Guy worked in a corner of Addie's study, where he heaped up his books on a little table. The house gradually became very full. The daughter-in-law also remained alien to the big house; but the children, Constance and Jetje, were always like golden sunbeams, sometimes whirling in a sound of yet stammering voices of early springtime, as they went along the stairs and passages with their nurse—one already toddling on foot, the other still carried—to go for a drive in the governess-cart or to play in the conservatory, where the old great-grandmother, at the window, looked on with vague smiles at their playfulness, which was that of very small children.

And, the day after Constance' arrival with Marietje in the grey-white blizzard, how surprised they all were when Addie telegraphed that he was coming, next day, with Uncle Ernst! Two or three words only in the telegram, with no explanation: how astounded they were that Addie had managed to get that done! Constance and Guy went at once to the little villa where they took in patients: yes, the doctor had already wired for the two rooms, they were told, and everything was being got ready, that was to say, the bedroom; for the gentleman would furnish the sitting-room himself. And on the next day Addie and Uncle Ernst actually arrived. Ernst's furniture was being sent on from the Hague; his china had been packed up under his own and Addie's supervision; and, though Ernst at first looked at the bare sitting-room with great suspicion, tapping at the walls, listening at the partition and declaring that the people—the man of the house, himself a male nurse, and the trained nurse, his wife—were spying behind the door, just like the landlady and her cad of a brother at the Hague, nevertheless he was pleased, surprised to find the room so large, though he missed the sombre canal in the Nieuwe Uitleg, which he loved for the gloom of its colouring and atmosphere. As he passed through the garden with Addie, leaning on Addie's arm, he thought it strange that he saw walking through the white snow, accompanied by the nurse, an old lady, the only patient at the moment, though there were several in the summer, and he looked at her with suspicion; but he was pleased again and surprised when Addie explained to him how very near he would be living to all of them; and, when Addie brought him to the house, Ernst stood by the garden-gate gazing at it and looked up at the snow-corniced gable, at the soft snow on the straight lines of the windows and above the door. The great house seemed to look down upon him benignly with all the eyes of its window-panes; and he went on, leaning on Addie's arm, through the garden and inside. He had never been there before. He took an immediate interest in the antique cabinet in the hall, the engravings, the Delft jars and nodded his head approvingly, admitting that this was beautiful. Constance welcomed him cordially; and, though he had not seen Mamma for years, he greeted her in all simplicity, as if he had parted from her only yesterday. She held his hand, looked him in the face, recognized him for a son of hers but did not know his name, imagined that he had come from Java, asked after things and mentioned names.... They did not understand each other; and Constance felt very sad, especially because of little Klaasje, playing at Mamma's feet with lovely coloured picture-books which "Uncle" Addie had given her:

"Look ... a blue man ... yellow woman ... red! And outside ... everything white ... everything white.... everything white!..."

And suddenly so heavy a melancholy arose in Constance that she could have burst out sobbing because of her mother, her brother, because of that child of her poor brother Gerrit! But she made a violent effort of self-control, put her arm round Ernst's shoulder and led him away from Mamma; and Adeline and Emilie came to speak to him. Oh, the things of the past—not the past things of which the atoms still hovered about this house, those of the old people, but the things of their own past, of the bygone dead years of all of them, years of a youth not so long ago—how they crowded in amongst them all, how they filled the atmosphere of the faintly sombre room, while the snow reflected its gleams indoors to water away brightly in the old mirrors!... How did they all come to be here like this, how did they all come to be here like this, as in a refuge, as in a sanctuary, a silent haven of simple love?... How nerveless she became, how nerveless, when she saw her husband and her son come in, those two who ...! She *could* not pursue her thoughts of nervelessness and sadness any further. Alex also now entered; and in him, so young, so young, she also saw all the past, flashing at her suddenly out of his eyes, with the vision of his father's death.... But now the girls came in too, and, when Guy and Gerdy came, both laughing, she also laughed, because of their gaiety, their flaxen-haired joy in living, young and strong and healthy and simple, both of them.... How happy, how happy those two were! Oh, the more the past heaped itself up, the more the present was overcast with shadow; but those two, Gerdy and Guy, were young and strong and healthy and simple!... Happy, happy! And, with a laugh almost of happiness, however intensely she might feel all the things of the past, she asked Addie:

"Isn't it too much for Uncle Ernst, now?"

"Yes, I shall take him home," said Addie.

"Can't he stay and dine one day?"

"Perhaps later on; he must get used to it first. The great thing is not to force him."

And he suggested to Ernst that they should go back.

But Ernst said:

"When will my packing-cases come?"

"To-morrow, Uncle."

"You see, if I'm to get everything in order...."

"I'll help you."

"Will you help me unpack?"

"I'll help you too, Uncle," said Guy.

"Yes," said Ernst, "that's right.... You see," he whispered to Addie ...

"What, Uncle?"

"It's not good ... for the vases to remain in the cases so long.... You don't believe it, of course, but...."

He did not complete his sentence, would not say that the vases were suffocating in their cases, with all that paper and straw; he would not say it, because Addie was so kind, a kind-hearted fellow, really, but devoid of understanding, stupid, just as stupid as all the rest of them....

"We shall unpack as quickly as we can, Uncle, and make the room comfortable for you."

"Yes. I have only the bedroom at present."

"The bedroom's all right, isn't it?"

"Yes. Am I to have my dinner there to-night?"

"If you don't mind ... as your sitting-room isn't ready...."

"Yes. I don't care for dining in my bedroom. Can't I stay and dine here?"

"Certainly, Uncle. We should like that above all things. Aren't the troop of us too noisy for you?"

"They are a bit noisy, but ... no, they're very good. Tell me, Addie, they're all children of Uncle Gerrit, aren't they?"

"Of Uncle Gerrit, yes."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I should like to stay and dine, if I may. It's because the sitting-room isn't ready, you see."

"Very well, Uncle. Then come upstairs now, to my study. Then you can rest a bit and read, or sleep if you like, on the sofa."

"No, I never sleep by day."

"It'll be quiet for you there."

"Yes, it's quiet where you are."

"Come with me."

He took Ernst upstairs.

"This is a nice, quiet room," said Ernst.

"Then I'll leave you by yourself. You'll find books and papers.... Can you manage to occupy yourself alone?"

"Yes, my dear boy; I want to be alone. You're kind, you're very kind. You understand me. I shall be glad to stay and dine."

"Would you like your dinner up here?"

"No, downstairs, with all of you. They're Uncle Gerrit's children, aren't they? You see, it's all family. I'd rather dine downstairs."

"All right, I'll come and fetch you."

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## CHAPTER XII

A few days' skating produced a sudden, unexpected lightness of heart; and Mathilde grew more animated. The members of Gerdy's tennis-club met again on the ice; Guy did nothing but skate these days, excusing himself to Constance and Addie for his idleness by saying that one had to make the most of the ice, which never lasted long; and even Van der Welcke was persuaded by Guy to fasten on his skates, remaining young as ever in his quiet way. It was indeed a sudden, unexpected lightness of heart after so many rainy days: the cold wind whipped up their blood; the snow crackled like powdered crystal under their eager, hurrying feet; young men and girls of Gerdy's little circle came to fetch her in the morning and again after lunch; and, when the skating was over, they would all meet round the tea-table, in the big drawing-room. And Addie taught Klaasje to skate on the pond in the garden; and, under the jovial influence of the frosty snow, he romped about the garden with his children, with little Jetje and Constant. And yet perhaps none of them sniffed up the healthy outdoor life of those cold days of east-wind and ice so greedily as Mathilde, suddenly quickened in her rich blood, her somewhat coarse build, her heavy tread and her loud, full, womanly voice. It had been no life for her, with the silent, dripping rain, in the noisy but yet sombre big house. She and the children had kept upstairs as much as possible in her own rooms, because she felt out of tune with the whole pack below, unable to coalesce with the big household: those sad women and all those children of Uncle Gerrit's, who daily monopolized Addie more and more, until he had hardly a moment to give to his own children and her. What was he to her now, always busy, always occupied, always away, always attending to the pack below or to poor people outside, poor people about whom she knew nothing? What was her life to her, the life in which she pined away in that musty atmosphere, in which she always remained a stranger, for lack of any sort of sympathy, because she did not—any more than any of them—wish for the establishment of any harmonious intimacy? Was it not really a terrible existence, for a young and spirited woman, in the country, in the winter, at Driebergen, with no friends, in a house with rooms so dark and gloomy that the servants declared that it was haunted; then downstairs, always at the window, the doting grandmother; Klaasje, half an imbecile; Adeline and Emilie, never cheerful, always melancholy; and those who were cheerful, Guy and Gerdy, never nice to her; her father-in-law much fonder of Guy and Gerdy than of herself, whom, as she well knew, he actually disliked; her mother-in-law, kind at times, it was true—had she not given Mathilde the beautiful brilliant which now sparkled on her finger?—but still cold, she thought, cold even to the children, just forcing herself to be kind because Mathilde happened to be her son's wife. No, she couldn't say who or what was to blame, but a stranger she remained, a constant stranger, half-forgotten, together with her two children, the children who alone, besides Papa and Addie, bore the name of the house, of Van der Welcke—Baron and Baroness van der Welcke—the children neglected, because the whole troop of Van Lowes made themselves masters of the house; of the affection of her father-in-law and mother-in-law, of every minute that Addie had to spare! Oh, it was just a hospital! Adèletje was always ailing; and now Marietje van Saetzema, really very seriously ill, had been added to the rest. Or wasn't it rather, with their exaggerated clinging to that family of semilunatics, a mad-house, now that, over and above doting Grandmamma and half-witted Klaasje, this Uncle Ernst, who was quite out of his mind, had appeared upon the scene? True, he did not live in the house, but he was there a great deal and would come in to meals unexpectedly, without a word of warning. She was frightened when she met him suddenly in the passages, always carrying on about the Delft jars; and then he didn't recognize her, didn't know who she was, what she was doing there, until he remembered: Addie's wife. Perhaps he only behaved like that from craftiness, from wickedness.

A haunted house, a sick-house, a mad-house: that's what it was; and this was where she had to spend her life, for Addie's suggestion, that they should live by themselves, economically, at the Hague, did not attract her: she had had enough of economy, she had not married him for economy! She had not married him for his money or for his title either: she had really and truly married him because she loved him, loved his quiet, charming, serious face, his eyes, his mouth, loved having him in her arms, because she loved his voice, loved, strange though it might seem, his rather elderly, restful manliness, calmness and strength suggested by that rather short, sturdy, blond frame. She had looked upon him with love, had felt love for him; and no one could blame her for being sensible and for not being prepared to marry him if he had been quite without money. Of course she thought it nice to have a title: well, there may have been a little vanity in that; but weren't there hundreds like her? And did that make her bad and so contemptible that they just left her to her own devices, Addie himself just as much as the whole pack of them?

All the little grievances accumulated within her breast, weighing her down and almost stifling her: the tea, which Gerdy purposely made not fit to drink; the half-witted child, which pushed against her chair; the imbecile man, who did not recognize her; the coolness of Papa, who *never* spoke a kind word to her, not even when he was playing with his grandchildren, Jetje and Constant, who were just as much her children as Addie's.... The grievances accumulated within her: grievances against Papa, Mamma, the sick people and the mad people they had to live with them—all because they were relations—against the servants, against Truitje, against everything and everybody.... Oh, how gloomy that rainy winter had been, ever and ever raining, with the great wind blustering round the house, drawing such strange, moaning sounds from the creaking windows and shutters and bellowing down the chimney, till all the old wood of the house and the furniture came to life, took soul unto itself and squeaked and groaned, until the whole place was one eerie horror of inexplicable noises!... Those noises, oh, those noises! They all knew of them and not one of them spoke of them, because, in spite of it all, they clung to the old, creepy haunted house; they even denied their existence to her; and the best thing that Mathilde could do was not to speak about them, because they refused to hear them! But she was frightened, she

had gradually become frightened, with that long keeping indoors: where could she go, with the rain, the wind, the storm, lashing for days and days? She had become frightened, frightened; and they, all of them, had one another, whereas she had nobody, with her husband generally out, visiting his patients: she had only her two little children; and she was frightened on their account too! And now, when she suddenly came upon Ernst on the stairs, she became frightened again; and she could see that the children also were frightened. No, she was not happy and she was angry with herself at not being pluckier and choosing poverty and economy—oh, how sick of it she was!—at the Hague rather than the so-called luxury of this haunted house. And such luxury: the furniture old, the carpets worn, the table very simple; really, a simple, middle-class life and one that cost thousands and thousands, as Addie would assure her on the first of the month, when handing her her allowance for herself and the children! With those thousands and thousands they could surely have had a more genuine luxury, if Papa and Mamma and Addie hadn't been such soft-hearted fools as to take in that pack of Uncle Gerrit's: you could do good and still think of yourself.... With those thousands—but without the pack—they could start and furnish the house in a better, less stuffy and more modern style; paint all those brown, gloomy doors a cheerful white and gold; have cheerful new carpets, curtains and furniture, with flowers and Japanese fans in the conservatory; make a summer-residence of the house and in the winter live at the Hague, keep their carriage, have their opera-box, go out and entertain.... They could have lived like that, Papa, Mamma and Addie, if they had wished, for the thousands were there to do it with; at the Hague, Addie, as Baron van der Welcke, could have acquired a smart practice, the good-looking, pleasant fellow that he was!... That was how they might have lived, deriving some enjoyment from their money; and even then they could very well have helped Aunt Adeline with the up-bringing of her children; and everyone would have thought it very handsome of them and no one would have thought that they were living or acting unreasonably or selfishly or inexplicably, whereas now!... Whereas now!... Locking themselves up in the dark haunted house, all through the long, long winter, with nothing but sick people, all through the long, long winter, with nothing but sick people, nothing but mad people about them!...

Fortunately it had begun to freeze. It was as though this glorious ice had brought about a friendlier feeling: Gerdy was not so very horrid; Guy skated with Mathilde because she was a good, finished skater, fond of good, finished, unwearied skating; and the crisp crystal cold, after all the days of rain and storm, made everybody cheerful and indulgent. Oh, those skating-trips! First a short journey by train; and then along the waterways, endlessly, endlessly! And she was so grateful when Addie, one single morning, was able to escape going to all those sick, poor people, whom he had to visit daily—she hated the sight and the feel of him when he returned—and went with her, for half a day's skating! And she took possession of her husband, glad to have him with her, with crossed hands, swaying evenly and rhythmically with him, in the rhythm of hip to hip, in the swing of firmly-shod feet, while she cut through the broad blast of the wind with her swift, powerful movement, till her eyes and face shone and she was drunk with swallowing the ice-cold distance, shooting far ahead in canal-vistas between the snow-clad meadows, under the low-hanging skies, swept clean as with giant besoms of wind, while the horizons of skeleton trees dwindled and faded away, and the windmills, with the broad, black, silent gestures of their sails, loomed up and disappeared as she shot past.

Fortunately it had begun to freeze. It seemed to her as if, suddenly, in these days of winter pastime, she had found her husband again, as if she half felt that he was finding her again! He did love her then? He was not quite indifferent to her? Through her glove, she felt his hand glowing in hers; she felt the swift rhythm of their hips as a voluptuousness; and she could have hung round his neck because he took her with him like that, rushing, rushing over the straight streaks of endless smooth ice!

"Addie, Addie, you do love me, don't you?"

Amid the swift movement she looked at him and laughed; and his eyes turned, with a little laugh, to her. Oh, how they knew how to laugh, those great, earnest eyes of his, with the often strange blue spark, like a flash of secret fire, which she sometimes did not understand but which she understood now! For what else did it mean, that flash, than that he loved her too, that he thought her pretty? And was he not telling her with his eyes as he had often told her in words that he loved her because she was so attractive, so palpably healthy and pretty and that it was this that attracted him in her: her pink-and-white complexion, her rounded form, her young and vigorous limbs? Then she felt him akin to herself, a young man, a man made young again, a man with a clear, materialistic soul; and in this man she read the young doctor, who loved her healthy body, her rich, healthy blood, weary as he must be of the morbid nerves of his mother's family! Oh, those Van Lowe's: she hated them all, she felt herself to belong to another race! And was Addie himself, like his father, not healthy, simply healthy and manly, a good-looking young fellow, a man, even though he was almost prematurely old? Was he, in the very smallest degree, a Van Lowe, with all their nerves, the morbidity, their semilunacy, so sickly in constitution one and all, that she could not stand any one of them? Bah, they turned her stomach: Adèletje, always ailing; Marietje, really very ill; Alex, so weak; Emilie, so crushed and melancholy; a Van Naghel, she, but still with Van Lowe blood in her: and Guy was a nice-looking boy, but so dull and sleepy; and Gerdy was a nice-looking girl, but full of eccentric ways, of course because she was a Van Lowe! Bah, they turned her stomach, that always ailing, half-mad family of her mother-in-law's, who had ensconced themselves in *their* house; and it was lucky that in Addie she found simply a Van der Welcke, Baron van der Welcke, a healthy fellow belonging to a healthy, normal family. That was how she looked at it: normal. That was how she looked at it while she let her husband swing her along the endless, endless streaks of ice; the snow-fields flew past; the horizons of leafless trees



approached, changed their aspect, disappeared; the spreading sails of the windmills loomed up, disappeared, loomed up, with the silent tragedy of their despairing gestures outlined against the sky. That was how she looked at it: normal. True, Addie employed hypnotism from time to time, but that was the fashion nowadays: he could not lag behind when medicine was making progress in all directions.... And, utterly blind to the really duplicate soul that was her husband's, she saw him merely single, simple and normal, because she remembered now, in the joy of their sport on the ice, the vigorous embrace of his arms, the hunger and thirst of his unsated kisses.... Normal, quite normal; and oh, she felt herself so strong now to win him, to bind him to herself, because she herself was comely and healthy and normal: his delight, when he was tired of every sort of ailment; his luxury, which already had given him two pretty children.... People were skating in front of her, behind her, like the pair of them; and she was proud that she was skating with her husband; she would not let him go; he was hers; he was hers....

It was fortunate that it had begun to freeze. They had had three fine days and this was the fourth; and already—alas!—a touch of thaw seemed to slacken the crystal-clear firmness of the sky which had been so transparent at first. But still the ice was in no way impaired; a trip was planned and Mathilde felt sure that Addie would come. And great was her disappointment when he said:

"Not to-day, Tilly. I must go to my patients this morning."

"You managed with the afternoon yesterday."

"I can't wait so long this time: there's an old woman who expects me. And Marietje isn't so well to-day: Mary, I mean, as Mamma calls her."

"Then I sha'n't go either," she said, crossly.

"Why shouldn't you go?" he persisted, gently. "You enjoy it so."

"With you."

"I can't come this morning."

"Yes, you can ... to please me."

"No, I can't come this morning, Tilly. But you would please me by going."

"I like skating with you."

His eyes laughed.

"And do you imagine that I don't enjoy it?"

"You don't love me."

"You know better."

"Then come."

"Not this morning."

"You're always so self-willed."

"Because I mustn't go this morning.... Be sensible now and go without me."

She shrugged her shoulders:

"All right, I'll go, I'll go."

It was just after breakfast; and the children were still downstairs. He played with them: Constant toddled to him on shaky legs; Addie held Jetje on his arm and rubbed his moustache against her milk-white little face, to make her laugh and crow. A soft feeling of bliss welled within him, because he was pressing against him a life that was his life, a small shrine of frail and tender child body in which flashed an atom of soul that laughed and crowed and lived. And the baby was so ordinary, a baby just like other babies, when he looked at it as a doctor; and the baby was so mystic when, as a father, he pressed it to himself. What was more mystic than a little child? What was more mysterious and higher in divine incomprehensibility than a little child, a little child born just ordinarily a few months ago? What was more divinely mysterious and mystic than birth and the dawn of life? Where did it come from, the baby with its tiny atom of soul, the baby which his wife had borne him? As a doctor, he laughed at his own naïve question; as a father and man, he grew grave in awe of it.... He felt two beings within himself, more and more clearly every day; two beings long maintained in a strange equilibrium, but now trembling, as at a test. He felt two within himself: the ordinary, normal, practical, almost prematurely old, earnest young scientist and doctor; and within that soul his second soul: a soul of mystery, of divine incomprehensibility; a soul full of mysticism; a soul full of unfathomable force, a force which unloosed a magic that was salutary to many.... And, when that magic passed out of him, salutary to many, he would feel himself normal, practical and serious, but suddenly blind for himself, as though he knew nothing for himself, because he was two souls, too much two souls to know things for himself.... Oh, what was more incomprehensible than the essence of life, what more incomprehensible than himself, what more incomprehensible than this little baby and that little toddling boy!... And it was born so simply, in the womb of a healthy woman, and it grew up so ordinarily; and that very ordinary growth was as great a riddle as anything or everything.... Oh, who knew, what did anyone know?... And the strangest thing of all was that he knew, with a strange consciousness for others,

what to do, what to say, how to act; that he had known, unconsciously, as a child, when he had spoken words of consolation to his father, to his mother; later, consciously, with a salutary and sacred knowledge, not alone for father and mother but for others, for so many, for so many!

Now he handed her back to the nurse, his little Jetje, his little riddle of birth and the dawn of life, his little atom of soul; now he stroked the silky curls of Constant, who was clinging to his legs, and went upstairs, knowing. How strange that was in him, that calm, quiet knowledge, that certainty of his will, which would shine forth in a setting of calm speech!... He went up the stairs, to the top floor, to what used to be Guy's room, where Guy had generally sat in the morning bending over his books and maps, until, in an impulse of youthful restlessness, he would wander through the house, looking for his sisters or aunt. Marietje now occupied the room, or Mary, as she was usually called.... Addie knocked and she asked who was there, kept him waiting for a moment in her modesty as she nervously tidied something in her room and put away her clothes. When he entered, she was sitting in a big arm-chair, looking very pale....

But Mathilde, angry that Addie had refused to come skating, suddenly felt a violent jealousy, a violent, dagger-sharp jealousy in her soul, because Addie had spoken of patients who expected him and because he had spoken of Marietje. And, in her room, undecided whether to go or not, whether to stay indoors and sulk or to seek her amusement without her husband, she suddenly felt an irresistible impulse to follow her husband upstairs. She went; and, in order to keep in countenance should she meet anybody, she resolved that she would pretend to be fetching a coat hanging in a wardrobe-closet next to Marietje's room. The wardrobes were used for clothes that were not worn every day. Entering the closet, she softly closed the door and held her keys in her hand: if she were surprised, she would quietly open the big wardrobe. Meanwhile she listened at the partition. And she heard the voices of her husband and Marietje as though they were sounding across a distance and an obstacle:

"How did you sleep, Marietje?"

"I haven't slept at all."

"What was the matter?"

"All night long I had a buzzing in my ears.... It was a roaring and roaring like the sea.... I wanted to get up and come downstairs ... to Auntie, but I was afraid to ... and I didn't want to disturb the house.... It was just like waves.... I didn't sleep at all.... And then I dream, I dream while I lie awake.... All sorts of things flash out before me, like visions.... And it makes the night so long, so endless.... And I feel so tired now and above all so hopeless. I shall never get well."

"Yes, you will."

"No, Addie. I have always been ill."

"You must have a quiet sleep now."

"I sha'n't be able to."

"Yes. Come and lie here on the sofa. I'll draw the blinds."

"Addie!"

"What is it, Marietje?"

"Do you know what I should like?"

"What?"

"I should like, when you have put me to sleep, as you did yesterday and the day before, I should like never to wake again, to remain asleep always. I should like your voice to lull me to sleep for ever and ever."

"And why don't you want to go on living? You're young and you will get better."

"Tell me what's the matter with me."

"Don't think about that."

"My body is ill, but isn't my soul ill too?"

"Don't think about that; and lie down ... keep very still ... give me your hand.... Hush, sleep is coming, peaceful sleep.... The eyelids are closing.... The eyelids feel heavier and heavier.... The eyelids are closing.... Heavier and heavier the eyelids.... You can't lift them, you can't lift them.... The hand grows heavier and heavier; you can't lift the hand.... The whole body is growing heavy, heavy, heavier and heavier with sleep, peaceful sleep, coming, coming...."

Mathilde listened breathlessly at the partition. All was silent now in Marietje's room; Mathilde no longer heard Addie's soothing voice summoning sleep, the magic of peaceful sleep. And suddenly, as she listened, she grew frightened, she, Mathilde, grew frightened of things which she did not understand, grew frightened as she was frightened when; in the evening, late, she went along the dark passages and the dark staircases. And yet it was morning now and the wintry reflexion of the snow, a little faded by the first touch of the thaw, fell shrill into the narrow closet, without any shade of mystery....

She trembled where she knelt, frightened of what she did not understand. She trembled and in her trembling became conscious of a fierce jealousy not only of Marietje but of all Addie's patients, those outside, whom she had never seen, living in their poor little houses, which she did not know. But she was most jealous of Marietje. Was the girl asleep now?... She heard Addie's footstep, heard his hand on the handle of the door, heard him go out. He was going out ... Marietje was no doubt asleep.... She waited a few seconds longer, heard the stairs creak lightly under his feet as he went down; and now, after her fears and jealousy, she was seized with curiosity. She left the wardrobe-closet, listened in the passage outside Marietje's door. And suddenly, grasping the handle firmly and carefully, she opened the door and saw Marietje slumbering peacefully in the darkened room, her face white and relaxed on the sofa-cushions. Then she closed the door again and went downstairs. She was no longer frightened, no longer curious; only her jealousy burnt fiercely within her, like an angry fever. She had just time to put on her things and pick up her skates: Guy, Gerdy and their friends were waiting for her downstairs....

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## CHAPTER XIII

That evening Gerdy said to Constance:

"Auntie, Mathilde carried on like a lunatic to-day."

But Constance refused to listen. She well knew that there was no love lost between Mathilde and the rest of them; and it always upset her that, on the one hand, Mathilde always remained a stranger and that, on the other, one of the children always had some remark to make about Mathilde. She, on the contrary was always glossing over Mathilde's shortcomings and nearly always took her side.

"Honestly, Auntie, Mathilde carried on like a lunatic this afternoon...."

Gerdy was in a great state of excitement and she determined to tell her story. It was after dinner, tea had not yet been served and Mathilde was upstairs, putting the children to bed. The others in the room were Adeline, Emilie and Guy; Granny was sitting in her corner. And Constance refused to listen:

"You mustn't always be so intolerant ... about Mathilde," said Constance, by way of reprimand.

"Intolerant? Intolerant?" echoed Gerdy, excitedly. "But you didn't see her, the insane way she behaved.... We were on the ice ... and...." She lowered her voice to a whisper, though Granny was not likely to understand. "We were on the ice ... and there were others: the Erzeeles from Utrecht and Johan Erzeele from the Hague, you know, the one who's in the grenadiers.... Yes, I know, Mathilde and he are old acquaintances, she used often to dance with him ... but that's no reason for carrying on with him as she did."

"I say, it wasn't as bad as all that," said Guy, in a tone of palliation.

"Not as bad as all that, not as bad as all that?" repeated Gerdy, very angrily, because Guy, Constance and everybody were making excuses for Mathilde. "Not as bad as all that? Well, if I was married, or even unmarried, I should be ashamed to carry on like that with any man, though I'd met him at a hundred dances!"

"Do let Mathilde enjoy herself," said Constance. "Really, she has so little...."

"So little what?" said Gerdy, almost impertinently. "She has everything, she has everything she could wish for! She has a darling of a husband, she has the sweetest of children ... she has everything...."

"But she sometimes feels ... a little neglected and strange ... among all of us," said Constance, still taking Mathilde's part. "So, if she's a little irresponsible once in a way, I don't grudge it her for a moment."

"But it was more than being irresponsible, it was much worse: she was simply carrying on!"

"For shame, Gerdy! You mustn't be so spiteful."

Gerdy shrugged her shoulders angrily. She simply doted on Aunt Constance; nothing on earth would induce her to quarrel with Aunt Constance: Aunt Constance, who was so kind to all of them; and so she preferred to say nothing. But her dear, eager little soul was up in arms; she was very angry indeed; she pitied Addie. She was so angry, she felt such pity for Addie that really she did not quite understand her own feelings. After all, this was not the first time that Mathilde had annoyed her; she had never liked Mathilde; it was enough to make her spill the tea or the milk if Mathilde entered the room unexpectedly; and so she really could not quite understand why she was so very angry and thinking so much of Addie, simply because Mathilde had carried on so with Johan Erzeele, why it should irritate her so that Constance—on principle, she could understand that much—was taking Mathilde's part, why it should irritate her that Mamma and Emilie were sitting so sad and silent, that Granny was sitting so feeble and silently trembling in her far corner, why it should irritate her that Adèletje and Guy should keep on playing backgammon:

"Three and four...."

"Two and five.... Imperial.... Once more...."

She was very much overwrought; and, when Mathilde came in for tea—the children were now asleep—Gerdy's little face quivered; she could hardly contain herself; but she made the effort, because Constance was looking at her in such surprise. And, to keep herself in countenance, she went in search of Uncle Henri, found Van der Welcke in the passage, on the point of coming in, and asked him:

"Uncle, are you coming to play a rubber?"

"If you like, dear. Who's going to make up?"

"Marietje, I dare say, and Alex."

"Is the other Marietje, Mary, downstairs?"

"No, Uncle, she's up in her room."

"This house of ours is a regular hospital, eh?"

"Oh, it's not as bad as that, Uncle!... I think it's a very nice house."

"You do, do you?"

Gerdy, usually so cheerful, suddenly became very nervous, cross and angry, very limp; and she didn't understand herself, couldn't understand herself....

"Well, come and have a rubber."

"Yes, yes, I'm coming.... Don't hustle your uncle: he's getting old."

But Gerdy laughed, shrilly, though she had to keep back her tears:

"You'll never be old."

"You think that?"

"No, never."

"Ah! Then I shall remain a scapegrace to my dying day?"

"No, a dear, kind uncle.... But come and have a rubber now."

She dragged him into the room. Constance grumbled mildly:

"Gerdy, you're just like a naughty child. Every time you run out of the room, you leave the door open."

And Gerdy, from being limp, became filled with poignant self-pity. Aunt Constance had ceased to care for her, cared more for her daughter-in-law, Mathilde.... Everybody, everybody cared more for Mathilde.... Addie, Johan Erzele: they all cared more for Mathilde.... She, Gerdy, was misjudged by everybody ... everybody except Uncle Henri, who was nice and kind....

She made a great effort, mastered herself, mastered her volatile emotions. Alex had come over that Saturday from Amsterdam, where he was now boarding with a tutor at the Merchants' School; and he and Marietje soon got the bridge-table ready. And it became quite a serious rubber, in the still, pale-yellow atmosphere of the big living-room, where the lamps shone sleepily through their yellow-silk shades, just bright enough to light the books or crochet-work in the hands of the silent women, Constance, Adeline, Emilie.... At about nine o'clock there was a certain movement in those intimate, silent, almost melancholy indoor lines and colours, when Adeline took Klaasje to bed and Constance and Adèletje helped Grandmamma upstairs: the child and the old woman at the same hour, the one never outgrowing her first childhood, the other relapsing into her second, after so well knowing the many sad things that were to come, that had come, that had already faded away, even as all life, that comes and goes, fades away in the faded pallor of the past.... And, when Constance and Adeline returned downstairs together, they seemed to hear the wind getting up around the house; and Adeline said, on the stairs:

"Listen, the wind's getting up."

"There's a change in the weather," said Constance.

"That means thaw; it's a westerly wind and we shall have rain."

On entering the room, they found Ernst there. He often came round in the evenings. He watched Gerdy's cards and sat very still, never spoke much, feeling that they never understood what he said and that it was better to talk to them as little as possible, even though there was some good about them, even though they were not utterly depraved, even though they meant the suffering souls no harm, although once in a way, all of them, they would trample on them unconsciously, because they did not see and understand and because they were so stupid and so innately rough.... Nevertheless, rough and stupid as they were, they were his relations and he came and looked them up, feeling at home in the house of his sister Constance and her husband, in the house also of Addie, who was the cleverest of them all and who, he felt certain, did hear and see the souls, for he often spared them.... He now stared at the cards and thought of the rubbers at

Mamma's in the Alexanderstraat, when he used to go there on Sundays in the old days.... Strange, that everything changed, that nothing remained, he thought.... It was no longer the Hague now: it was Driebergen; it was Van der Welcke's house and Gerrit's children: Gerrit, how rough, how very rough he used to be, but even so not exactly wicked and depraved! And the cards as they were played one after the other fell from the fingers of Van der Welcke, Gerdy, Alex and Marietje. The same game; only life changed; the game did not change nor did the souls, the poor souls, ever and ever suffering around him, linking themselves to his soul with dragging chains.... He sat in silence and followed the play of the hand, understood it, nodded his approval of Van der Welcke's careful game....

Mathilde had come in; so had Addie, for a moment, before going upstairs to work; and they met as husband and wife who, after dinner, in a bustling house, seek each other out for a moment to exchange a word or two. Mathilde's eyes were red, Addie looked serious; and they all noticed it; it struck them, it saddened them, while they heard the wind flapping like a sagging sail and the panes lightly creaking and the windows lightly rattling in their frames.... Constance wondered what had happened and thought that it must be Mathilde, always urging him to move to the Hague; and Addie would be quite willing, for his wife's sake, but then the money-question would crop up and remain insoluble, because Mathilde would not be economical.... And that indeed was how it was; and they had lost each other, Addie and Mathilde; and they would find each other again in a rebirth of desire, when Addie reflected:

"What a beautiful, healthy woman she is! And we have to be healthy in our bodies and normal in our longings if we would be healthy of soul, in the life of our bodies and our physical being."

On the evening after the excursion on the ice, they found each other again. The wind had lashed their blood to a warm glow, the exercise had sent it coursing through their veins. Love was reborn of their embrace until drowsiness overtook them. And Mathilde thought that she had found him again and Addie thought that he had found her again, because their kisses had sealed one to the other, because their arms had clasped one to the other, but they lost each other again at once, as ever and always, because Mathilde just did not know him in his two-sided soul and he never knew things for himself, whatever he might know for others, in the clarity of his knowledge; in any of the manifestations of the instinctive knowledge which he knew silently and blissfully in his soul's soul: the hidden spark, from which treasure shone.

Mathilde sat down quietly in a corner, sitting a little way from the others, to catch the light of a lamp on her book; and Addie remained for only a moment, saying that he had work to do. And, as he went out of the door, there was a sudden draught, so that the lamps flickered and smoked and nearly went out.

"There's something open," said Constance. "Where can that wind come from?"

"I'll look," said Addie, closing the door.

"You see," said Gerdy, pursing up her mouth and turning to Aunt Constance, "you see it's not always *my* fault when there's a draught."

Silence fell; there was not a sound but the hard tap of the dice on the backgammon-board and the rustle of the cards as they were played, while Constance, Adeline, Emilie and Mathilde read or worked, and the evening hours in the soft light of the sitting-room dozed away as with soft-trailing minutes and quarters, dull reflexions in the mirrors, faint lamplight on the furniture and the rhythmical ticking of the clock in the almost entire silence, broken only now and again by an occasional word, at the card-table, or when Guy said:

"It's blowing ... and thawing.... There'll be no skating to-morrow...."

A piercing scream rang through the house; and the scream so suddenly and unexpectedly penetrated the silence of the stairs and passages of the great house, outside the room in which they were sitting, that all of them started, suddenly:

"What's that?... What's that?..."

They all sprang up; the cards, thanks to Gerdy's fright, fell on the floor, and lay flat with their gaudy pictures. When Van der Welcke opened the door, there was no longer any draught; the maids were running into the hall, anxiously, through the open door of the kitchen. Everybody asked questions at once. They heard Addie come down a staircase; and the hurried creaking of his firm step on the stairs reassured the women. They called out to him, he to them; and, amid their confusion, they at last heard his voice, clearly:

"Help me!... Here!..."

"Where?..."

"On the stairs."

They ran up the stairs.

"On the back-staircase!" they heard him call.

And Constance saw that the partition door was standing ajar at the end of the long passage. She gave a cold shiver and she heard Mathilde suddenly say:

"Oh, nothing ... nothing will induce me to go up that staircase!"

But she forced herself and went; and the others followed her.

They found Addie on the small, narrow back-staircase; and he was carrying Marietje, Mary, in his arms. She hung against him unconscious, like a white bundle of clothes, with her nerveless arms hanging slack and limp.

"What happened?"

"I heard her call out.... The staircase-door above was open.... I expect she meant to go downstairs ... to fetch something ... and was taken ill on the stairs.... Help me, can't you?" he said, almost impatiently.

The women helped him carry Marietje upstairs. They all went up now, to their rooms; the maids, still pale and trembling, put out the lamps in the sitting-room; and silence and darkness fell over the house, as they went creaking up the stairs, with candles in their hands.

The wind outside increased in violence; and the dripping thaw pattered against the panes.

The three sisters were together in their bedrooms: Marietje and Gerdy in their room, Adèletje in her own room, with the door open between them. And they spoke very low, in whispering voices:

"I'm getting used to it," said Marietje, sensibly; "I'm no longer frightened."

"I heard it quite lately," said Gerdy.

And Adèletje answered:

"Yes, I hear it nearly every evening."

"Uncle and Aunt don't speak about it."

"No, it's better not to."

"It's always the same sound: like the dragging of heavy footsteps, in the garret, under the roof..."

"And then it goes downstairs."

"Yes ... then it goes downstairs."

"Uncle had the garret examined."

"Addie has been up there, with Guy."

"They found nothing."

"It can't be a rat."

"It's quite unaccountable."

"I'm getting so used to it," said Marietje.

"It sometimes comes down the little staircase."

"Aunt Constance is afraid of the little staircase."

"She doesn't like the house at all."

"But Uncle does and Addie does."

"Mathilde was so frightened!"

"Uncle and Addie wouldn't like to leave the house."

"And it's a nice house," said Gerdy. "I ... I'm frightened myself lately ... and yet I'm fond of the house."

"I love the house too," said Adèletje. "It's so brown, so dark ... like something safe and something very dear ... around us all. I should be very sorry to leave the house. I shall never marry—shall I? —because I'm ugly and delicate ... and I shall always remain with Uncle and Aunt...."

Gerdy took her in her arms.

"*You won't*," Adèletje went on. "You'll marry one day, Gerdy ... and so will Marietje."

"Oh, stop!" said Gerdy. "Do stop, Adèletje!... What are you talking about marriage!... I'm ugly as well; nobody likes me!"

"Listen!" said Marietje.

"What did you hear?"

"The sound ... I thought."

"I hear nothing."

"Listen!"

"Yes, listen!"

"It's trailing up the stairs."

"Oh, I'm frightened, I'm frightened!" said Gerdy.

The sisters all crept together.

"I'm not frightened," said Marietje. "I often hear it, like that."

"What is it?"

"The maids say...."

"What?"

"That it's...."

"Who?"

"The old man...."

"Hush!"

"Listen, listen!"

"They say the house is haunted."

"It may be nothing at all," said Marietje. "It may be the wind, making a draught."

"But everything's shut."

"Old houses have queer draughts sometimes, for all that."

"The furniture's old too."

"Listen, it's trailing!"

"That's the wind."

"There's the same trailing sound in the wind sometimes, blowing round the house. I'm getting used to it," said Marietje.

"Yes," said Adèletje, "one gets used, one gets used to everything.... I shall always remain in this house, with Uncle and Aunt. I love them."

"They never talk about it."

"That's by far the best way."

"Mathilde, how frightened *she* is!"

"Listen, listen! It's going upstairs!"

"It's the wind ... taking the draught upstairs."

"In an old house ... it's as though the old wood were alive."

"And the furniture."

"What can have been the matter with Mary?"

"Can she ... have seen anything?"

"No."

"No, no."

"She wanted to fetch something.... She fainted.... She's very ill, I believe, very weak."

"Addie says that she's not so very ill."

"Listen!"

"Could it really be ... the old man?"

"And, if it were the old man ... what then?" said Adèletje. "I ... I shall remain in the house. I shall die, here, I think, at Uncle and Aunt's."

"Oh, do hush, Adèletje!" said Gerdy, limply, nestling in her sister's arms.

"I'm not afraid of dying."

"Oh, Adèletje, do hush, do hush! You mustn't talk of dying."

"Listen! I hear it again!"

"But now it's trailing away."

"Like a draught sucking in the air."

"Yes," said Adèletje, "I expect it's the old man."

"Why should it be he?"

"He can't tear himself away from the house."

"He was always implacable...."

"To poor Aunt Constance."

"The old woman was different."

"Yes, she was different."

"No, it's the draught, it's only the draught.... And the house, creaking."

"It's nothing."

"It's nothing."

"But perhaps we imagine ... because we hear...."

"We all feel ... a sort of fear ... because we hear."

"Mary saw something, I expect."

"Come, girls, let's go to bed."

"Do you dare sleep alone in your room, Adèletje?"

"Yes, Gerdy ... but leave the door open between us."

"Yes, that's nicer."

"Good-night then, darlings."

"Adèletje ... you won't think any more of dying, will you?" said Gerdy, moist-eyed. "Perhaps I shall be dead before you are."

"Hush, darling! How can you talk like that?... I'm delicate and ugly.... You're strong, you're pretty."

"I may be dead first, for all that!" said Gerdy, sobbing.

"Gerdy, don't excite yourself so," said Marietje. "That's because we've been talking about it. Now you won't sleep all night."

"I dare say I shall be frightened to-night," said Gerdy. "If so, I'll wake you, Marietje, and creep into bed beside you."

"Very well, do.... And don't worry...."

"Good-night, then...."

"Good-night...."

"Good-night...."

Round the house the thaw wept; and in the night the sinewed grain of the ice broke and melted in weeping melancholy, with the added melancholy of the west wind blowing up heavy clouds, the west wind which came from very far and moaned softly along the walls and over the roof, rattling the tight-closed windows of the night....

Inside the house reigned the darkness of repose and the shadow of silence; and the inmates slept. Only Gerdy could not fall sleep: she lay thinking with wide-open eyes, as she listened vaguely to the wind blowing and the thaw pattering, thinking that she hated ... and loved ... that she hated Mathilde ... and loved ... him ... Johan....

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## CHAPTER XIV

"Yes," said Paul, as he followed Constance out of her own sitting-room, while she, with her key-basket over her arm, went down the stairs with Marietje and Gerdy, "yes, I'm not ashamed to confess it: I've come to see how the country suits me. The Hague is becoming so dirty that I can't stand it any longer. What a dirty place a town is! It's much cleaner in the country.... You're fortunate, you people. But I daresay I should have stayed on at the Hague—I'm not really a man for the country—if my landlady wasn't getting so old, if she wasn't always changing the servants, if those servants weren't so unspeakably slovenly and dirty.... She produced such specimens lately that I gave her notice.... I'd had those rooms fourteen years.... It'll be a great change for me.... But I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to see to everything myself; and I'm getting too old for that.... Yes, I still do my wash-hand-stand myself.... But look here, Constance, when it came to making my bed—because the servant's hands were dirty and my sheets one night smelt of onions—you know, that was really too much to expect. I'm no longer a young man: I'm forty-six. Yes, that's right, you young baggages, laugh at your old uncle! I'm forty-six, forty-six. Lord, what a lot



of dirt I've seen in those years!... As the years go by, filth heaps itself around you like a mountain: there's no getting through it. Politics, people, servants, bedclothes, everything you eat, everything you touch, everything you do, say, think or feel: it's a beastly business, just one sickening mass of filth.... The only pure, unsullied thing that I have found in the world is music. Ah, what a pure thing music is!..."

"Paul, I must just go down to the store-room and have a talk with my cook about the filth which I'm to give you this evening," said Constance; and the girls laughed.

"All right, I'll come with you ... I sha'n't be in the way. Ah, what a pure thing music is!" he continued, in the store-room, while the cook opened wide eyes. "Look at painting, for instance, how dirty: oil-colours, turpentine, a palette, paint-brushes, water, all equally messy. Sculpture: clay and damp cloths; literature: what's more loathsomely dirty than ink, the oceans of ink which an author pours forth?... But music: that's tone, that's purity, that's sheer Platonism.... Oh, no, since they've taken to building public conveniences at the street-corners in the Hague, I can't go on living there!"

"*Paul!*" said Constance, warningly; but he was too much worked up to understand that she was rebuking him. "Run away now, with the girls and leave me with Keetje.<sup>[1]</sup> Look at her, staring at you and not minding a word I say.... Keetje, listen to me, I want to order the dinner; and you, Paul, ajo,<sup>[2]</sup> be off!"

"Come away, Uncle!" said Marietje, "Keetje, at Driebergen, isn't accustomed to hear everything called so dirty."

"Keetje's proud of her kitchen, aren't you, Keetje?" said Gerdy.

"Oh, well," said Keetje, "I expect meneer doesn't mean all he says."

"Not mean all I say!" Paul shouted at the servant, who stood calmly with her arms akimbo. "Not mean all I say!"

"One can do a lot with scrubbing, sir, to keep things nice and clean."

"And I tell you," Paul blazed out, "that everything's dirty, except music...."

"And except my kitchen!" said Keetje, greatly offended. "I don't know what sort of servants meneer's had. But we're good cleaners here, aren't we, ma'am?... Yes, I know, old Mie<sup>[3]</sup> is very old and mevrouw only keeps her on out of kindness ... and we've got young help besides.... But dirty!" shaking her head energetically. "There's no dirt here ... though it is an old house ... and a big family...."

"Girls! Paul!" cried Constance, in despair. "I've no time to stand in my store-room arguing about what's dirty and what not in the world or in Keetje's kitchen.... Get out of this!... And you, Keetje, listen to *me* and answer *me*."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Uncle, come along!" said Gerdy. "We'll show you Keetje's kitchen."

"Well, meneer can inspect that with pleasure!" said Keetje, by way of a last shot.

The girls dragged Paul off to the kitchen, where they were joined by Adèletje and even by Marietje van Saetzema; and they screamed with merriment when Paul examined the pans one after the other:

"But look, Uncle ... they're shining like silver and gold!"

"Well, we *can* have our dinner out of them to-night.... Still, children, music, music is the only pure thing in the world!"

"Provided it's not false."

"Of course it mustn't be false.... Have you a good piano here?"

"Yes, Uncle, Mathilde has hers upstairs and here's mine, in the conservatory," said Gerdy. "I'm the only one who plays."

Paul sat down at the piano, struck a few chords:

"The tone is fairly good.... Ah, music, music!..."

And he played. He played *Wotan's Farewell*, followed by the *Fire Magic*.... He played very well, by heart: his pale, narrow features became animated, his long fingers quivered, his eyes lit up. In the conservatory the old mother listened, heard merely a flow of soothing sound. At her feet, Klaasje listened, playing with her toys. Mathilde came from upstairs; after her came Guy, deserting his books. Paul played, went on playing ... he had forgotten all about them. Suddenly he stopped:

"You mustn't think," he said abruptly, "that I am an unconditional Wagner-worshipper. His music is delightful; his poetry is crude, childish and thin; his philosophy is very faulty and horribly German and vague.... Proofs? You ask for proofs?... Take the Rheingold: did you ever see such gods? With no real strength, no real marrow in their coarse thieves' souls, their burglars' souls

full of filth.... Is that the beginning of a world? No, a world begins in a purer fashion.... And so childishly and crudely: the world's treasure, the gold, the pure gold guarded by three dirty Lorelei, with their hair full of sea-weed, who, the moment they set eyes upon a dwarf, start giggling and making fun.... Are those the pure guardians of the pure gold? But the music in itself, the purity of tone: oh, in that purity of tone he is a master!..."

And he played the prelude to the Rheingold, played it twice consecutively. Suddenly he stopped once more:

"Oh, Gerdy, how dusty your piano is!... Does no one ever wipe the keys?... Where can I wash my hands?"

"Uncle dear, do go on playing!"

"And my fingers black with dust? No, look here, Keetje's pans may shine like silver and gold, but your piano is a sounding-board of dirt. Where can I wash my hands?"

"Here, at the tap."

She led him to the hall.

"Well, first find me a clean towel."

"The towel is clean, sir," said Truitje, who happened to be passing.

"No, I want a towel fresh from the wash, folded in nice, clean folds."

And it was great fun: Marietje ran hunting for Constance, to get the keys of the linen-press.

"So you've come to live here?" said Van der Welcke, who came down while Paul was washing his hands.

"Yes, I had a sudden, irresistible impulse to move to Driebergen. I was feeling a little lonely at the Hague," he confessed. "I am growing old and lonely. And it's cleaner in the country; the air is less foul, though I'm not lucky with this thaw. The road outside was one great puddle. But I have found two airy rooms, in a villa.... It's strange, I should never have believed that I could ever come and live at Driebergen ... and in the winter too!..."

He inspected his hands, which were now clean:

"Imagine," he said, "if there were no water left! I should be dead next day!"

Paul really brightened up. He was a great deal at the house, very soon got into the habit of dining there every evening and, because he felt scruples at always taking his meals at Van der Welcke's expense, he made handsome presents, as a set-off for his sponging, he said, so that in the end it cost him more than if he had dined every day at home. He ordered fine flowers and fruit from the Hague; on Van der Welcke's birthday, he gave him a case of champagne; on Constance's birthday, a parcel of caravan tea, because he came and had tea with them every afternoon. In this way he contributed generously to the house-keeping and relieved his scruples. He brightened up considerably, after his recent years of loneliness, talked away lustily, broached his philosophies, played Wagner; and even Mathilde accepted him as a pleasant change, with a touch of the Hague about him.

Constance would rebuke him at times and say:

"Paul, I won't have you constantly ordering that expensive fruit for me from the Hague."

"My dear Constance," he would answer, "I'm saving the cost of it on my ties; for my dandyism is gradually wearing away."

In the evening, in the great sitting-room—while the wind blew round the house and the dice fell hard on the backgammon-board and the gaudy colour of the cards flickered in the hands of the bridge-players—Paul's music came as a new sound, driving away the grey melancholy, tinkling in drops of silver harmony. He played everything by heart; and the only thing that his attentive audience couldn't stand was his habit of suddenly breaking off in the most delightful passages to defend some philosophical thesis which no one at that instant was thinking of attacking, with which everyone agreed at the time. Nevertheless, despite his playing and his new-found cheerfulness, he felt old, lonely and aimless. Whenever he had an opportunity of talking quietly to Constance for a moment, without having to run after her downstairs, to the store-room, he would say, sadly:

"I? I'm an old bachelor, an old boy. I'm a typical old bachelor."

"You ought to get married, Paul," she said, one day.

He gave a violent start:

"Constance," he said, "if ever you try to lay a trap for me, I swear I'll run away and you shall never set eyes on me again!... Where should I find a wife who would be as tidy as I? And then I'm so difficult to please that the poor child would have a terrible life of it.... Sometimes, yes, sometimes I do cherish the illusion ... of marriage with a very young girl, one whom I could train according to my ideas, my philosophy, my ideas and philosophy of purity ... of which the loftiest is the idea of purity in soul and life...."

"That's a regular old bachelor's idea, Paul: getting married to a very young girl, training her in your ideas. A fine woman of thirty or over: that's better."

"As old as that!" exclaimed Paul.

"A woman of thirty is not old for a man of forty-six."

"No, Constance, don't trouble your head. Marriage is a desperate affair. No, it's a good thing that I never got married.... But I do feel lonely sometimes. I'm glad I came to live here.... It's you who are providing, the family-picture now.... Poor Mamma! She still knows me quite well. But she thinks that I am still very, very young.... Yes, the family-picture is with you now, not on Sunday evenings, but every day of the week.... Now that I'm growing old, I feel myself becoming more pastoral than I used to be. Do you remember how I used to abuse the family and deny family-affection and how angry poor Gerrit used to get? Now I'm growing very idyllic and I'm throwing back and longing for the family in the desert.... I'm glad that your house has become a centre for the family, Constance. But for that, there would be nothing to keep us together. Oh, it's a melancholy thing to grow so old, lonely as I am! What have I to live for? Nothing.... Well, with you, I am still at least a sort of rich uncle, one from whom the children may have expectations: I dare say I shall leave each of my nephews and nieces a trifle. I must have a talk with my solicitor one day. It won't be much for them, but I'll leave them enough to buy a clock, or some other ornament for their mantelpiece..... And your old friend Brauws is back at the Hague, you know.... Oh, didn't you know? Hasn't he written? He's sure to soon.... I met him the other day: the fellow's grown old. He always had an old face: wrinkles are things that need looking after; they want massage.... I used to massage mine, but I've given it up: my personal vanity has gone. As you see, I wear the same tie always. I'm fond of this tie. I have it steamed from time to time: that keeps it fresh. It's a nice tie; but I no longer have such a collection as I used to.... Yes, the family no longer cling together at the Hague. Karel and Cateau still do nothing but eat good dinners by themselves. For years and years they have done nothing but eat good meals together. Lord, Lord, what a disgusting pair to find their pleasure in that!... Saetzema and Adolphine: that's a sad case; you people have been very kind to Marietje.... Otto and Frances have a heap of children now and that good Louise looks after them, while Frances makes a scene one day and embraces her the next with a great display of emotion and loads of tears. And that has lasted for years too.... Yes, the years pass. I simply couldn't bear it any longer, especially with those sluts of servants whom my landlady started engaging lately. I yearned for cleanliness and ... for my family. It's a sign that I'm growing very old, Constance. *My* dotage is always marked by that idyllic longing.... That's why I take so much pleasure in immersing myself amid you all in family-affection. It's a great thing that none of you quarrel; even you and your husband don't quarrel any more. It's become the golden age."

[1] Kate, Kittie.

[2] Malay: clear out!

[3] Mary.

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## CHAPTER XV

And the hard-braced north-east winds, which had brought the nipping frost with them, came no more; they had passed; and it was no longer the strong, boisterous winds, but the angry winds, the winds that brought with them the clouds of grey melancholy, in eternal steady-blowing sadness, as though in the west, yonder, there were a dark realm of mysterious sorrow, whence blew huge howling cohorts of gigantic woes, titanic griefs, overshadowing the small country and the small people. The sky and the clouds now seemed bigger and mightier than the small country and the small people; the sky now seemed to be the universe; and houses, roads, trees and people, horizons of woods and moors, lastly, human souls all seemed to shrink under the great woes that drowned the small country and the small people from horizon to horizon. Curtains of streaming water cloaked the vistas and a damp fog blurred the distant wavering line of trees; a rainy mist washed out the almost spectral gestures, the silent, despairing movements of the windmill-sails; and the low-lying world, feeble, small, sombre and bowed down, endured the crushing, oppressive force of rain and wind lasting night and day and all day long.

Constance and Brauws were sitting once more in her own sitting-room, which was a replica of the little boudoir in the Kerkhoflaan at the Hague. Along the curving folds of the curtains, through the grey, clouded panes, they watched the grey rain falling, now in vertical streaks, now aslant, driven by the raging wind.

"I so well remember this weather," he said, "in the old days, when I used to sit chatting with you at the Hague, in your room which was so like this room."

"Yes," she said.

"I would come late in the afternoon, find you sitting in the dark and scold you because you had not been out; and we used to talk about all sorts of things...."

"It's a long time ago."

"The years fly past. Do you remember, we used to fight a little, both of us, against the years that were overtaking us, against the years that would make us old?"

She laughed:

"Yes," she said. "We no longer fight against them now. We are old now. We have grown old."

"We are growing old. And yet what an amount of youth a human being possesses! As we grow older, we always think, 'Now we are growing old.' And, when we are older than when we thought that, we feel ... that we have always remained the same as we were from a child."

"Yes ... a person doesn't change."

"Only all his joys and all his sorrows change and become blurred; but we ourselves do not."

"No, we don't change. Then why should there be joy and sorrow ... when, after many years, we have remained the same as we were from childhood?"

"Because we remain the same ... and yet do not remain the same."

"Yes," she said, smiling. "I understand what you mean. We remain the same from childhood ... and yet ... yet we change. It is like a game of riddles. I ... I am the same ... and I am changed."

"I too. My soul still recognizes in itself my former child's soul ... and yet ... yet I am changed.... Tell me: I believe things are running smoothly with you...."

"Sometimes."

"Not always?"

"No."

"I am so glad to see ... that things are going well as between you and Henri."

"We are growing so old ... Everything gets blunted."

"No, it's not only that."

"No, not only."

"You have grown used to each other...."

"Without talking about it."

"You set store by each other by now...."

"Perhaps.... Gradually...."

"Hans is a good sort."

"Yes, he's just simply that."

"And you appreciate this now."

"I think I do."

"You both have full lives."

"Yes. Who would ever have thought it?"

"You have so much to make you happy: Addie always with you...."

"My poor boy!"

"Why do you say that?"

"I am frightened...."

"What of?"

"I don't know. On days like the last few days, I am sensitive to every sort of fear, I always have been."

"Have the fears been justified?"

"Sometimes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I have sad thoughts."

"That is sheer melancholy."

"A melancholy which is a presentiment ... on days like these...."

"And everything is well."

"Only the material things."

"Be happy in that your life is so richly filled, both yours and Hans'.... It's a life of the richest

security ... with all that you do."

"With all that we do? We do nothing!"

"You do a great deal ... for people who are small!" he smiled.

"For small souls!... Do we do enough?"

"You do a great deal."

She shook her head:

"I don't.... Hans does: he is good."

"Just simply good.... Tell me, is it merely because of the weather that things don't seem to run smoothly?"

"No, material things aren't everything."

"Is it because of Addie?"

"Perhaps. I can't say. I feel an oppression, here." She put both her hands to her heart. "It's always liable to come, a day...."

"Yes."

"A day of sorrow, illness, wretchedness ... of misfortune ... of disaster."

"Why should you think that?"

"I often think it: now there's a misfortune coming, a disaster.... I sit and wait for it.... Oh, I've been waiting for it for months!... The children look at me, ask me what's the matter, whether anything has happened ... with Mathilde.... No, nothing ever happens.... There is no sympathy between us ... but I, I am calm and I wish her every good ... my son's wife...."

"You must get over that oppression."

"It can't be argued away."

"You must be happy. I have been here for some days now. I see nothing but love all around you."

"From her side?"

"Well, perhaps not from hers."

"She always remains a stranger."

"Then win her to you."

"It's very difficult, when there is no sympathy."

"But, apart from that, there is nothing but love around you. Really, you are wrapped about with silent happiness."

She shook her head:

"They are fond of me ... but there are things slumbering...."

"There are always slumbering things. Happiness without shadow doesn't exist. And one even doubts whether it ought to."

"No, perhaps not ... for later, for later. But ... there are things that slumber, silent, sorrowful things."

"I see you can't overcome it."

"No. I am glad to see you again."

"After so many years. And I too am glad to see that things are going so well with you ... even though there are sorrowful things that slumber."

"There are many good things."

"There is much love ... and much living for others."

She laughed softly:

"So simply ... with no great effort!"

"When we are not great ... why should we act as though we were? We are small; and we act accordingly. If we do good in a small way ... isn't that a beginning?"

"A striving...."

"For later."

"Yes, for later."

"I, I can't even say ... that I am doing good in a small way."

"Tell me about yourself."

"There is nothing to tell. Thinking, living, seeking ... always seeking.... There has been nothing besides."

"Then do as we do," she laughed, softly. "Do good in a small way ... as you say that we do."

"I shall try.... But I am disheartened. I admire you and I envy you."

"I ... I am disheartened. I am sometimes quite dejected. I should like to live quietly, with a heap of books around me. I ... I'm giving it up."

"The struggle?"

"Yes, the struggle to seek and find. Little by little, it has conquered me. Can you understand me? You ... you have conquered it."

"What have I conquered?"

"You understand."

"You rank that conquest too high.... And you, why are you conquered?"

"Because ... because I have never achieved anything.... I may sometimes have found, but never, never achieved.... And now I want to rest ... with a heap of books around me ... and, if I can, follow your example ... and do good in a small way."

"I will help you," she said, jesting, very sadly.

They were silent; and between her and him the room was full of bygone things. The furniture was the same, certain lines and tones were the same as years ago.... Out of doors, the unsparing night of the clattering rain and raging wind was the same as years ago. Life went on weaving its long woof of years, like so many grey shrouds. They both smiled at it; but their hearts were very sad.

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## CHAPTER XVI

And the melancholy of bygone things seemed to swell on the loud moaning of the wind during the following days, when the rain poured down; the house these days seemed full of the melancholy of bygone things. They were days of shadow and half-light reflected around the old, dotting woman in the conservatory; Adeline, the silent, mournful mother; Emilie, a young woman, but broken ... like all the greyness exuding from human souls that are always living in the past and in the melancholy of that past; and now that Brauws also saw it as a thing of shadows and twilight round Alex—because the boy could never forget the horror of his father's death—he also understood within himself that bygone things are never to be cast off and that they perhaps hang closer in clouds of melancholy, around people under grey skies—the small people under the great skies—than in bright countries of mountains and sunshine and blue sky. And that there were sorrowful things of the soul that slumbered: did he not see it in Addie's knitted brows, in ailing Marietje's dreamy stare, in Mathilde's glances brooding with envy and secret bitterness and malice? Did he not see it in the sudden melancholy moods of Gerdy, usually so cheerful? And did he not understand that in between their young lives there was weaving a woof of feelings that were most human but exceedingly intense, perhaps so intense because the feelings of small souls under big skies can be deeply sorrowful between the brown walls of a house, between the dark curtains of a room, which the grey daylight enters as a tarnish of pain, mingling its tarnish with the reflexion which lingers from former years in dull mirrors, as though all feeling and all life were quiveringly mirrored in the atmosphere amid which life has lived and palpitated?

Brauws was now living at Zeist and he had collected his heap of books around him and lived there quietly, conquered, as he said. But he was with them a great deal and was hardly surprised when, one morning, intending to come for lunch, he heard unknown children's voices in the hall, saw in the hall a young woman whom he did not know at first, heard her say in a very soft voice of melancholy, with a sound in it like a little cracked bell of silvery laughter:

"Don't you recognize me, Mr. Brauws?"

She put out her hand to him:

"Do you mean to say you really don't know me? Aunt Constance, Mr. Brauws doesn't know me; and yet we used to have so many disputes, in the old days!"

"Freule ... Freule van Naghel ... Freule Marianne!" Brauws stammered.

"Mrs. van Vreeswijk," said Marianne, correcting him, gently. "And here are my children."

And she showed him a little girl of eight and two boys of seven and six; and he was hardly surprised, but he felt the melancholy of the past rising in the big house when Van der Welcke came down the stairs and said:

"Ah, Marianne! Is that you and the children?"

"Yes, Uncle, we have been to Utrecht to look up Uncle and Aunt van Vreeswijk: they are so fond of the children.... Charles may come on this afternoon ... but he wasn't quite sure."

And, turning to Brauws, she continued, very, easily:

"We are living near Arnhem. Won't you come and see us in the summer? Vreeswijk would be very glad, I know."

She spoke quite easily and it was all very prosaic and ordinary when they all sat down round the big table in the dining-room and Marianne quietly chatted on:

"And Marietje—Lord, what a lot of Marietjes we have in the family—*our* Marietje is soon coming to introduce her young soldier to you."

"Is it settled then?" asked Constance. "I thought Uncle van Naghel didn't approve."

"He's given in," said Marianne, shrugging her shoulders. "But the dear boy hasn't a cent; and we none of us know how they're going to live on his subaltern's pay. And Marietje who always used to swear that she would only marry a rich man! ... And we have good news from India: Karel is really doing well...."

How prosaic life was! How prosaically it rolled along its steady drab course, thought Brauws, silently to himself, as he looked on while Guy carved the beef in straight, even slices.... And, prosaically though it rolled, what a very different life it always became from what any man imagined that his life would be, from the future which he had pictured, from the illusion, high or small, which he had gilded for himself, with his pettily human fancy ever gilding the future according to its pettily human yearning after illusions.... Oh, if the illusion had come about which, in the later life reborn out of themselves, he and Constance had conceived, without a word to each other, in a single, brightly glittering moment, oh, if Henri's illusion had come about and that of this young woman, now the little mother of three children, would it all have been better than it now was? Who could tell? Who could tell?... And, though the dreamy reflecting upon all this brought back all the melancholy of the past, yet this melancholy contained an assurance that life, as it went on, knew everything better than the people who pictured the future to themselves.... There they all were, sitting so simply round the big table at the simple meal for which Constance apologized, saying that Marianne had taken her unawares; and Brauws was but mildly astonished to find that Marianne was married to Van Vreeswijk: he had not heard of it and it was a surprise to him to see her suddenly surrounded by children; he was but mildly astonished to see her and Hans talking together so simply, as uncle and niece, as though there had never been a shred of tenderness between them; he was but mildly astonished when he himself talked to Constance so simply, while he felt depressed about Addie, whose eyes looked so dark and sombre. When Addie was still a child, he had conceived an enthusiasm for him, perceiving in him a certain future which he himself would never achieve. And he had also suffered, because he felt Addie's jealousy for his father's sake, when he, Brauws, used to sit for hours with his mother in the half-dark room, whispering intimate words so quickly understood, so sympathetically felt....

Now the years had passed; sorrow had faded away and sorrow was being born again perhaps, for life cannot exist without sorrow, laid up as an inheritance for one and all; and yet sorrow was so very little and became so small in the measureless life entire. There was nothing for it but to smile, later, much later, at all the disappointment, even that of seeking and not finding and not achieving....

It was very noisy because of the children: the three little Vreeswijks after lunch playing with Jetje and Constant; and, as the girls were staying with the children, Constance, with her arm round Marianne's waist, went upstairs to her own room:

"Let's sit here quietly for a bit," she said.

Marianne smiled:

"You've always got your hands full, Auntie."

"I don't know why, dear.... We live so quietly here, at Driebergen ... and yet ... yet my hands are always full. I do sometimes crave to be quite alone.... But the craving never lasts long ... and it seems impossible.... However, it's all right as it is...."

"What awful weather, Auntie!... I remember how often it used to rain like this when I came to see you in the Kerkhoflaan.... How long ago it is, years and years ago!... Here, among all your old knickknacks it looks to me suddenly and strangely as though everything had remained the same ... and yet changed. Auntie ... Auntie...."

Obeying a sudden impulse, she dropped on her knees beside Constance and seized her hand:

"Do you remember, do you remember?... I used to come and see you in this sort of rain and stay on ... and I could not bear that you should be unhappy with Uncle.... And, you know, I talked about it ... I said tactless things ... I asked you to try and be happy with Uncle ... Do you remember, do you remember?... And now, Auntie, it appears to me as if a great deal has been changed, though much has remained the same, and as if things had become much better ... between you and Uncle ... between you and Uncle Henri...."

"Dear, we have grown older; and everything has become more mellow; and Uncle ... Uncle *is* very good."

"Yes, he is good."

"He is just simply good."

"You see that now."

"Yes, I see it now, I admit it."

"Oh, I am so glad!... Yes, we have grown old."

"Not you."

"Yes, I too," she said, laughing softly. "I am young, but I am older than my years.... And, Auntie, tell me, do you remember before we went to Baarn, you came and called one day—we were just busy moving—and you sent for me and asked me ... you told me ... that Charles was fond of me ... and I refused him ... do you remember, do you remember?"

"I should think I did remember, darling!... And now you've got him after all; and it's all for the best, isn't it?"

"Yes, Auntie, we get on very well indeed.. and I have my children.... Do you remember, do you remember how you came to Baarn one day? I was very low-spirited; and you took me in your arms and pressed me to you and told me ... a fairy-tale, about the small souls ... which passed through vanity ... to ecstasy. Do you remember?... And, when the ecstasy died out ... then the little soul found a grain ... a mere grain ... which was big enough, however, because the soul itself was so small. Do you remember, Auntie, do you remember?"

"Yes, dear, I remember.... It was just a few tiny words to console and cheer you a little ... And now the little soul has found the grain, hasn't it?"

"I think so, Auntie ... but under ... under all these small, everyday things ... a great deal of melancholy remains.... Perhaps it's wrong; perhaps it oughtn't to be so...."

"But, if there are things in one's past, if we have lived before, dear, then there is always a certain melancholy and we all have our share of it ... just because we feel deeply, very deeply perhaps, under our dark skies ... and because our feeling always remains ... and our melancholy too...."

"Perhaps so, Auntie.... And so it goes on and we drift on.... You see, there are good things in life.... Tell me, doesn't it occur to you that you have found...."

"What?"

"What you came to look for, years ago, in Holland ... after you had been abroad so long, Auntie, and felt so home-sick for your own country and for warmth ... the warmth of family-affection.... Tell me, Auntie, doesn't it occur to you that you have found it *now*: the country, our grey, dark country ... and everything that you used to long for?... Are we not all round you: even we, though we live some way off?... Are we not all, nearly all of us around you?"

"Yes, dear."

"And are you happy now?"

"Yes, dear."

"I hear something in your voice that contradicts your words. Tell me, what is it?"

"I'm frightened ... I'm frightened."

"And you have found so much, you have found everything! What ... what are you frightened of?"

"I'm frightened ... I feel so anxious...."

"What about?"

"About things ... that may happen."

"Where?"

"In our house."

"What can happen?"

"Things, sad things."

"Auntie, this is nonsense!"

"I can't help it, dear.... I'm frightened ... I'm frightened...."

"Tell me, Auntie, you don't like the house, do you?"

"It's not that."

"But the house oppresses you."

"No, it's not that, child.... Uncle and Addie like the house.... And I'm getting used to it...."

"Tell me, Auntie: they say...."



"What?"

"That the house is...."

She looked at Constance meaningly.

"Darling, darling, it's not that.... It's an old house.... We never talk of that...."

"But it may be just that that depresses you."

"It did at first ... but I'm getting used to it.... Addie is so very calm and communicates all his calmness to us.... What appears inexplicable ... is perhaps quite simple.... But that's not it.... I'm frightened ... frightened of...."

"Of what?"

"Of what I fear ... will happen."

"And what do you fear?"

"Things that I can't put into words ... some great sorrow."

"Why, Auntie? Why should it happen?... And then, if sorrow comes, won't you be strong?"

Constance suddenly gave a sob:

"I shall be weak!"

"Auntie, Auntie, why are you so overwrought?"

"I shall be weak!"

"No, Auntie, you won't. And you mustn't be so frightened. There is nothing but love all around you ... and they will all of them, all of them help you."

"I am frightened ... and I shall be very weak...."

"No, Auntie.... Oh, Auntie, do stop crying! ... What are you afraid of? And what could happen now?... For whom are you afraid?"

"For Addie ... for my boy ... for Mathilde."

"But why, Auntie, why?... Oh, don't be so frightened!... Everything's all right between them ... and Addie ... Addie is so calm, so practical, so simple in his way of acting and thinking...."

"Perhaps.... Oh, if he is only strong!"

"Isn't he always?"

"Perhaps he is.... Oh, my dear child, I am so frightened!..."

"Hush, Auntie, hush!... Don't cry any more.... Lie still, now; lie still in my arms.... Even if we have sorrow to go through, even if we have sad things to experience, even then you should remember that everything ... that everything comes right again ... in the end.... If we all have our share, why shouldn't they have theirs?... And perhaps—who knows?—your anxiety is exaggerated, Auntie ... because you have been a little overwrought ... lately."

"It may be that."

"Is it all ...a little too much for you sometimes?"

"I am so seldom alone."

"I dare say you feel tired sometimes."

"It may be that."

"You mustn't think about it any more Tell me, Auntie: Gerdy isn't very well...."

"What makes you say that?"

"I thought she looked pale ... and rather sad."

Constance passed her hand over her forehead:

"Oh, Marianne," she said, "I wish that I could talk it all away, think it all away!... But I can't.... I'm frightened, I keep on being frightened...."

And she sobbed gently on Marianne's shoulder, while the younger woman knelt beside her.

The rain fell in vertical streaks. The carriage took Marianne and her children to the station through a deluge.

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## CHAPTER XVII

Since that first time, Mathilde was pricked with continual jealousy; and in the mornings, when Addie went upstairs to Marietje van Saetzema's room, she always followed him and stole into the wardrobe-closet next door, always with her keys in her hand, so that, if she happened to be caught, she might appear to be looking for some article of dress in one of the presses. She listened at the partition and understood what they were saying sometimes but not always, because Marietje spoke very low and Mathilde could not always hear what she answered. But, as her eyes glanced mechanically along the big flowers that formed the pattern of the wall-paper, she suddenly noticed a broad crevice, where the wood had split and the paper cracked and torn; and, with her heart leaping to her throat, she peeped and peeped.... She had to squeeze between two cupboards, she banged her head against the partition and was terrified lest they had heard; but they heard nothing or else the noise did not strike them, for the sound of their voices went on.... Mathilde now put her eye to the crevice and was able, though with difficulty, to see into the room, saw Marietje sitting with Addie sitting beside her, saw her hand resting in his:

"Why does he hold her hand so long?" she thought. "Need he feel her pulse as long as that?"

But he did not let go of Marietje's hand; and Mathilde became impatient, also because she could not catch what they were saying:

"How softly they are talking and how confidential it all is!" she thought.

And, when Marietje lifted her head a little, as with the movement of a lily on its slender stem, Mathilde saw her smiling, saw her eyes gleaming softly, saw the words taking birth as it were smiling on her lips; and it seemed as though those words added a touch of colour to the pale lips and a blush to the pale cheeks....

"How very much better she looks than when she came!" thought Mathilde, though she wanted to call out to Addie and tell him to let go Marietje's hand. "They are about the same age," she thought. "I am much younger than she is."

And yet Marietje, though twenty-six, had a certain youthfulness, as of a very young girl; and Mathilde could not get rid of the thought:

"They are—very nearly—the same age. It's ridiculous: a young doctor like Addie ... with a young woman, a young girl like her. It's ridiculous.... Why is he wasting his time on her now?"

She now saw the smile fade from Marietje's lips, saw the girl, on the contrary, look very serious, tell a long and serious story:

"What can she be telling him?" thought Mathilde.

And she saw their faces come nearer to each other: it was as though Addie were reassuring Marietje, explaining things; and now, now he laid his hand on Marietje's head and she ... she lay back on the sofa.

"It's absurd," thought Mathilde, "this hypnotizing ... and that they should be alone together for so long."

Soon the hypnotism took effect. Marietje fell asleep and Addie quietly left the room. Mathilde waited a few minutes and also stole away, meeting no one on the stairs....

What she had seen through the slit in the wall-paper was nothing; and yet ... and yet she could not help constantly brooding over it.... She now also noticed, at lunch, that Marietje was much more cheerful, that her movements were much less languid, that she laughed with the other girls; and she noticed that, after lunch, she helped Adèletje with the plants in the conservatory, that she was beginning to join in the life of the others, that she no longer went straight back to her room as she used to do at first.... And constantly too, downstairs, in the conservatory, she was struck by an intimacy between Marietje and Addie.... Mathilde was quite sensible, though she was jealous of her husband; she was jealous of all his patients; she was quite sensible and thought:

"A certain affection between a young girl and a doctor, a young doctor, who obviously has a good influence upon her, as Addie has, is easy enough to understand."

And she wanted to go on thinking so sensibly, she, a woman of sound, normal sense, but it was difficult, very difficult.... For Addie went out and she at once saw Marietje's smile disappear, saw her happy vivacity sink as it were ... and Marietje soon went upstairs, until she came down again with Aunt Constance and Adèletje to go for a walk, as they did every afternoon when the weather was not too bad.... Mathilde remained upstairs, played the piano, looked out upon the sad, misty road.... Oh, she loved her husband, she even loved him passionately and she was living here for his sake; but wasn't it awful, wasn't it awful? In Heaven's name wouldn't it be better just to move to a small house at the Hague ... and accept the pinch of poverty?... She went to the next room, to her children: they had been out and were playing prettily, while the nurse sat at the window sewing; and now she did not know what to do next.... What an existence, in the winter, in a village like this, in a big house, a house full of sick people and mad people! As it happened, through the window she saw Uncle Ernst walking along the road, with his back bent under his long coat, talking to himself as he returned to his rooms in the villa where he was being looked after: what an existence, oh, what an existence ... for a young and healthy woman like herself! She was never susceptible to melancholy; but she felt a twilight descending upon her from the unrelieved sky overhead. She could have wept.... And yet she could have stood it all, if only she

had possessed Addie entirely.... If only she could win him entirely, she thought, suddenly; and suddenly it occurred to her that she did possess him ... but not entirely, not entirely.... He escaped her, so to speak, in part.... They had love, they had fervour in common; they had the children in common; they had bonds of sympathy, physical sympathy almost. She felt happy in his arms and he in hers; but for the rest he escaped her. Something of his innermost being, something of his soul, the quintessence of his soul, escaped her, whereas she gave herself wholly to him and did not feel within herself those secret things which refused to surrender themselves.... She felt it, she understood it now; suddenly, under the grey melancholy of the skies, as though she suddenly saw clearly in that twilight; she understood it: their love was merely physical! Oh, he escaped her; and she did not know how she was ever to win him entirely, so as to have him all to herself, all to herself!... Perhaps if she began to take an interest in his patients, to share his life in them? But she was jealous of those patients, who took Addie from her for hours and days together; and she was jealous, very jealous of Marietje.... But what then? How was she to win him?... And in this rich-blooded woman, whose senses bloomed purple and fierce, there shot up as with a riot of red roses the thought of winning him more and yet more with her kisses, with her whole body, with all that she would give him, with all that she would find for him, to wind tendrils round him and bind him to her for ever and for ever.... And then, then also to make him jealous of her, as she was jealous of him, by disturbing his unruffled calm, the calm of a young, powerful man, with painful suspicions, which would yet bring him wholly to her, so that she might win him entirely....

Oh, wasn't it awful, wasn't it awful? As it was, she sat here the livelong day and possessed her husband only in the evening, only at night, as though she were food for nothing else. It went against the grain; and suddenly, intuitively, she felt her jealousy of Addie's long talks with Marietje more sharply than before. What need had he to talk to her at such length? Oh, he ought not to neglect his wife so, he ought not to think her good only for that: he ought to talk to her also, for hours at a time, earnestly, strangely, gazing into her eyes, as he talked to Marietje! Why did he not talk to her, his wife, like that? What were these talks? What had those two to talk about? It was not only about being ill and about medicines and not even only about hypnotism: of that she was convinced. There existed between the two of them secret things, about which they talked, things which they two alone knew.... Oh, how she felt her husband escape her, as though she were stretching out her fingers at him covetously and as though she did indeed grip him in her hot embrace ... only to lose him again at once!...

Her days passed in constant monotony. She was a healthy, superficial, rather vain, very young woman, with a few vulgar aspirations; and she suffered in her surroundings because she had an undoubted need for healthy and superficial affection. She would have been happy leading a simple, very carnal, very material married life, with plenty of money, plenty of enjoyment, with children around her; and then she would have laughed with pride and been good, as far as she was able. As it was, she felt that, except physically, she was hardly the wife of her husband and, despite her children, hardly accepted by his family and hardly suffered in their house. And she peevishly blamed them all, thinking that they were not kind to her, and she failed to perceive that what separated her from them all was a lack of spiritual concord, of harmony, of sympathy, because she had nothing that appealed to them and they had nothing that appealed to her, because the emanations from her soul and theirs never reached each other but flowed in two directions, because everything that they understood in one another, even without words, she did not understand, even though it were explained to her in words, because she looked upon them as sick, mad, egoistical and nerve-ridden, because they looked upon her as shallow and vulgar. It was an antipathy of blood and of soul: nobody was to blame; and even that she did not understand. The only one to blame, perhaps, was Addie, because, when taking her for his wife, he had not listened to the soul within his soul and had allowed himself to be led only by instinct and by his material philosophy of regeneration:

"She is a healthy, simple woman. I want healthy, simple children. That's how we ought all to be: healthy and simple as she is."

Were those not the ideas which had made him introduce her into the midst of them all, as an object lesson, without listening to the still, slumbering voices of his soul's soul?... And scarcely had those voices awakened before he had been roused out of himself with the thought:

"After all, I found her. Why should I lose her now? Who am I, this one or the other? And, if I am both those whom I feel within me, how can I unite them and compel them into a single love for my wife, for the woman who gives me healthy, simple children?"

And, every day that passed, he had known less for himself, whatever he might know for all of them whom he approached and benefited by strange influence, knowing less and less daily, until he saw himself plainly as two and gave up the struggle, let himself go, allowed his soul to drift at the will of the two streams that dragged him along, in weakness and surrender and lack of knowledge for himself, whereas he sometimes knew so clearly for others. Self-knowledge escaped him.... And, if Mathilde had been able to see this, in her husband, she would have shrunk back and been dismayed at what, all incomprehensible to her, existed secretly in the most mystic part of him. She would have been shocked by it as by a never-suspected riddle, she would have turned giddy as at a never-suspected abyss down which she gazed without knowing where it ended, a bottomless depth to her ignorant eyes and quite unsusceptible instincts. She would not have understood, she would have refused to understand that there was no blame but only self-insufficiency and inconsistency of soul, in silent antagonism and antipathy, because Addie felt himself to be two. She would have wanted to blame ... them, all of them, because "they were not

nice to her," but not her husband, for she loved him because of his sturdy young manliness, because of his older earnestness and thoroughness, in which she failed to see the soul of his soul. And she now wanted, unhappy as she was, to continue feeling like that, neglected, offended, underrated, by all of them in that large, gloomy house, in which everything, down to the dark oak doorposts, was hostile and antagonistic to her, until she felt frightened of mysteries in or upon which they hardly ever touched in speaking, mysteries which were even almost welcome to the others and not too utterly unintelligible in their communism of soul, from which she was irrevocably excluded.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

That night, Marietje van Saetzema had a dream which was like a nightmare. She was running down a sloping mountain, deep as an abyss; she rushed and rushed and Addie came rushing after her and Mathilde after Addie, rushing with delirious screams. After Mathilde, Johan Erzeele came rushing and, last of all, Gerdy; and before any one of them reached the other, Marietje, who was running in front, plunged into the deep abyss; and they all plunged after her. The echoing fall, in the black depths, made Marietje wake with a start to find the darkness of her bedroom quivering all around her, the strange inner darkness of the night; and she was cold and clammy and sat up wide-eyed, while the wind blew fiercely outside. Her first impulse was to get up and run out of the room for help, to Aunt Constance, to Addie. But, growing calmer, though her head and heart were still throbbing, she let herself fall back upon her pillows and controlled her fears. She would stay quietly in her room.

A month ago, she would never have done as much; at the Hague, after this sort of dream, she would utter cries, go running through the house, scream aloud. Now she did not scream, but lay where she was and drove the feverish thoughts in front of her. Yes, feverish she was; but she speedily recovered a sense of calmness, as soon as she began to think of Addie. Hadn't he said so himself:

"Marietje, when you feel overstrung ... think of me!"

And she thought of him; and things began to smile and to grow very calm around her.... She gave a deep sigh.... She recalled the words which he used when hypnotizing her:

"The body is growing heavy.... The hand is growing heavy.... You can't lift your hand...."

And, though she did not fall asleep, she became very quiet and smiled contentedly. True, she knew that he said the same thing to all the patients whom he hypnotized:

"Think of me, whenever you feel your nerves give way."

But she, when she thought of him ... was she in love with him? Perhaps; she didn't know: perhaps she did love him, deep down within herself, in the chastest recesses of her soul; perhaps she had been in love with him for years, ever since he used to talk to her so kindly—he a small boy, she a rather bigger girl, but about the same age—when her brothers were so rough to her and Mamma, Floortje and Caroline used to snub her, as they always did. In the noisy, uproarious, vulgar house, she had grown up quietly, like a little pale plant, humble, oppressed, as it were hiding herself, until suddenly some impulse in her blood had made her scream the house down with neurotic cries. They all asked whether she had gone mad; and she had locked herself up since, hidden herself, in her room.... And, after these attacks, she would remain behind as in a dream, seeing nothing, hearing nothing around her, just staring. And, when she saw that her condition at last made an impression, she at once became proud of that impression, lifted herself out of the Cinderella humility, became the interesting figure at home, now that she aroused her father's fears, her mother's pity, her sister's annoyance. And she had grown proud of her neuroticism; she let father, mother and sister feel fear, pity and annoyance, with a sort of vindictive satisfaction. Yet she had a vague feeling of deep unhappiness, because her soul was sinking as into an abyss, her hands groping vaguely in the terrible void.... She would spend days in tears. Then Aunt Constance had come, so kind, so gentle, so sensible; and she had resisted, because perhaps she was very fond of Addie and always had been, in obedience to some modest dread, did not wish to live where he lived. But Aunt Constance had insisted and she had yielded; and Addie, Addie was now curing her: oh, he cured her when he merely pressed his hand softly on her forehead! And she confessed to him the wicked, arrogant pride in her illness, which at last created an agitation in the paternal house where Marietje had never counted....

He had listened so earnestly, telling her that this was very wrong, that it was the worst of all and that, with such wicked feelings she would never get well. And, after that, he talked for days, oh, so earnestly! And she listened to him in ecstasy, as though her soul were rocking on his deep, soothing voice. And gradually, gradually, she had discovered in him—oh, no affection for her, no ordinary affection or love, for she was plain and thin and without charm, while Mathilde was so handsome: a beautiful woman!—but a real harmony between some of his feelings and views with what she, in her silent life as a lonely, down-trodden little girl, had thought about all sorts of people, animals, things, about everything which had aroused her compassion in her youthful earnestness and hypersensitiveness: about the wind lashing the leaves; about a driver ill-treating a horse; about Aunt Adeline, Granny, Emilie, little Klaasje; about poor people whom she would

sometimes go and visit with Aunt Constance and Adèletje. And thus, slowly, out of all these small, simple feelings something had thrilled in unison with his feelings, had roused kindred feelings in him, until they had talked of all sorts of strange presentiments and dreams, of existence before life and after death, of an invisible world and life crossing their threads with the visible world and life. And, when sometimes she had been a little fanciful, Addie had always understood her, but at the same time, with all his restfulness and strength, his seriousness and smiling earnestness, had quieted her in her hypersensitiveness and hyperimagination, in her dread and surmise, until she now discussed all those questions with him so quietly, in words that quickly understood one another, so that, even in these conversations, which might easily have made her more neurotic, he satisfied her and lulled all the anxious thrills of her sick girlish nerves and soul. There was a mystic force in his voice, in his glance, in the pressure of his hand, so that, even after these conversations, she remained lying in a deep and blissful sleep and, after half an hour, woke from it as though rising refreshed out of a wide, still bath on strangely rarefied air, like cool water, which gave her an incomprehensible, blissful sense of spiritual well-being.

And that peaceful life of sympathy was healing to her, whereas it vexed Mathilde. She thought that it would always keep flowing on like this; and she was greatly surprised when she suddenly heard of a ball at Utrecht to which they were all invited.

"Which of you want to go?" asked Constance. "I shall stay at home, but Uncle will chaperon you."

Mathilde loved the idea, even though Addie did not give it a thought. Of the girls, however, only Gerdy cared about it; but Guy would go with her.

"So none of you: Adèletje?... Mary?... Marietje?"

No, they did not feel inclined, even though Aunt Constance urged them, said that they very seldom had any fun, that they ought really to go, now that the chance offered. But the girls didn't want to; and Aunt Constance said:

"Well, then, you and Uncle will just make four; so you can go in the carriage."

But Mathilde preferred to dress at Utrecht, in an hotel, because her dress would get creased in the carriage; and she decided to go in the afternoon, with a box.

On the evening of the ball, Constance grumbled at Adèletje, Mary and Marietje, because they took no pleasure in dancing, and said that, if this went on, they would move to the Hague, because the girls were growing so dull in the country. Constance' nerves were raw; and she said angry, unreasonable things; her eyes filled with tears.

"But, Auntie," said Marietje, "we're all so happy here together! Why talk about the Hague? What do we care about a dance?"

"That's just it. I think it unnatural."

"Listen to it blowing!" said Adèletje.

"And raining!" said Marietje—Mary.

"That's what Uncle and Gerdy and Guy are driving through," said Adèletje.

"The poor horses!" said Marietje—Mary.

The others laughed.

"Yes, the horses will get wet, poor things!" said Marietje—Mary.

"Dirk'll look after them," said Constance. "The horses are taken out so seldom."

"But when they are ... they are taken out in the rain!" said Mary, reproachfully.

Paul was there, playing softly on the piano. Ernst was there; and it was very strange to see the friends which he had silently made with Klaasje. Together they looked in her picture-books: the unnaturally old queer man and the unnaturally young child.

"I can read now," said the backward girl of thirteen, very proudly.

"Really?" said Uncle Ernst.

"Yes, Uncle Addie is teaching me to read. Look, in these books, with pretty letters, blue, yellow, red. That's violet. And that, Uncle Addie says, is purple. That's purple: a lovely colour, purple. Uncle Addie teaches me to read."

And laboriously she spelt out the highly coloured words.

"So Uncle Addie teaches you to read with coloured letters?" asked Ernst.

"Yes, I don't like black letters. And look at my books: all with beautiful pictures. That's a king and a queen. It's a fairy-tale, Uncle. This is a fairy. The king and queen are purple ... purple; and the fairy—look, Uncle, look at the fairy—is sky-blue. Uncle Addie says it's a-zure."

She drew out the word in a long, caressing voice, as though the names of the colours had a peculiar meaning for her, rousing in her strange memories of very early colours, colours seen in gay, faraway countries, down, down yonder....

"Mr. Brauws won't come," said Emilie.

"No, it's raining too hard," said Adeline. "He won't come this evening."

"He's become so much one of the family."

The evening passed quietly; the old grandmother and Klaasje were taken and put to bed; but, because Aunt Constance was sitting up till the carriage returned from Utrecht, they all wanted to sit up.

"What an idea!" said Constance, with nervous irritability. "Why don't you all go to bed?"

But they were gathered round her so pleasantly and they stayed up: Addie, Emilie, Adeline, Marietje; but Addie sent Adèletje and Mary to bed.

And they sat waiting downstairs in the night. It was three o'clock when at last they heard the carriage; and Van der Welcke, Gerdy and Guy entered.

"Mathilde is spending the night at the hotel," said Van der Welcke.

"And Uncle made a very sweet chaperon," said Guy, chaffingly.

But Gerdy did not say much, looked tired, very pale, constrained. They went upstairs, to their rooms, and Gerdy kissed her mother. But, without the others seeing it, she followed Adeline to her room and suddenly, unable to contain herself, burst into a paroxysm of tears.

"Darling, darling, what is it?"

And the mother, long since broken, took the girl, now breaking, into her arms and it was as though she suddenly wakened from her apathy and felt herself very much a mother.... Oh, she knew that she could not do much for her children, that she was not capable, never had been since Gerrit's death, that without Van der Welcke, Constance and Addie she could not have made anything of her children! Nevertheless, they remained her children; and, if she did not know how to guide her sons in their careers, she did know how to sympathize with her poor Gerdy's sobs.

"Darling, darling, what is it?"

And, dropping into her chair, while Gerdy knelt before her in the folds of her white-tulle frock, she held the pale little face against her and compelled the child to speak, to speak....

"It's nothing," said Gerdy, through her sobs. "I didn't enjoy myself."

"You didn't? Why, what happened?"

"I hardly danced at all."

"Why not?"

"Mamma, it's better to tell you plainly. I'm so unhappy! It's about Johan...."

"Erzeele? Has he proposed to you?"

Gerdy shook her head:

"No, but...."

"But what?"

"In the winter ... skating ... I thought he was fond of me.... It's my own fault: it was silly of me, it was silly.... It wasn't anything.... He was just the same to me as to other girls; and I thought, I thought ... It's nothing, Mamma, it's my own fault, but I thought ... Mamma, I oughtn't to take it so much to heart ... but it makes me very unhappy.... He danced with me, once.... But he danced with Mathilde the whole time.... He was always with her.... People were talking about it.... It was just as if she was mad, as if she didn't think ... that she oughtn't to behave like that ... with Johan.... It struck Uncle Henri too: I could see it by his face. They were together the whole evening and ... you understand.... He paid her attentions ... shamelessly ... the way he does to married women.... With girls he's different.... I hated him for a moment. But then he came and asked me, for that one dance ... and then I thought ... I oughtn't to have thought it. It's my own fault. I'm very unhappy, Mamma.... Uncle Henri was very angry too ... with Mathilde ... because she wouldn't come back with us to Driebergen.... He gave way and let her stay, to avoid unpleasantness.... But it was ridiculous of her: the carriage is big enough and she would not have been so badly creased.... Oh, she looked lovely, she looked lovely!... She is quite lovely, dressed like that, at a ball.... Addie ought to have come with us.... She was really beautiful, but not—it's wrong of me to say it, I know—not like *us*."

"How do you mean, dear?"

"Not like Aunt Constance and Emilie and you.... She didn't ... she didn't look well-bred.... She looked beautiful, but she looked coarse.... If Addie had come, perhaps she would have restrained herself, not worn her dress so low. She was the only one in such a very low frock.... You see, there was something about her ... that repelled me even more than usual: I can't say what and it's very wrong of me, because after all she's Addie's wife and we must be fond of her; but really, she didn't look a lady; and I could see it in people's faces: they thought her very handsome ... but not ... not well-bred.... And ... after that ... when she did nothing but dance with Johan ... then ... oh,

Mamma, then she looked at me ... and looked at me with a sneer ... as if she were looking down on me!... I knew that I was not at my best, that I looked pale and thin; my shoulders are not good; and Johan behaved so oddly to me, in such a queer, mocking way: oh, Mamma, he was almost cruel!... I do believe, oh, Mamma, I do believe, that I ... that I'm in love with him! But I oughtn't to tell you and I oughtn't to be like this ... I oughtn't to cry so; but I couldn't help it, I couldn't help it!... I did my best, Mamma, not to show it before Uncle Henri and before Guy, but, oh, Mamma, the whole dance ... the whole dance was a torture!"

Adeline mingled her sobs with Gerdy's:

"My darling, my poor, poor darling!"

"Mamma! Oh, Mamma!"

"What is it, my poor dear?"

"Listen, Mamma!"

"What?"

"Don't you hear? The sound ... upstairs!"

"Hush!... Hush!... The sound..."

"Is dragging itself..."

"Downstairs. It's like a footstep. It's always like that."

"Oh, Mamma, I'm frightened!"

"It's nothing, dear: the wind, a draught, a board creaking...."

"Oh, but I'm frightened!"

"It's nothing.... I opened the door once ... to look."

"You dared to?"

"Yes. It was nothing."

"There was nothing to see?..."

"No. It was only very draughty."

"And everything's closed!"

"It's nothing, it's nothing, dear."

"Now it's dragging itself away ... down below."

"It's the draught.... Oh, my poor, poor darling!"

"Oh, Mamma, I'm unhappy ... and I'm frightened, I'm frightened, I'm frightened!..."

When Mathilde returned next morning, she seemed to perceive a certain displeasure, a coldness in her husband, in her mother-in-law and in all of them; but she decided that perhaps she was mistaken: she was tired, she was unstrung; and, after she had been to see the children, she kept to her own room, where she knew that no one would disturb her, now that Addie had gone out to his patients. And it was not the surmised displeasure, the unwonted fatigue after the ball that made her nervous, as though she was infected by a nervous thrill from all who surrounded her: it was particularly because of Johan Erzeele that she was now walking restlessly round her room, sitting down at the window, getting up again, going in to the children, coming back again, sitting down to the piano, looking over her ball-programme and suddenly tearing it up.... Now, suddenly, she reproached herself with all sorts of things that had happened the night before: for dancing with Johan so often, even though she had known him all her life as a young girl at the Hague, where he was a subaltern in the grenadiers, while his people lived at Utrecht; for flirting with him in so marked a way at supper; for allowing him to speak like that, with his brazen, sensual fashion of making love to her; for knowing and deliberately encouraging his brazenness; lastly, for scarcely preventing him from escorting her on foot—because it was so near—to the hotel, where she had reserved a room.

She had lost her temper, refused, asked for a carriage, and ridden alone to the hotel where she had spent the night; but his offer and the words in which he had couched it had shocked her, had frightened her all through that night, that short night, so that she had not had a moment's sleep. And now she was angry with herself for not summoning up her usual sound sense, so that he had seen how frightened and shocked she was and had laughed at it, with the caressing laugh of his well-shaped mouth. And, because she was angry with herself, all sorts of nervous excuses went whirling through, all her grievances, great and small, came surging up, as though to defend her against herself, against her own self-reproach. Why couldn't Addie have gone too? Why must he leave her to her own devices like that? Why was she only good for the one thing? Why did he hold such long conversations, full of strange intensity, with that ailing Marietje? Why did she sometimes, through his kisses, feel a strange chill come out of him and freeze her, so that the spontaneous word grew still and lifeless on her lips and she no longer knew what to say: she only knew that she was losing him, again and again and again, while all the others, down below, were

winning him, winning him for themselves! Oh, how the grievances whirled up, fighting against her self-reproach, until at last she burst into tears, sheer nervous tears, such as she had never shed before! And, as though the grievances were winning, she suddenly laid the blame on Addie, on all of them, on her husband's whole family, on Driebergen, on the house full of lunatics and invalids, on the eerie, haunted house where she could not breathe, while they all, down below, found living there so delightful. She blamed them all, blamed the whole house for it, that she was losing her sound sense and had allowed Johan to say all sorts of things to her which otherwise she would never have allowed. And, in her tears, while still blaming him—because she did not see that there was no blame, that no one was to blame for anything, while she was casting about to whom to impute the blame—she longed for her husband, felt that she was still very much in love with him, that she would have liked to embrace him, to clasp him close to her, to weep out her sorrows on his heart, to hear his deep, young, earnest voice, to look into his deep, young earnest eyes, so that she might grow calm again and happy, far away, with him and her children! Now she longed for him to come back; now she looked out down the road; and, when she saw him—the bell was ringing for lunch, because Truitje downstairs had also seen him coming up the road—she ran down and was just in time to kiss him in the morning-room and to whisper:

"Addie, Addie, you do love me?"

"Why, of course, darling!" he answered, gravely and, she thought, almost sadly.

And now, sitting silent at table, feeling all sorts of reproaches around her, she asked herself, was it not his fault, was it not his fault? What she really imagined to be his fault she did not clearly see, for it was all whirling through her mind; she kept on thinking of Johan Erzeele, kept on feeling her self-reproach; and the grievances surged up, like lances, more numerous than before, to defend her against that self-reproach.

Gerdy had not come down to lunch: she was tired, Adeline said. The tone of the conversation was forced; and Mathilde reflected that it was always so when she was there, when they would look at one another askance, in a silent understanding against her, against her....

Lunch finished, the children, Jetje and Constant, went out, after Addie had first played with them. Yes, he was fond of the children, but was he fond of her, of his wife?...

"Addie, Addie, you do love me, don't you?"

She had found another opportunity of asking him; and he answered:

"Why, of course, dear."

"Stay with me to-day."

"Very well. What would you like to do? Shall we go for a walk? It's fine."

"Yes, Addie, I'd like to."

And they went out together and roamed along deserted paths; she took his arm:

"I am so glad to be with you.... You ought to have come yesterday...."

"I don't care for dancing ... but, if you had asked me...."

"You would have refused."

"Perhaps not."

"Yes, you would.... I sha'n't go again, without you. I want to dance with you, with you."

"I like skating better."

"There, you see, you're refusing already!"

"No, I won't refuse: I shall come with you, next time."

"I'm happy when I'm with you.... Addie, couldn't we go and live alone, with our children?"

"Whenever you like, darling."

"Yes, but you're attached to the house."

"Yes, I'm attached to it."

"It would be a sacrifice for you."

He made a vague gesture:

"Only you'd have to be economical at the Hague."

"You would soon have a fine practice there."

"But I'm not aiming at ... a fine practice."

"Ah, that's just it!"

He yielded to a slight sense of impatience:



"It's a pity, Tilly, that you find it so difficult to adapt yourself here.... Very well, we'll go to the Hague."

"But, if you're obstinate ... and refuse to earn an income," she said, impetuously.

"We shall have enough."

"How much?"

He made a brief calculation:

"Say, five thousand guilders, no more."

"But I can't live on that ... with two children."

"It ought to be enough, Tilly."

"But it's nonsense, trying to live at the Hague on five thousand guilders a year ... with two children."

"Then what do you want?" he asked, bluntly.

"I want you to get a practice.... You have only to wish it: you would become the fashion at once."

He was silent.

"Why don't you answer?"

"Because we don't understand each other, Tilly," he said, sadly. "I can't give up the practice which I have in order to become a fashionable doctor."

"Why not, if it pays?"

"Because it conflicts with all ... with everything inside me."

"I don't understand."

"I know you don't."

"Then explain it to me."

"It can't be explained, Tilly. It can only be felt."

"So I have no feeling?"

"Not for that ... no fellow-feeling ... with me...."

"Why did you marry me?" she asked, curtly.

"Because I love you."

"Because you love me!" she echoed, curtly. "Because I'm good enough ... for that!"

Her eyes flashed.

"Tilly!" he implored.

It was as though a sudden terror blinded him, as though a spectre of guilt suddenly loomed up out of all the black self-insufficiency of the last few years, his years of married life.

"Because I'm good enough ... to bear you children. Because you want to have children by me, healthy children, children different from your family, your mother's family."

"Tilly!"

"Addie!" she entreated. "Love me! Love me!"

"I do love you, Tilly!" he cried, in despair. "Love me altogether!"

"I do love you altogether!" he lied, in anguish for her sake.

"No, you love me ... half!"

"That's not so!"

"Yes, it is, you know it is!... I want to be loved by you altogether and not only...."

"Hush, Tilly," he entreated, in dismay. "Tilly, don't let us spoil our happiness!"

"Our happiness!" she laughed, scornfully.

"Aren't we happy then?"

And he tried to force her to say yes, but she was suffering too much and exclaimed:

"No, I am not happy! When I embrace you...." she clutched her fingers. "When I have embraced you," she went on, "it's over, it's over, it's over at once; I feel that you are far away from me again; that you don't love me."

"I do love you, I do love you!"

"Then talk to me."

"I do."

"No, talk to me as you talk to Mary."

"But, Tilly, I talk to her ... to calm her."

"That's a lie!"

"Tilly!"

"It's a lie!... You talk to her ... you talk to her because you're in love with her!"

"Tilly, stop that!"

"Not as you are with me ... but differently."

Suddenly he grasped her wrist. She knew his sudden bursts of anger. They were very rare; but she knew them. And, because he was dazzled by the sudden light that shone from her, because from all the gloom of his self-insufficiency a consciousness of guilt came looming up to frighten him:

"And now, silence!" he cried, shaking her arm. "Silence! I command it!"

He no longer knew things. Life whirled dizzily before him, deep as a black abyss.

He stood in front of her on the lonely road; and it was as though his grey eyes flashed lightning, shooting blue spark after blue spark of rage and pain. His whole face quivered, his body quivered, his voice quivered with rage and pain. She felt a furious resistance rise within her ... together with black despair. She felt an impulse to rush into his arms, to sob out her sorrow on his heart. But she did not want his caresses: she wanted the thing that escaped her. It was escaping her now; and, when she said it, when she said it straight out, he commanded her to be silent, not to say it. Wasn't it his fault, wasn't it his fault? Wasn't *she* right?

She released her hand:

"You don't love me," she said, curtly.

"No. When you speak to me like that, I don't. I'm not in love with Marietje. I'm sorry for her."

His voice was very calm and full of feeling; and she, also grown calmer, answered:

"You feel for her."

"I do."

"Well, then...."

"But you have no right to bring that up against me. I don't grant you that right ... because, Tilly...."

"Right, right? What rights have I? I have no rights!.. I live in your house on sufferance."

"Tilly, be careful!"

"Why should I?"

"You're destroying our happiness."

"It doesn't exist."

"Yes, it does ... if...."

He passed his hand over his head. There was a cold wind blowing; and the beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"If you would be reasonable."

"And share you?"

"Share me?... With whom?" he roared.

"Not with her, perhaps," she resumed, frightened, "but with ... with...."

"With whom?"

"With them all."

"All whom?"

"Your family ... all of them ... whom you love more than me."

"I don't love them more."

"No, but you feel with them ... and not with me."

"Then feel with me!" he implored, as though to save both her and himself. "Feel, Tilly, that I can't be a fashionable doctor, but that I have a large practice, a number of patients to whom I am of

use."

"They don't pay you."

His mouth involuntarily gave a twist of contempt.

"They don't pay you," she repeated. "You are wearing yourself out ... for nothing."

"Try and feel, Tilly, that I am not wearing myself out for nothing ... just because I am not making money."

"Then teach me to feel it."

He looked at her in despair.

"Teach me!" she entreated. "For your sake, because I love you, I will try to learn, try to feel ... I love you, I love you, Addie!"

"Dear," he said, gently, "I'll do my best ... to teach you to feel it. Come with me."

"Where?"

"There ... to those little cottages."

"Who lives in them?"

"Poor people ... sick people ... whom I attend."

"Addie ... no, no ... no!..."

"Why not?"

"I'm not prepared for it.... You know I can't stand that...."

"You're a healthy woman; your nerves are strong: come with me."

She went with him, not daring to refuse.

"Tilly," he said, gently, as they walked on and approached the cottages, "I will try to have understanding for both of us.... If you are to be happy in yourself ... with me ... happy the two of us ... then...."

"Well?"

"Then you must learn to understand me ... to understand me very deep down, as I am. Then you must try to understand ... all of us; to love us all: my father, my mother.... Tilly, Tilly, can you?..."

She did not answer, trembling, frightened, looking deeper into things, after all that he had said. Her fine eyes gazed at him despairingly, like those of a wounded animal in its pain. She could have embraced him now, just ordinarily, clasping him warmly and firmly to herself. But he led her on as he might lead a child. He knocked, opened the little door and led her in. A sultry heat of mean poverty struck her in the face like a blow; and it was nothing but misery, wherever he took her. It seemed to her as if she herself carried that misery with her, in her soul, which had never yet thrilled as it did now.

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## CHAPTER XX

Oh, he was to blame, he was to blame, he was to blame! He saw suddenly, in a sort of despair, that the only answer to the question which he sometimes had to ask in vague, black self-insufficiency was the assenting yes, yes, yes!... Because he had not known it for himself, entirely for himself, for the two personalities which he so clearly felt himself to be, he was to blame, because he loved his wife with only half of himself. Was she to blame in any way? Was she not what she always had been? No, she had changed, she had refined herself, as if her soul, despite the antipathy of her environment, had yet become transformed and grown more like the people and things that surrounded her! And it was his fault: he had brought her into this environment, in which no sympathy was created and which had given her nothing beyond a refinement of soul, senses and nerves, so that she now suffered through that which he had always thought that she would never perceive. With what sudden clearness, in her simplicity, she had seen it all, almost unconsciously, and was now flinging it at his feet! He wrung his hands and felt desperate at the thought of it all. Of an evening now, alone in his study, in the soft light of his reading-lamp—the table with Guy's books and maps standing in one corner—he would walk up and down, up and down, wringing his hands, glancing deep into that despair, while the self-insufficiency was no longer vague, but soul-torturing in self-dissatisfaction, because he saw himself at fault in that great action of his life, which was still so very young, his marriage: at fault towards himself, at fault towards his wife. To let her marry him, because she was healthy and simply normal, with that idea of setting an example—see, that is what we ought all to be: normal, simple and healthy—oh, to love her, yes, but to love with only the half of himself, without ever giving her anything of the deep—things of the soul, things which he gave to all with whom he felt a soul-relationship, without counting, in a lavish prodigality: how *could* he have done it, he who knew things for

others I More clearly than ever he perceived that he had never known them for himself; and he clearly perceived that others, his father, his mother, had suspected that he did not know for himself, that he had not known when he brought Mathilde to them as his wife: into their midst, into their house. And now, in his emotion, in this lonely silent contemplation, there awakened within him the energy to redress, oh, to redress if possible: to redress everything, everything for her!...

Now, suddenly, he went to her room, where she was spending a moment after dinner, before tea was brought in, where he often found her when he wished to be alone with her for a minute; and he found her now. She was sitting listlessly in a chair; and the room was dark: the children were already asleep next door. He lit the gas and looked at her with all the energy that leapt up within him like springs, the energy to redress, to redress. And, without any preamble, he said:

"Tilly ... we'll go to the Hague."

"What do you mean?" she asked, in surprise.

"We shall go and live at the Hague. I shall do what you suggest: I shall look for a practice at the Hague."

She had him to herself now, for the first time after their talk that afternoon, and suddenly, sobbing, she threw her arms around him, pressed him to her:

"Love me!" she implored.

"I do love you.... It won't do for us to stay here.... It's better that you should be quite by yourself, in your own house, your own mistress."

"We've talked about it so often!" she sobbed.

"There will be money enough, Tilly; I shall make money."

"You said five thousand guilders."

"No, there will be more. Don't be afraid, have no care, there will be enough ... and you can do as you please. I promise, I promise."

"But it's a sacrifice for you...."

"To leave the house?"

"Yes."

"I'm fond of the house ... but it's better that we should go to the Hague."

"Your parents ... they will all miss you."

"Now don't make difficulties, Tilly."

"No, Addie, no...."

"How do you mean, no?"

"I won't go to the Hague."

"Why not?"

"It's too late.... It wouldn't alter a thing.... It's too late."

"What's too late?"

She sobbed and embraced him. She clutched him to her, she covered his lips with glowing kisses.

"Oh, let it be!" she said, in between her kisses; and her voice sounded utterly discouraged.

"Why, Tilly? Why? I want to see you happy.... It's decided now: we're going to the Hague. I'll look out for a house."

She shook her head.

"Tell me, Tilly: why do you refuse?"

She shrugged her shoulders:

"I don't know," she said.

"You love me, surely?"

"I love you, I dote on you, I'm mad on you!... Let us stay here and ... and ... love me a little."

"But, Tilly, I do love you. You know I love you!"

He kissed her, very tenderly; and she accepted his kisses, with her eyes closed, and lay limply, as though tired, in his arms. Suddenly she thrust him away:

"Let me be," she said, rising to her feet.

"Tilly...."

"Let me be ... stop kissing me."

"Why mayn't I kiss you?..."

"I don't want you to."

"And you say you love me!"

"Yes, but ... don't kiss me any more."

He looked at her in perplexity; and she said:

"It's not only kissing...."

"Tilly!" he said, stretching out his arms. "Whatever it is, we shall find it for each other ... with each other...."

"Yes...."

"You think so, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You believe it? When we are at the Hague ... alone ... in our own home?"

"Yes, yes, I believe it."

"And will you then be happy?"

"Yes ... when we have found it."

"And we shall find it."

"Yes."

"Come and sit with me, in my study.... I have work to do: come and sit with me. I sha'n't go downstairs for tea. I have some reading to do: come with me ... and stay with me this evening: will you?"

"Yes."

"Then it will be as if we were already at home ... in our own home ... at the Hague...."

She went with him, pale, tired, listless, with his arm round her waist.

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## CHAPTER XXI

Easter was at hand; spring brought a new balminess to the wind, a new softness to the rain, a new warmth to the air, which hung low in a heavy grey canopy; and much had changed during the past few weeks. The big house, full though it was with all of them, seemed very quiet now that Addie and Mathilde had moved to the Hague, though their rooms were always kept ready for them because Van der Welcke had said that Addie must always have his rooms ready for him whenever he chose to come home, though it were only for a day. And so the bedrooms and the nursery always remained in mute expectation, with silent furniture and closed doors; and only in Addie's big study, one of the best rooms of the house, formerly the old man's library, Guy now sat and worked at the window. And it was as though, in spite of the restfulness induced by Mathilde's absence, they were all gloomy because Addie was gone, as if they had all lost him. True, he came regularly, twice a week in fact, especially because of Marietje—Mary; but even then he had so much to do outside that they scarcely saw him except at meals. And it was as if they could all have put up with Mathilde, rather than lose Addie. Klaasje no longer pushed her chair away, Gerdy no longer spilt the milk, at evening tea—those small, almost ridiculous vexations with which Constance had had to put up so often—as soon as Mathilde entered; but, now that all vexation was gone, Addie also was gone and seemed lost for all time. And they lived on in a sort of grey harmony, still and peaceful but now, regularly, without many words, in a dull resignation which mourned in all their eyes and voices, while Gerdy now silently, silently pined and pined; and it was only Guy and Van der Welcke who, once in a way, indulged in loud and forced merriment. Paul also had his melancholy days: sometimes he would not put in an appearance for a week, said that he was ill, remained in his rooms, lying on a sofa with a book in his hands, not thinking it worth while to talk brilliantly or to play the piano. But they looked him up, Constance, Brauws, the girls; they drove him out of his rooms and out of his mood of depression; and he returned, like a victim, grumbled that Gerdy's piano was always dirty, asked for a duster, scrubbed the keys and submissively played Grieg, the melodies dripping slackly from his fingers. And, though everything was grey, in the somewhat sultry spring air, still it was strangely happy with a harmony felt in silence, a family concord, which sometimes brought the tears to Constance' eyes when she sat talking to Brauws in the twilight upstairs in her own sitting-room, in whispered interchange of quick half-words, which at once understood one another. Then, when Addie arrived, he brought with him a certain gleam, a light, a sudden glory; and yet his eyes too were full of sombre greyness, but they were all so glad to see him that they saw only glory in them. He was happy at the Hague, he said. He had a good practice, everything was going well.

Mathilde was very cheerful; the children were well. He asked them all to come down sometime, for, though they had all been once, to see the house, they did not come again, withdrawing themselves from him as it were ... He saw it and was hurt by it; his eyes seemed to roam through the dear brown rooms, as if this big house remained his house; and, when Constance embraced him, she felt in her son's heart a difficult struggle and a swelling of great sorrow. He never spoke of it; he hypnotized Marietje; he regularly kept up Klaasje's reading-lessons and the books with the coloured letters gleamed into the child's awakening imagination; he talked, on Saturdays, at great length with Alex or sat with old Grandmamma and always thought of something to say to her that made her nod her head with soft, smiling satisfaction; he found a moment for his father, for his mother, for all of them: also for the poor sick people on the silent country roads; once he interested himself in an old sick horse which caused Marietje—Mary—great sorrow, when she saw it tortured, and bought it for her and let it run about, for her sake, in a meadow belonging to a farmer whom they knew. And his regular visits were what they all looked forward to, once a week, as to a delightful day; and the other days dragged on, in grey harmony, amid the quiet family life, in which they all recognized the same loss in one another.

Easter arrived; and the three, Constant, Jan and Piet, came home for the holidays. And it was one great emotion, not only for Adeline, but also for Constance and also for Addie, when he came down, an emotion which bound them still more closely together, an emotion aroused by the future of all those boys, an emotion felt over the examinations which they had passed or were about to pass. Constant, now seventeen, was to be transferred this year from the Secondary School at the Hague to the School of Agriculture at Wageningen; Jan, now fifteen, was still at a boarding-school at Barneveld, preparing to go up for his naval examination next year; Piet, now fourteen, was at the Hague, at the Secondary School, with a view to the Polytechnic. At the Hague, Constant and Piet lived with a tutor; and Addie was almost glad that he himself was now living at the Hague and seeing more of the boys, for the tutor was not satisfied: the boys did their lessons badly, not because they were unwilling, but because they had no head for books, for working, for studying, any more than Alex, any more than Guy. The three yellow-haired younger ones were even worse feather-heads than their two elders: Constant was something of a dreamer, Jan the most solid, Piet the cleverest of the three, but none of them workers. They all displayed the same incapacity for perseverance, with the different shades of their different characters: Alex, true, doing his best for Addie's sake at the Merchants' School at Amsterdam, but full of a secret dread of life, struck as a child with that dread since, staring through open doors, he had seen his father's dead body, in that single moment of horror and blood; Guy, kindly, genial, merry and light-hearted; Constant, inwardly sombre, morose, with a strange deep look of suspicion in his eyes; Jan, a boy for games; and Piet—the youngest except Klaasje—no doubt the most enlightened intellectually, but delicate, shy, girlish and reminding Constance most of the flaxen dolls of the old days: the merry, careless children, romping round the dining-room in the Bankastraat, while Gerrit, in his uniform and riding-boots, stood tall and wide-legged in the midst of their fun. And now, now the boys were no longer careless: it was their reports, it was their careers opening yonder in the future that as it were compelled them to think of serious things; and it was as though they none of them developed with the blossoming of their years, as though they, Alex, Guy, Constant and Jan, remained feeble, light-hearted, sombre and rough and Piet so shy and delicate, while cruel life opened out before them, society, in which they had to conquer a place for themselves, when none of them could persevere in the youthful studies which prepared their future. It was a great source of anxiety for Addie; and, if the boys had not all been so fond of him, the anxiety would have been greater than he could cope with. Was it not he who had really chosen their career for them, because they did not know, because they had no preference, all of them perhaps shuddering with dread of having to take their place in human society, such as Alex felt it most deeply in the melancholy of his dejection, as though their father's suicide, of which they all knew, had cast a shadow over all of them, a twilight over their childish souls? And Addie, like an elder brother, like a young father, had had, in consulting them, to choose for them, had had to discuss the matter with them at length. The Indian Civil Service appealed to none of them; Addie thought that not any of them had the brains for college; and so it was decided: Alex, army training-college, but that had not been a success and he was doing better now at the Commercial School; Guy, the Post Office; Constant, Wageningen; Jan, the Navy; and Piet, in whom Addie saw the brightest intelligence of all, he had stimulated to enter for the Polytechnic. But it was not only Alex: Guy also was a source of trouble to him, plodding with gloomy resignation at his maps and books; Constant, sombre and morose, was doing his best; but the competitive examinations for Willemsoord might prove very difficult, Addie thought, for Jan later; while Piet ... But the boy was still a child, clinging so dependently to Addie, with his rather girlish affection, with his shyness, which placed confidence in Addie only.... Yes, thought Constance, now that she saw them all together, they would long be a great trouble, they would still be a great burden to Addie; and Adeline, poor Adeline could never unaided have made men of her boys.

It was Easter; and it was strange how much at home they all were in the big house at Driebergen, which they regarded as their paternal house, regarding Uncle Henri and Aunt Constance next to their mother as parents also, regarding Addie as an elder brother, as their youngest father, on whom everything really depended. No one ever opposed this view; and in everything, down to the least thing, it was quite natural for them to say:

"I'll ask Addie."

They thought their cousin much older in spirit than in years and all looked up to him naturally and with unquestioning confidence, as though he must know things, as though he would be sure to make life smooth for them, that future of career beside career which opened before them like a

battlefield. However much they might differ in character, in this they felt alike, quite naturally, as though they could not do otherwise; and, when a stranger sometimes expressed surprise that Addie fathered them so, their eyes would glance up in astonishment, as though to ask:

"What do you expect? Of course, Addie does everything for us!"

And they were very grateful, almost unconsciously, to Uncle Henri, who paid the bills, to Aunt Constance, who took care of them in so many ways, to Addie, who would make life smooth for them; but still they thought it very natural, because it had always been like that, for the girls too: Marietje, Adèletje, Gerdy and Klaasje. There it was: Uncle, Aunt and Addie looked after them, because Mamma was so sad and not very capable and devoid of energy. They had been used to it ever since they were very young and small; and it was like that; and it could never have been different.

Now, when he came down from the Hague, Addie talked to all of them seriously; and they listened with serious faces, looking up at him, accepting what he said, promising to work better in future, to show better reports next time, to give him more reason for content in all respects.... Then he would shake hands with them; and that handshake conveyed a promise which they would be glad to keep, to please Addie, because Addie, after all, was bearing the entire responsibility for their lives and their futures. They left it all to him, but they began to see more and more clearly that they must make it easier for him. He spoke to Piet in particular:

"Mr. Veghel's not satisfied, Piet."

This was the tutor with whom Constant and Piet boarded.

The boy blushed, with a quick flow of colour to his round, girlish cheeks; his eyes glanced up shyly and timidly.

"You must work harder, Piet: you can when you like; and therefore, if you don't, you can't possibly go to Delft.... And you're cut out for a civil engineer. That's what you want to be, isn't it?"

"Yes, Addie."

"Well, see that you get your remove before the summer holidays. You won't get your remove, Piet, if you go on like this."

"I'll do my best, Addie."

Then the boy became very restless, because Addie was not satisfied; and inwardly he wished that Addie did not see him so clearly, so clever and capable if only he liked; and Piet thought the Polytechnic a very difficult affair:

"It'll never come off," he thought, in his secret heart.

But he did not say so, because, in spite of himself, he hoped that it would, if only because Addie wanted it to and because it was such a long way off, the Polytechnic, and because Addie lately had worn such a wrinkle in his forehead, as though he were disappointed ... possibly in him.

"We're a great trouble to you, Addie, what?"

"If only you work hard, Piet ... then it won't be such a trouble and things will look after themselves."

But Piet was not the only one to see it: they all saw it, the boys and girls alike, and wondered if it was because of them only or because of something quite different—himself, or Mathilde—that his forehead wrinkled so and his grey eyes grew so sombre....

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## CHAPTER XXII

At the Hague, Mathilde felt a certain gratification, a satisfaction; and the bustle of the early weeks gave her a pleasant feeling of excitement and made her forget the despairing thoughts of the last few weeks spent at Driebergen. They had an attractive little new house in a side-street off the Bezuidenhout itself. It was freshly painted, bright in colouring; and she found it delightful to be able to furnish the house, now that summer was approaching, with light, modern furniture which looked and suggested a doll's house, with the small rooms and the abundance of light-coloured muslin in the drawing-room and conservatory, which she thought looked nice and cheerful. The first spring light entered hard and shrill; and the new colours of the wallpapers showed up in the first sunny days, crying out at Addie when he returned from his visits in his smart little brougham. And she displayed a certain solicitude that above all he should be nicely dressed, that he should look very well-groomed: she insisted on his ordering a couple of new suits. He had not a large practice yet, but that was sure to come: she was full of hope. In the afternoons, she would go out, rejoicing in the shopping-streets, in all the errands which she had to do, in the old-acquaintances whom she met, people whom she had known in her parents' house—they were both dead now—and occupying a somewhat lower social scale than her own at present. And she loved especially to show herself to her relations—a few uncles and aunts and cousins in her elaborate new dresses: Baroness van der Welcke.... And, in her gratification, in her

satisfaction, in her new environment, created by herself in sympathy with her commonplace illusions, it was as though she had suddenly wiped all Driebergen out of her life, as though they had never existed, the nearly three crowded early years of her marriage yonder, in the melancholy, rainy village, in the sombre house, the haunted house full of lunatics and invalids. A newness, fresh and commonplace as the paint of her house, reigned all around her; she inhaled newness and was grateful to Addie; but that which, despite herself, had begun to grow refined in her, through her intercourse with antagonistic but yet finer natures than her own, now became blunted at once; and the days of real misery which she had undergone now, in her superficial thoughts, seemed very far away, as though they had been never lived but only dreamed, as read in a book, but never felt. The feeling had not burst forth from her, like a plant that buds, but had moved slowly around her, like a wind that blows or a drifting cloud. It had moved her, but had not metamorphosed her. Now, in her own atmosphere, she was blossoming up, fully, like a flower transplanted to the earth which it needed in order to blossom entirely.

And yet, though she recovered herself, she was not quite herself again. Even though she no longer craved to know and to receive that which escaped her in Addie, yet she continued to know that something in him did escape her; and, however eagerly, in her simple entreaty, she had begged that he would love her, now, even though she uttered the same request, almost with a childish plaint—"Addie, you *do* love me, don't you?"—she had to admit to herself that she now saw him really very far above herself, not only in that which escaped her, but also in that which she understood: the daily sacrifice which he was making by living at the Hague, by acting as she had asked, seeking to establish a practice as she wished, by shifting the tenor of his life, as with a strong grip of the hand, in the direction which would make her happy, her, the woman who no longer loved him as she had done ... as she had done when she felt him akin to herself, in the healthy normal life of physical natures.... He was that still, but he was also different; and that different thing was not akin to her, nor was the superiority with which he sacrificed himself. The superiority, the sacrifice oppressed her.... She soon forgot; and, when she was out of doors, going along the shops, meeting acquaintances who admired her, she was happy. When she came home, waiting with her two children for Addie's return, she suddenly felt oppressed:

"I grew melancholy at Driebergen," she would think.

But now she was in her new, freshly-painted house; and she was oppressed and felt unattractive; she dragged with her something that she could not shake off. She often wept, sobbed, as at Driebergen, but there, she knew, it was only about Marietje van Saetzema, whereas here she did not know what she was sobbing for.... At meals, sitting with him alone, she was silent, or else spoke harshly, without intending to. She did not sit with him when he was working, though he asked her to. When he wanted to kiss her, she drew back. At night she often locked herself in, pretended to be asleep.... Only in the children did she feel in harmony with him, did she agree with him, with his system of feeding them, of sending them out every day in all weathers. The children united them, now and then, for a few moments.... When the children were in bed, their life together became strangely unreal, as though both were asking themselves why, why? And it grew worse daily. He was now living exactly as she wished; and it seemed to him as if he had no life of his own. The keeping up of his reading, in the evenings, became mechanical; and mechanically he went once, sometimes twice, a week to Driebergen, remaining there for half the day. They saw him looking strange, unsettled, old, with wrinkles in his forehead and a gloom of despair in his eyes.

"My dear old chap," Van der Welcke said, one day, "I can see that things are not going well with you. Do you remember how your father, not so very long ago, with the only bit of wisdom that ever fell to his share, advised you to seek your own life for yourself?... You're seeking it less and less ... for yourself. Things are not well with you down there ... at the Hague."

"Father, I have so little right to seek my own life for myself."

"And yet we all do it."

"There was a time, once, when you didn't. You then gave up your life for me."

"I did that quite naturally. I don't know what's happening inside you ... but it looks to me as if you were forcing yourself. Here you're at home, here you feel a man: you love this house, you love the work you used to do here...."

"I don't belong to myself any more."

"You never did belong to yourself. As a child, you belonged to your silly parents ... who got the better of you entirely; and now you belong to your wife. I expect it's your fate."

"If it has to be...."

"I should so much like to see you happy, Addie. Bless my soul, old chap, we should all like to see it. We're all suffering on your account. Your poor mother's suffering."

"Does she talk about it to you?"

"No, we never talk much together, as you know, but still...."

"Do you understand each other better?"

"No, but that's not the question. The question at this moment is your happiness...."



"Father, I am not unhappy. Things are really all right with me."

"You've got that cold, distant voice, my boy, which I know so well in you, which you put on when you're hiding yourself and not facing things. I never mistake it."

Van der Welcke got up, walked restlessly across the room, all blue with smoke, walked back again and suddenly stopped in front of Addie and took his son's head in his two hands:

"My boy, why was it necessary that your fate should be the same as your father's, an unhappy marriage?"

"Father...."

"Don't deny it. Why should you? Aren't we two friends who have always known all about each other? As a child, you were my friend. We were always like brothers. Why must your fate be the same as your father's, an unhappy marriage? You, who are so clever where others are concerned."

Addie suddenly clutched hold of his father. Van der Welcke continued:

"Why must you always know so little that will help yourself?... At the time, I raised no objection. You were fond of the woman; you always knew your mind with such certainty; I thought that you knew things for yourself; I let you have your way. I was jealous because you were getting married; so was your mother; we should have been jealous of any woman. We didn't like the girl you brought us; we thought, 'It's our jealousy that makes us not like her. She's Addie's wife; she's taking our boy from us.' We had no right to think like that. We tried to stifle our jealousy. We received Mathilde, hoping, almost knowing for certain, that you were finding your own happiness in her, because you always knew your mind.... You didn't know it in your own case.... You knew everything so positively in ours.... You also knew so positively, so plainly, that the profession which I tried to urge upon you was not the thing for you: you found your own vocation. You were a small boy; and you know it all so clearly and positively.... When you grew up and became a man, you no longer knew things. Isn't that so?... Why should your fate be the same as your father's? I was a ne'er-do-well, when I made my mistake; you were a calm, serious man...."

It was as if his father were depriving Addie of all his strength, but he merely said, in his almost cool, even, restrained tones:

"Dear Father, really ... things are all right between Mathilde and me. Even Mamma understood, in the end, that she did not feel happy here, at home; and Mamma agreed that she would feel more at home and happier in her own house, however small...."

"But I'm not speaking of Mathilde's happiness, I'm speaking of yours...."

"That goes with it, that must go with it, Father...."

And so it always remained: he spoke out no more than that, gave no more of himself than that and was outwardly almost cold with chill shuddering and repellant when spoken to about himself. That he had made a mistake, that he had not known things for himself he clearly perceived; but all his efforts were directed towards the attempt to repair what he had managed, through his ignorance where himself was concerned, to spoil or destroy in his wife's life.

Because he knew that she soon forgot things, he thought that he would succeed, if he devoted himself to her entirely, if he lived with a view to her happiness and ceased to live with a view to his own higher instincts, his own sympathies, his own vocation and activities. And, even if she did not forget everything at once, he would hope that, if he persisted, she would end by forgetting entirely.

On days when she was bright and cheerful, he was satisfied, in silence and with a certain inward sombreness, because things were going as he was compelling them to go. On days when she was snappish and locked herself into her room and was evidently unhappy and no longer knew how to explain her melancholy, he suddenly saw his young life before him as a dismal ruin, as a desolate block of masonry in a dark night, as a desperate climbing and climbing in the dusk, with no goal of light ahead. Then he would look at his young, crowing children and wonder whether one day—and that perhaps soon—they would comfort him and her, their parents, even as he had comforted his. He did his work listlessly, visited his patients listlessly, even though no one ever noticed anything in him. He would ride through the streets of the Hague in his smart little brougham; and his eyes looked dully before them and he longed for his bicycle and the Driebergen roads, the silent, gloomy roads, sodden with rain and weighed down under by the heavy skies where his sick poor awaited him in their mean little dwellings, in vain, seeing him only for a single moment once a week. He was filled with bitterness: with a listless sneer at himself he reflected that he might just as well have satisfied his parents' wishes and Grandmamma's wishes, in the old days, and become a diplomatist. It would have been nearly the same as what he was doing now: putting himself forward as a young fashionable doctor who practised hypnotism and who was sought after, especially by the ladies, because he was good-looking and a baron.

He sank into deeper and deeper dejection and felt roused only for a moment when treating a serious patient.

## CHAPTER XXIII

And Mathilde's healthy mental balance was disturbed. This young and healthy woman, with her rather vulgar aspirations, had fallen in love with him because her nature expected to achieve a sympathetic satisfaction through his both in body and soul; her love had faltered when she gradually perceived that she was sharing him with so many who seemed to understand him better, when she suddenly saw, in a refinement of her inner perception, that he was really escaping her. She had enough common-sense to understand and to appreciate that he wanted her happiness above all things, that he was now devoting himself to her entirely, that he had forced their present life at the Hague into a direction which was hers, not his. Because of this, she was filled with a surprised gratitude; and yet this gratitude depressed her. The years spent at Driebergen amidst her husband's family had subdued her to a mere nervous susceptibility; and now she sought and wept again and did not know what she sought nor why she wept. Fits of temper followed on fits of weakness and fits of discouragement. In the question which she no longer put to Addie, but which nevertheless constantly arose in her heart—the question whether he really loved her—lay hidden a second question, whether she really loved him. At such times she thought that, even though her love was diminished, they would still be happy, now, at the Hague, and make her life a simple life, the after-math of physical love. But she saw him grow moodier despite himself, despite all his efforts. She passed through hours of despair; and, if she had not had her children, she would have gone away somewhere, she knew not where.

Her healthy mental balance was disturbed. She now thought that it would be a good thing to tell Addie that she did not wish to stay at the Hague like this, because he was not happy there, that she wanted to go back to Driebergen. And the idea of giving back to him what he was giving her, of sacrificing herself as he was sacrificing himself, gave her an internal glow of exhilaration, as though she had found a solution; a solution in the near future, in a week or two, a month or two. Yes, let her tell him that it would be better, after all, to go back to Driebergen. The rooms there were always ready for them. They would all be glad to see him back again. She would give him back to his family. But she ...

She pictured herself once more in the repellant life which she had led there. And she would not, she could not suggest it to him. Then days would follow when she avoided him, when she hardly saw him at meals. Sometimes, for a few moments, they would play with the children, for there was something really attractive about the fair-haired little mites, pretty children both, Constant and Jetje, healthy children, such as Addie had wanted. When they were put to bed, she would go out in the evening by herself, to take tea with relations or friends. She did not ask him to go with her: he had his work to do; and she came back in a cab.

There was a void in her life; and she tried to argue sensibly with herself, and to make light of things. Come, there were hundreds of women in her position, not so very happy with their husbands: really, happy marriages were rare; and people still managed to get on all right.... There were the children; and she was very fond of them.... Perhaps later, when they were a little older, things would be better: Addie might become reconciled to his position as one of the most fashionable doctors of the day; she also might recover her calmness, her balance.... Life was so insipid: getting up, dressing, ordering meals, paying visits, shopping. Only the children, still so small, imparted a little gaiety to it. For the rest, it was insipid; and it was the same for one and all. Nearly everybody had to pass through some sort of crisis, after a few years' marriage. She would settle down, Addie would settle down: they would go on living side by side....

But days of tears would follow, days of despair; and she felt much too young, much too full of vitality, just to drag on her life like that....

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## CHAPTER XXIV

It was spring; and Marietje van Saetzema was to go to the Hague for the day, to see her father and mother. Constance went with her.

"How well Marietje was looking!" cried Adolphine, with delight.

Marietje certainly looked well. She would always remain a little pallid, frail and thin, with narrow shoulders; but her cheeks had filled out, her eyes showed a dewy calmness and her lips, pale though they were, blossomed into a kindly smile. She was, as usual, a little subdued, but she joined in the conversation and her attitude was more natural, less painful and forced.

"But you must leave her with us for the summer as well," said Constance, "for the poor girl hasn't had much out of the country air during the winter. It is beginning to look lovely now where we are. She'll spend a summer with us first, Adolphine, won't she, before you take her back?"

"Very well," said Adolphine, gratefully.

But presently, when she was alone with her sister, she found an opportunity to say:

"At least ... if there are no objections."

"What objection could there be?"

"Because of Addie."

"What do you mean?"

"People are so spiteful sometimes, you know. They say...."

"What do they say?"

"They say that Addie is in love with Marietje and that Marietje does her best to attract him."

"I should let them talk, Phine."

"What do you believe, Constance?"

"I don't believe a word of it. Addie is in love with his wife."

"That's just it. People say...."

"What do they say now?"

"That things are not going so very well between Mathilde and Addie."

"Every young couple has a difficult time now and again. A little difference of opinion ... I assure you they are happy together."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"It was Mathilde's wish to come and live here?"

"It was better that she should be on her own, in her own house."

"Oh, she didn't have a scene with you then? That's what people say."

"I never had a single word with Mathilde."

"I see her once in a way. She does *not* talk nicely of you. She says that she was sacrificed to Gerrit's children, that she did not count at home. When she talks like that, I defend you, for I know how nice you and Van der Welcke are to everybody."

"She may have had a bitter moment that made her speak like that."

"She goes out a lot," said Adolphine.

"When? Whom does she go to?"

"In the evening. Friends. She is hardly ever at home of an evening. She oughtn't to do that ... without Addie, you know. It's so undomesticated."

"I know she goes out now and then of an evening to have tea ... with friends."

"Yes, exactly.... She's *always* out.... But how well Marietje is looking, Constance! She does Addie great credit. He's making a great reputation ... with his hypnotism. Everyone wants to be hypnotized by him. I'm always hearing him praised."

"I'm so glad, Adolphine."

She went away, arranging to fetch Marietje in the afternoon and take her back to Driebergen. She had an open fly waiting: it was beautiful, mild weather; and the spring was weaving verdure in between the trees. But a heavy load lay on Constance's breast and she could have cried ... because of her boy, because of Addie. She was going to ride to him now, at the other end of the town, the Emmastraat. She meant to lunch there and, when she had seen the grandchildren, to come back to Adolphine's. It was eleven o'clock. And she felt so much weighed down with sorrow for Addie, who came home to them looking more and more gloomy every week, that she could not, could not go to him yet ... after all that Adolphine had said.... Oh, how she always loved saying things that jarred upon your nerves, things that hurt, things that grated against your soul! Did she do it purposely? Was she insincere? Or was it because she couldn't help it, because she was tactless ... or, very likely, took an unconscious pleasure in hurting other people?... Oh, perhaps she did not know how much pain she gave!... But to go straight to Addie now, to Mathilde, was impossible....

"Cabman, drive a little way through the Woods first."

The driver turned down the Javastraat, went along the Scheveningen Road and let his horse roam at will in the rides of the Woods.... Oh, the Hague was charming; she loved the Woods! Even as Addie loved Driebergen, with an innate inherited love for the house and household and the fact of living there—he was indeed his grand-parents' grand-child—so she loved the Hague greatly. She loved those green villa-lined roads, she loved the briny fragrance of the sea.... She was now riding along the Ornamental Water, now, suddenly, along the spot where she remembered meeting Brauws years ago—he sitting on that bench yonder—when, after she had turned round with a start, he caught her up; and her confession, that she had suggested a divorce to Henri.... Oh, those days, those days of life and suffering and illusion, so far, so far away in the distant past!... And now, now the man drove with his jog-trot, the jog-trot of a victoria hired by the hour, along the Kerkhoflaan; now she was riding past the old house.... Oh, that old house! It was as

though the past, the illusion, the suffering and the life, the later, later life, were still hanging around it like a low-drifting cloud! It was the trees of yore and the skies of yore and the green spring life of yore. The house, the house: there was the window at which she had so often sat musing, gazing at the great skies overhead, while her soul travelled along a path of light. Up above were Addie's little turret-room and her own bedroom: oh, that night of illusion at the open window, with the noiseless flashes of hope over the sea, the distant sea yonder!... She felt almost inclined to stop, to alight, to ask leave to go over the house; but something in the curtains, in the outline of a woman sketching at the window of her former boudoir prevented her; and she rode on. Oh, how she loved her Hague; and yet ... yet she had suffered there, with what antipathy she had been surrounded!... Did that antipathy of small souls for small souls go on for ever? Must her poor boy now suffer through it, even though he made his name as a doctor?... Oh, what a heavy depression she felt upon her heart, as if her fur cloak, were much too warm for the balmy weather with its breath of spring!... Now they were going down the Bankastraat, past poor Gerrit's old house; and suddenly that terrible night of snow stood white-hideous before her mind, stained dark with her brother's blood.... Here was Dorine's boarding-house; and Constance got out and rang, but Dorine was not in.... The driver jogged on wearily. She recognized acquaintances here and there, grown older now that her memories were harking back to past years; and the cabman, doubtless to spin out the drive, instead of following the Kanaal, turned up the Alexanderstraat. Oh, the house, the old family house, so full of recollections, so full of the past! And ... she saw that it was empty, that it was to let. With a quick glance at the uncurtained windows above, she even recognized the plasterwork of the ceilings; and it was as though the past still brooded there, still stared out at her, through the white, streaked windows.... Wearily the horse now jogged along the Bezuidenhout; and she saw poor Bertha's house, with its tightly-drawn veil of chill panes stiff and repelling a swift penetrating glance.... Yes, the Hague was like a grave to her; and yet even as a grave the Hague was dear to her. A grave? And Addie lived down there, at the end of the street!... Would *she* still care to live in the Hague? She did not know, she did not know: perhaps she was becoming used to Driebergen, becoming used to the big, sombre house there, because there was so much love around her, even though she continued to feel a stranger there.... And a stranger: that was how her boy felt here!

The carriage now pulled up outside her boy's house. Strange, the front-door was open: perhaps the maid was out on an errand and had left the door open for a minute to save herself trouble. Constance, telling the driver to come back at half-past two, went inside. Addie could hardly be home yet from visiting his patients. She knocked at the door of the drawing-room and received no answer. Mathilde was no doubt busy with the children or with her house-keeping. Constance opened the door and walked in, to look for her.

She gave a start. Through the drawing-room and the dining-room she saw Mathilde sitting in the conservatory, with Johan Erzeele beside her. He sat bending towards her; and he was holding her hand in his two. Mathilde's eyes were staring into the distance; and a feeble hesitation seemed to take away something of the usual strength of her fine, healthy, rather full lines. Constance saw it for one moment, as a strange vision in that bright, unsoftened conservatory-light, which was made the harder with many-coloured muslin curtains and coarsely vivid with the gold and motley of ugly Japanese fans. It gave Constance a fright; and in that inexorable light the fright and the vision were both inexorable.

It did not last longer than a second. Her shadow in the drawing-room made Mathilde and Johan start up; and they rose to their feet:

"Mamma!"

"Mrs. van der Welcke!"

It sounded like a greeting; but their voices were unsteady, because they understood that Constance had seen. Constance' voice trembled, but she merely said:

"Good-morning, dear. How do you do, Mr. Erzeele?" She kissed Mathilde, shook hands with Erzeele. "I came over with Marietje; I left her with her father and mother and came to look you up ... intending to lunch with you ... if it suits you."

She strove to make her words and her voice sound quite unaffected and she succeeded; and, because she succeeded, she suddenly felt that what she had seen was nothing: a moment of familiar intimacy. Were they not old friends? Had Mathilde not, as a girl, when he was still a cadet, danced with him often at their dancing-club? There was nothing, there was nothing; she was reassured by the tranquillity of her own voice.

"So you will stay to lunch," said Mathilde.

"If it suits you."

"Of course it does.... Addie is not in yet."

"Are the children upstairs?"

"Yes, I'll send for them."

Erzeele said good-bye, said that he must go, reminded Mathilde easily of her appointment to meet him the next day at the tennis-club. Constance glanced at him quickly: in his uniform, he was young, broad and short; his complexion fair but bronzed with the sun; above his powerful shoulders and thick neck his face stood fresh and strong, smart military, with a pair of glad,

childlike grey eyes; a long fair moustache shaded his lips, which were laughing glad and warmly sensual; and, when he laughed, his small sharp ivory teeth flashed.... His thick fair hair curled slightly at the tips....? It was very strange, but it struck her suddenly that Erzeele's way of looking at Mathilde resembled that of her own husband, Van der Welcke, when ... when he was young, when she met him in Rome. Something in the fresh vigour of his glance and of his rather sensual laugh, something about his figure, about his teeth reminded her of Henri as a young man.

"You've known him a long time, haven't you?" asked Constance, when he was gone.

"Oh dear, yes!" said Mathilde, vaguely.

The nurse brought down Jetje and Constant for Grandmamma to see: after that, the children were to go out for a little longer.

"They look well," said Constance, huskily.

She felt a heavy pressure of inexplicable melancholy on her heart, a pressure so heavy that she could have cried, so heavy that she felt her eyes grow moist in spite of herself.

"Yes," said Mathilde, "they're very healthy. It's quite a system that Addie and I are practising with that special diet and the regular time each day in the open air. The other day it was blowing a gale ... and Addie absolutely insisted that they should go out all the same. And I must say I agree with him."

Suddenly, while Jetje was sitting on her lap and Constant tugging at her skirts, Constance took Mathilde's hand:

"Then things *are* all right between you?" she whispered, almost imploringly.

"How do you mean?"

"You are happy now, Mathilde ... here at the Hague?"

"Certainly, Mamma.... You yourself understood, didn't you, that I longed for a house of my own."

"Yes, dear, I understood."

"Only...."

"What?"

"I am sorry to have robbed you of Addie."

"But, my dear, a son does not belong to his parents."

"Still, I reproach myself.... But I could not stay with you any longer. You understood that it was not because ... because you were not kind to me. You were very kind ... you tried to be ... though I do not believe that Papa likes me, that Emilie, Aunt Adeline or any of the others like me.... I bear them no malice: I don't like them either."

Constance was silent.

"I am so different from the boy and girl cousins ... and Papa was always jealous."

"My dear!"

"And you too; but you fought against it."

"Mathilde, I always wished you to feel at home with us; I always hoped that some part of you would blend with us."

"Exactly; and that was impossible: I was too different from all of you; and at Driebergen ... in the end.... I should have become as full of nerves ... as Mary."

There was a tint of hatred in her voice.

"No, dear," said Constance, harking back, "you were not happy with us. But because I hope that you are happy now...."

She had risen nervously; the nurse had entered and was taking the children with her: they were to have one more turn in the street before lunch.

"Tell me, Mathilde, are you really happy? Do you really and truly love Addie again?"

"I have always loved him. What do you mean?"

"Then it's all right, then it's all right, dear."

"Why are you so sad? There are tears in your eyes."

"The Hague always makes me sad. The cabman took me for a little drive and I passed all the houses of the old days ... when we all used to live here."

"Did you feel a longing to come back to the Hague?"

"No, no ... I don't want to come back again."

"Will you always remain at Driebergen?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You have found happiness there, I did not. I remained a stranger."

"Tilly ... one day, perhaps ... you will live there as we do now ... when we are no longer there...."

"No, never."

"Why not?"

"I dislike the house and everything in it ... down to the very doorposts. And I can't get used to an eerie house ... as you all do."

"But Addie...."

"Exactly: he will never forget the house. What can it be to him? He was not born there!"

"He feels at home there."

"Just so. And I do not.... Oh, I ought never to have married him!"

"Tilly, Tilly, what are you saying?"

"I ought never, never to have married him!"

"And you love him, you love him!"

"I have loved him, oh, very dearly. But he is far above me! I do not reach his level! He sacrifices himself for me. And it breaks my heart to accept his sacrifice. It oppresses me! Oh, Mamma, find something, find something for us! Let him go back to you all ... and let me stay here with the children.... I shall live simply ... in a small upper part ... and practise economy. It is all my fault, not his. He is good and kind and magnanimous ... but all that oppresses me. I thought at first that we were—how shall I put it?—akin to each other, kindred natures. When we got married, I used not to think about such things ... but I thought in myself, with an unconscious certainty, that we were akin. He was so nice, so straight-forward and so manly; and that rather elderly something appealed to me: I used to look up to it, without being oppressed by it.... Gradually, gradually I began to feel that he was far above me. Things I like leave him indifferent: little luxuries, fashion, gaiety, society. That hypnotism of his: at first, I used to think, 'This is something new, a new method;' now, I don't know: I am becoming afraid of it! I am becoming afraid of him! There is something in him that frightens me.... Oh, I know, it is only because he is so good and so big and because I feel very small and ordinary, because I don't understand those fine, lofty ideals ... about doing good and about poor people and about self-sacrifice!... To him it all comes natural. He is sacrificing himself now for me: he does not care for the Hague or for his practice here, whereas I could never live at Driebergen again.... And, even if I could feel more or less at home among you all ... even then, even then Addie would oppress me!... Do you understand? Oh, you are crying! Of course you are angry with me: you see your son above everything. That is easily understood; and I ... I still have enough love left for Addie to understand it, to understand it all.... But, you see, the love I still have for him ... is an anxious love, it's a sort of self-reproach that I am as I am and not different, a sort of remorse caused by all kinds of things I don't understand and can't express, things that make me cry when I am by myself and oppress me ... oppress me, until I sometimes feel as if I were suffocating!"

"Hush, dear: here he is!"

They both ceased and listened. They heard Addie's voice: coming home, he had met the children outside the house; Constance and Mathilde heard his deep voice sound kindly, playfully, in the hall. He now opened the door, with Jetje on one arm and little Constant toddling by his side with his hand in his father's.

"Mamma!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "I had no idea that you were here!"

"No, my boy, I came up unexpectedly. I brought Marietje with me and left her with her father and mother."

"You'll stay to lunch, of course?"

"I should like to."

"Why, what's the matter with you, Mamma?"

"The matter?"

"And with you, Mathilde?"

"With me?... Nothing."

He saw that they had been talking together. He said nothing more, however, but played with the children for a while and then released himself and gave them over to the nurse, who had come in.

"The youngsters are looking first-rate, aren't they?"

"We shall have lunch in a minute, Mamma," said Mathilde, tonelessly.

Addie sat down beside his mother, took her hand, smiled. Mathilde left the room with her keys.

"Don't fret, Mamma," he said.

"My boy...."

"You're fretting. You look so sad."

"My dear, my dear ... I...."

"What?"

She gave a sob and laid her hand on his shoulder. She was so frightened, so frightened, that it was as though her great dread stifled her and prevented her from breathing. She trembled in his embrace.

"You won't fret, you won't fret, will you, dear?"

"No."

The maid came to lay the table in the dining-room. Constance controlled herself.

"Mamma," he said, jestingly, now that Mathilde also returned, "you're losing all your vanity! That's a nice old blouse to come and see your son in! Look, it's wearing out at the elbows. Do you know you haven't looked at all smart lately?"

"Oh, my dear boy. This blouse is quite good still!"

"Well, I think it's seen its best days. What do you say, Tilly?"

"Why should I get myself up, an old woman like me?" said Constance.

"You'll never be old, Mummie, and a well-turned-out woman must always remain well-turned-out.... Do you remember the old days?"

"Yes, when...."

"You brought home that fine photograph from Nice?"

She smiled through her tears:

"My boy, that is so long ago!... You thought me a bundle of vanity then."

"The photograph never leaves my writing-table.... Mamma, you mustn't let yourself go like that."

"Very well, I don't wear this blouse any more. ... But it costs so much to dress nicely ... and we have so many expenses."

"You were not rich in the old days," said Mathilde, piqued at something that she did not understand.

"And yet Mamma wore dresses that cost six hundred francs," said Addie, chaffingly.

"Yes; and now that you are well off...."

"Now I never dream of doing such a thing," said Constance, gently.

The luncheon was quiet, a little melancholy, a little constrained. Afterwards, things went a little more merrily because Jetje and Constant came downstairs again with their nurse, suddenly, in a very youthful vision of golden hair seen through the open door. Their little voices chirped like those of young birds; and Constance could not refrain from saying how much they all missed them at Driebergen. For there also they were always coming down the stairs, looking so young and so golden, like a vision of the future, to go walking out of doors. Even in the winter they brought a hint of sunshine and of spring, something refreshing of youth and beginning, a promise of future in the old house which was so gloomily full of things of the past, things that hovered about the rooms, gleamed out of the mirrors, trailed, like strange draughts, along the lightly creaking stairs....

Mathilde did not say much; she was silent and sat with her lips closed and her whole face—her eyes half-shut—closed, after that sudden irresistible betrayal of her feelings to her mother-in-law to whom nevertheless she was attracted by no sort of sympathy.

A little while later, Constance' carriage came to fetch her and Addie offered to go to the Van Saetzema's with her and see how Marietje was.

"And what are you doing, Mathilde?" asked Constance, gently.

"I don't know.... I expect I shall go out.... Or I may stay at home...."

Addie went upstairs to get ready; and Constance suddenly took Mathilde in her arms.

"My dear...."

"Mamma...."

"You did well to speak out to me just now.... However sad it made me feel, you did right."

"Oh, why did I do it? I should have done better to hold my tongue."

"No, no. Speak, oh, do speak to Addie too!"

"I have spoken to him so often!"

"Not lately?"

Mathilde shrugged her shoulders:

"No, not so often lately. What's the use? It's not his fault ... it's six of one and half a dozen of the other ... and it can't be helped."

"Very likely. Only...."

"Only what, Mamma?"

"Be careful, Mathilde, I implore you! Oh, do be careful! Everything, everything can come right again.... You are sure to come together again later ... but be careful, be careful. Don't spoil your life."

They looked deep down into each other's eyes.

"Mathilde, I may speak openly to you, mayn't I? Just because it's I, dear, your mother ... who suffered so very much ... because she spoilt her life so ... spoilt it so ... when she was young ... until life became a torture.... I was a young woman, as you are, Mathilde, and ... and I wasn't happy ... any more than you are, my poor child, at the moment ... and...."

"I know, Mamma," Mathilde replied, shortly.

"Yes, you know ... you know all about it.... Of course you know, dear, though I have not mentioned it to you.... But just ... just because of all that, I may tell you, may I not, to be careful? Oh, do be careful!"

"You are afraid of things that don't exist."

"No, dear, there is nothing.... I know there's nothing ... only...."

"What?"

"You see ... when I arrived this morning...."

"Erzeele was with me."

"Yes."

"He's an old friend."

"I know."

"He came to make an appointment ... to play tennis to-morrow."

"Yes, I heard him."

"There was nothing else."

"He was holding your hand."

"He's an old friend whom I knew as a girl, almost as a child."

"Yes, dear, I know ... but...."

"What do you mean?"

"It *is* dangerous."

"What is?"

"To talk to him too much ... while you're in your present frame of mind. If you're feeling unhappy, dear, about one thing or another ... speak to Addie."

"I've spoken to him so often."

"Confide in him."

"I have."

"And not ... not in Johan Erzeele."

Mathilde's eyes blazed:

"Mamma ... you haven't the right!"

"Yes, dear, I *have*! I not only have the right to tell you this as Addie's mother, but above all I have the right because I understand you, because I am able to understand you, because I remember my own wretchedly unhappy years of despair, as a young married woman, unsatisfied, unhappy, desperate, though for other reasons, alas, than those between you and Addie!... Because I remember all this, Mathilde, because I can never forget, just because I remember, because I now



remember how I used to talk ... to Papa while I was married to my poor old husband ... how I used to talk to Papa ... and try to find consolation in those talks ... and how we worked ourselves up with those talks until ... oh, Mathilde, oh, Mathilde, let me tell you all about it!... Let me tell you all about it, quite simply, even though you know, so that I may have the right to speak to you. I used to talk to Papa ... and we fell in love with each other ... we *thought* we loved each other...."

"And, if you thought so, why didn't you?"

"Because it wasn't true, dear, because it wasn't a burning fire of feeling, because it was an unreal feeling, arising from unreal words between a young woman and a young man until ... until all those talks drove them into each other's arms ... and the awful thing became irrevocable."

"Mamma!"

"I am telling you everything, dear...."

"I know everything, Mamma. But you say you used to have unreal talks with Papa."

"Yes."

"I talk *simply* to Johan."

"My dear, my dear, it's not that. I, I myself was unreal ... in those days ... in my feelings, which came out of books which I had read. Papa used to answer ... out of those same books. You ... you are different: you *are* simple; Erzeele, a friend of your childhood, is simple, a simple-minded fellow; your talks are bound to be different."

"Our talks are simple."

"But, when I came in, I saw that you were talking confidentially, intimately, intimately and eagerly ... and that he was holding your hand, holding your two hands."

"Yes, you saw that: he was consoling me."

"That's exactly what he mustn't do. That's exactly what he mustn't be allowed to do. Oh, Mathilde, I am an old woman and I am your mother, especially now that you have no mother of your own, and I am Addie's mother ... and I understand, I understand everything ... because I myself have suffered so much...."

"Addie's coming downstairs, Mamma."

"Promise me, dear ... to be careful."

"I ... I will be careful."

"And forgive me, forgive me for everything that I have dared to say. Kiss me. Oh, I long so intensely ... for you and Addie to be happy again!"

She took Mathilde in her arms, passionately, and kissed her twice, three times.

Addie entered.

"I'm ready, Mamma. The carriage is waiting."

"I'm coming, I'm coming, my boy."

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## CHAPTER XXV

Summer came suddenly: fine, sunny days followed one after the other, all the windows in the big house were opened and the summer seemed to enter and drive everything of winter out of the open windows. The spreading garden became closely leaved with a green and gold triumph of dense foliage which, lightly stirred by the wind, cast shadows over the pond, with a play of alternating flecks of light and shade. Van der Welcke, strolling along the paths, found pleasure in watching Klaasje, the big girl of thirteen, tearing round the water, pursued by Jack, the new terrier, who barked and barked incessantly with his sharp, throaty bark.

"She is still just like a child," thought Van der Welcke, "and she is developing like a little woman. It is strange, the influence which Addie has over her ... and the way the child is perking up now that the fine days have come. But it is not only the fine days, it is Addie above all that gives her this balance: what's it through, I wonder? Purely through his influence, through a sort of healing magic that flows from him.... It is very strange. The other day, I had a terrible headache; and, when he came and just gave me a little massage, it was gone, quite.... And the way the fellow has succeeded in developing the child's mind, with those picture-books, with those coloured things: it's as though he wanted to affect her by means of colours and glitterings and I don't know what. In any case, it came off; she is really learning her lessons very well; and everything she says is more reasonable and sensible. It's as though she were catching herself up.... Yes, amuse yourself, child.... Look, how wildly excited she is with that dog, like a real child; she's enjoying the fine weather; she's just like a child of nature; and she looks well too: she'll grow into a pretty girl, though she's a trifle heavily built.... She no longer has that stupid look in her eyes; and there's

something kind and genuine about her ... in her behaviour towards old Mamma and Ernst, something motherly and understanding combined, as if she felt she had something in common with their clouded minds. ... It's jolly to look at the child, to see her sprouting and blossoming, exactly like a plant that is now receiving just the right light and just the right amount of water ... and yet she owes it all to Addie and will very likely never know that she owes it to him.... Yes, the fellow wields a wonderful influence.... Alex is keeping his end up now in Amsterdam and seems to be losing some of his melancholia since Addie has been talking to him so regularly: poor chap, he was ten years old when he saw his father lying dead in all that blood; and it affected him for all time!... We were right to take all those children to live with us: that sort of thing gives a man an object in life, even me, though I myself do nothing, though it's Constance and Addie who act. I feel a certain satisfaction, even though I just let them do as they please.... Who would ever have thought that it would become like this, the big, lonely house, where Father and Mother lived so very long and sadly by themselves, now so full, as a refuge for Constance' family? It turned out so strangely, so very strangely.... Oh, if my boy were only happier!... Who would have thought that he, he who has everything in his favour, should go falling in love with a woman who cannot make him happy? I am always thinking about it. I get up with it, I go to bed with it; I see the two of them in the smoke of my cigarette; and I am beginning to worry and worry about it: a proof that I'm getting old.... And I can see that Constance also worries about it, that the thought of Addie ... and that woman is always, always with her ... oh, everything might have turned out so happily!... But it was not to be, it was not to be.... A lovely summer morning like this almost makes a fellow melancholy.... Yes, it makes you melancholy because you know for certain that it won't long remain so, that calmness in the air, that beautiful clear sky, that green and gold of the trees, and that it will soon become different, soon become different, full of sadness and of gloomy things."

He suddenly spread out his arms, for Klaasje, pursued by the dog, came rushing down the path in his direction without seeing him, as it were blinded by the game which she was playing.

"Uncle Henri, Uncle Henri, let me go! Jack will catch me!"

"Mind and don't tumble into the water," Van der Welcke warned her; but she had already released herself from his arms and was running on, with the dog after her.

"She's gone wild," he thought, "wild with the joy of life. She is beginning to wake up, physically and mentally. It is as though a twilight were withdrawing from her, a twilight which is beginning to steal over me. What is the matter with me? What do I feel? Oh, I long to go bicycling, to go for a long spin ... but Addie's not here; and, even when he is, he has no time, and Guy's working!... Suppose I asked Gerdy: she's fond of a little run."

He went in, through the conservatory: the old woman was sitting there, staring quietly out of the window; Adèletje was busy with the plants.

"Well, Mummie, how are you? What do you say to this fine weather?"

"What?"

"What do you say, Mum, to this fine weather?"

The old lady nodded her head contentedly:

"Lovely, lovely," she said. "The wet monsoon is over. But tell Gertrude ... to be careful ... of the river ... behind the Palace."

Her voice sounded like a voice from the past and spoke of things of the past.

"Where is Gerdy?" Van der Welcke asked Adèletje.

"In the drawing-room. Uncle Paul's in there, playing."

He heard the piano: Paul was improvising. Van der Welcke found Gerdy leaning over the back of her chair, very pale.

"I say, dear, come for a ride with me. It'll freshen you up."

She looked at him dejectedly, shook her head:

"I have a headache."

"That's just why you ought to come, dear. Come along, do ... to please me."

He stroked her hair. She took his hand and put it to her lips.

"Come."

"Really, Uncle, my head's too bad."

"Then, why don't you go and sit in the garden? It's so hot in here."

"Aunt Constance is taking me for a drive presently; and Mary's coming with us."

"Paul, can't you ride a bicycle? There's one of Addie's which you could have."

"No, my dear chap, it makes you so hot. And all that perspiring is such a dirty business."

"Well, in that case," thought Van der Welcke, "I'll go on my own, but it's not particularly cheerful."

If only Guy weren't working! I can't very well take him from his work ... to come cycling! So I'll go on my own.... Lord, Lord, how boring!... How boring everything and everybody is ... without my boy! How that poor Gerdy is moping!... No. I can't endure it, I can't do it, I can't go bicycling by myself.... I'll ask Guy to come. It'll do him good: the boy is too healthy to be always sitting with a pile of books round him."

Van der Welcke went upstairs, reflecting that Addie would not approve at all if he knew that his own father was taking Guy from his work ... to go bicycling, as he had often taken Addie himself in the past.

"But Addie has so much method, he used to divide his time so splendidly between his work, his mother ... and me," thought Van der Welcke. "Still, to-day, I simply can *not* go bicycling on my own ... and so I'll just play the part of the tempter."

He had reached the first storey; and here too the windows on the passage were wide open and the summer, fragrant and radiant, entered the gloomy old house, whose brown shadows vanished in patches of sunlight. The sunlight glided along the dark walls, the oak doors, the worn stairs, along the faded carpets and curtains and through the open doors; and it was strange, but all this new summer, however much Van der Welcke had longed for it throughout the long, dreary winter, the winter of wind and rain, now failed to cheer him, on the contrary, depressed him with inexplicable sadness.

He now opened the door of Addie's study. Since Addie and Mathilde had moved to the Hague, the room had remained the same as regards furniture, but somehow dead; only in the morning Guy usually sat working at his table by the window and Van der Welcke was sure to find him there. But he was not there; and the books and maps had obviously not been opened or looked at.

"Where can the boy be?" thought Van der Welcke. "He can't still be in bed."

The room did not look as if anyone had been there that morning. There were a couple of letters on Addie's writing-table, where the maids always left any that arrived for him at the old address, so that he might find them when he came down, once or twice a week, for the brief visit to which every one at home looked forward.

Van der Welcke moodily closed the door:

"I'd better see if he is still upstairs," he thought, going up the second flight.

Since Guy had given up his bedroom to Marietje van Saetzema, he slept in a little dressing-room. The door was open; the bed was made.

"The fellow must have gone out already," thought Van der Welcke. "It's a dirty trick not to let me know. Well, I shall go by myself: I need some air."

Angrily he went downstairs, through the hall, to the outhouse where the bicycles were kept. Guy's was not there.

"There, I said so: he's gone out and never even let me know. Oh, it's always like that: those children are always selfish. We do everything for them, when they've got no claim on us; and what sort of thanks do we receive?... The boy knows that I'm fond of him, that I like cycling with him when Addie's not here, but he doesn't so much as think of looking for me and asking me to go with him.... It's all egoism, it's always thinking of your own self.... If there's any paying to be done, that's all right, that's what Uncle Henri's there for; but the least little thought for me ... not a bit of it!... That's the way it goes. I've lost Addie ... and tried to find him again in another and it's simply impossible and ridiculous."

Still young and active, he slung himself on his bicycle and for a minute or two enjoyed the motion of the handsome, glittering machine, as it glided down the summer lanes; but very soon he began to think, gloomily:

"A motor-car I should have liked to have. I'm not buying one because of those everlasting boys: life is expensive enough as it is.... And instead of Guy's thinking of me now and again.... Ah, well, if you want to do good to others, you must just do it because it is good; for to expect the least bit of gratitude is all rot!"

No, cycling alone did not console him; his handsome, glittering, nickel-plated machine glided listlessly down the summer lanes and he suddenly turned round:

"That's enough for me ... all by myself, without anybody or anything...."

And he rode back home slowly, put the machine away and looked at the empty stand where Guy usually kept his machine.

"Have you seen Guy?" asked Constance, meeting her husband in the hail.

"He's out," said Van der Welcke, curtly and angrily.

"He hasn't been working," she added. "I always look into Addie's study to see if Guy is at work: Addie asked me to."

"No, he has not been working; he's...."

"Out?"

"Yes, with his bicycle."

"They why didn't he ask you to go with him?"

"I'm sure *I* don't know," said Van der Welcke, angrily, shrugging his shoulders.

Constance too did not think it friendly of Guy:

"What does it mean?" she wondered to herself. "He ought to have been working, but, if he wanted to go cycling, he might really have let his uncle know."

And her soul too became filled with melancholy, because young people were inevitably so ungrateful. But she said nothing to Van der Welcke; and they never knew that they often thought and felt alike, as in an imperceptible harmony of approaching old age that found only a negative expression: they so seldom quarrelled nowadays, at most exchanged a single irritable word, even though no deep sympathy had ever come to them....

Constance went to her room to put on a hat; the carriage was ordered; she was going for a drive with the girls. She felt worried about poor Gerdy, who no longer took pleasure in anything:

"It will pass," she thought. "We have all of us, in our time, been through a phase of melancholy.... Adeline told me that Gerdy was in love with Erzeele ... but he doesn't appear to think about her.... Oh, how I worry and worry about it all: about my poor boy, about Mathilde!... Erzeele is bound ... is bound to be attracted by her.... Come, I need air, in this fine weather; and yet this warm air oppresses me: the summer is always oppressive in our country. The weather in our country is always *becoming* something: it never has become anything, like the weather in the south; it is becoming, always becoming something.... It's sultry now, the sun is scorching; we are sure to have a storm this evening."

She now left her room, ready, and thought:

"Addie is coming to lunch to-day; it's his day: oh, how I always long for that day!... Last time, he had to answer some letters and ran for ink for his writing-table. I'll just see if everything is in order now."

She entered the room that used to be Addie's study:

"Yes, the ink's there," she told herself, with a glance at the writing-table. "How unc cosy, how cold the room looks, with nothing but the old furniture, the old man's furniture!... There are letters for Addie again: the poor boy never has any rest...."

Casually she took a step towards the table and was struck by the appearance of the letters:

"What is that?" she thought.

The letters—there were three of them—were without stamps or postmarks: it was this that had struck her.

"Bills?" she wondered for a moment.

Then she shivered and began to tremble so violently that she dropped into Addie's chair. She had recognized Guy's hand.

There were three letters. One was addressed to herself and her husband: to "Uncle Henri and Aunt Constance...." The second: to "Addie...." The third: to "Mamma...."

She sat distraught, staring at the three letters vacantly, without putting out her hand. A cloud of white squares seemed to whirl about her: it was as if the envelopes were flying round in a circle before her eyes. And she felt suddenly faint.

"What is it? What does it mean?" she asked herself, aloud.

She looked at Guy's work-table: the books were there, neatly arranged on the big atlases. She got up and trembled so violently that she felt herself sinking away, into an abyss. She rang the bell. The door was open. She heard the maid on the stairs:

"Truitje!"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Truitje, I'm here ... in Mr. Addie's study."

"What is it, ma'am?"

"Call your master ... at once."

"But how pale you look, ma'am! What is it, ma'am?"

"Nothing, Truitje. Call the master at once."

"Aren't you well?"

"Yes, yes, only call the master."

The maid went away in dismay; the stairs creaked under her hurried tread.... Constance had sunk back into the chair again and sat waiting. Downstairs the piano sounded, under Paul's fingers,

and she followed the tune, *Siegmund's Love-song*:

"He plays well, he plays well," she thought.

She was half-fainting; the white squares still surrounded her, because of the three letters, there, on the table.

She now heard a footstep on the stairs; she followed the creaking as it came nearer. It was her husband, at last.

"What's the matter, Constance?"

Her throat would not allow a word to pass; she merely pointed to the table.

"Well, what is it? Letters? For Addie?"

She continued to point. He looked, recognized Guy's hand. He glanced at her; she said nothing. He now opened the letter to "Uncle Henri and Aunt Constance":

"Has the boy gone mad?"

Constance looked up with a question in her eyes. Every kind of thought raced through her, so rapidly that she could not follow them. And yet she seemed to see one thought flash across them slantwise: had three letters from Alex been lying there, from Alex who was always so much obsessed by the vision of terror and blood that had shocked his young imagination, she would have feared the worst.

Van der Welcke handed her the letter without a word; she read it greedily. Guy wrote briefly, wrote difficult, sincere words of gratitude. Oh, it was not want of gratitude to Uncle Henri and Aunt Constance that had made him go without taking leave of all who were dear to him! He was not ungrateful to Addie! But it was just because under all his cheerfulness he had felt himself quietly growing sad under all their kindness ... while he found it impossible to go on working. And of course he knew that, if he had said to Addie, "I can't work at books; what I want, very vaguely and I don't know how, is to make my own way," Addie would have let him go, because Addie understood everybody and everything so well. But it was just this, the conversations, the leave-takings, that he feared, because within him there was so much inert weakness, because he could never have gone, if he had had to speak, if he had had to take leave; and that was why he was going away like this, with his bicycle and his bit of pocket-money.

"But the boy's mad!" cried Van der Welcke. "To clear out like this at his age, with no money and just his bicycle! The boy's mad! I must telegraph to Addie at once."

"He will be out ... and on his way to us: this is his day for coming down."

"Which train does he come by?"

"The half-past eleven as a rule."

The girls, Gerdy and Mary, came in, with their hats on:

"Are you coming, Aunt? The carriage is there."

"The carriage?"

"When we've been for our drive, we can fetch Addie from the station," said Mary.

Constance burst into sobs.

"Auntie, Auntie, what's the matter?"

Van der Welcke left the room, taking the letter for Addie with him:

"How are we to tell her?" he thought to himself.

Constance, upstairs, had an attack of nerves. She sobbed as violently, felt as miserable in the depths of her being as if it had been her own child that had left the paternal house ... for good.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

In the midst of the sunshine on that summer day a spirit of melancholy descended upon the whole of the big house and set the nerves of all the inmates tingling. Addie had been, had read Guy's letter, had left at once ... for Rotterdam. Downstairs, in the morning-room, Adeline sobbed without ceasing; and from the sunlit conservatory the old grandmother stared at her through the vista of the rooms, because she did not understand.... Adeline lay sobbing in Emilie's arms; Marie and Paul were with her too; upstairs, Adèletje and Mary remained with Constance. Brauws appeared at the door:

"What has happened?" he asked, in a whisper.

Van der Welcke seized him by the arm, took him into the garden. Klaasje lay half-asleep against the thick trunk of a beech, with Jack nestling in her little skirts, both tired with playing. The child

was humming a tune, looking up at the sky, dreaming away amid all the gold that rained down upon her from between the leaves like glittering coins.

"What has happened?" Brauws asked again.

But Van der Welcke could not speak; his throat refused to let the words through.

"Good-morning, Uncle Brauws!" cried Klaasje, dreamily. "Look, Uncle Brauws, I'm very rich. It's raining golden sovereigns over me ... out of the beech-tree, out of the beech-tree!... Out of the beech-tree golden sovereigns are raining over Klaasje!" she hummed rhythmically.

"Hans," asked Brauws, "what's the matter, old fellow?"

"It's that idiot of a Guy!" said Van der Welcke, at last, hoarsely. "I was looking for him this morning, couldn't find him anywhere. His bicycle was gone.... He has cleared out. He left three letters behind him: for his mother, for Addie and for us. He writes that he can't work at books, that he wants to try his own way.... I've read all the letters.... He tells Addie ... that he feels that he must stand alone ... that he must stand alone if he's to do any good ... that ... in this house...."

Van der Welcke gave a sob.

"Well?"

"He feels himself growing flabby ... because there's too much affection, too much leniency for him.... That's the sort of thing he writes.... Who would have thought the boy was so silly?... He writes that he won't do any good ... if he stays here.... That he wants to go and face the world.... A boy of his age!... The most ridiculous idea I've ever heard of!..."

"The boy may be right," said Brauws, very gently.

But Van der Welcke was not listening:

"I shall miss him," he confessed. "I miss him now. He was my favourite ... among them all. He consoled me for the loss of Addie.... I loved him as my own son; so ... so did Constance."

Brauws was silent.

"Life is a damned, rotten encumbrance!" said Van der Welcke, explosively. "We do everything for those children, we do everything for that boy; and, all of a sudden, he goes away ... instead of ... instead of staying with us, causes us sorrow breaks his poor mother's heart.... He writes about America.... Addie went straight to the station to make enquiries. He was going on to Rotterdam. Addie ... Addie never has a moment's peace.... He was looking tired as it was, tired and sad; and, instead of having a day's rest ... with us ... with all of us ... I wanted to go with him ... but he said he preferred to go alone.... Why not have told Addie ... that he would rather do something else ... than go into the Post Office?... God, we'd have been glad enough to help him! ... He—Addie—does everything ... does every blessed thing for the children.... Oh, Brauws, it's as if a son of my own had run away ... run away in a fit of madness!... Addie has gone to Rotterdam. It was Addie's idea, Rotterdam. But Guy can just as well have gone to Antwerp, to Le Havre, to God knows where!... He hadn't much money with him.... What will he do, what were his plans?..."

The sunny summer day passed gloomily: just a telegram from Addie, "Coming to-morrow," without any further explanation. Constance had found the strength to go to Adeline in her room; the girls were overcome with a silent stupefaction, at the thought that Guy, their cheerful Guy, kept so much hidden under his light-heartedness: a deeper dissatisfaction with life, vague and unclear to all of them, who were so happy to be with Uncle Henri and Aunt Constance in what had so long been their family house, since they had been quite small children; and, when Alex arrived in the evening from Amsterdam, he too could not understand why Guy had felt a need so suddenly to go away from all of them, without taking leave, with that queer idea of making his way in the world alone.... On the contrary, he—Alex—valued in the highest degree all that Uncle, Aunt and Addie did for him: without them, he would never have made any headway in the world and he was making headway at last, he thought. He was now working methodically at Amsterdam and almost methodically making his melancholy yield ground: it was as though Addie inspired him with the love of work and the love of life, wooing to life in him the strength to become a normal member of society, oh, he felt it so clearly! After every talk with Addie he felt it once more, felt strength enough to stay one week in Amsterdam, to work, to live, to see the dreaded life—which his father had escaped by suicide come daily closer and closer, nearer and nearer, like a ghostly vista, at first viewed anxiously and darkly, but later entered, walked into, inevitably, until all the ghostliness of it was close around him.... And, when he thought of his father and always saw him lying, in a pool of blood, with his mother's body flung across the corpse in all the terror of despair, then at the same time he would think of Addie and reflect that life, no doubt, would not be gay but that nevertheless it need not always hark back out of black spectral dread to his youth ... because Addie spoke of being strong and becoming a man gradually.... And Guy had gone, had evaded just that beneficial, strengthening influence of Addie!... No, Alex also could not understand it; and that evening he remained sitting gloomily between his sisters, not knowing what he could say to comfort his mother.... The next day was Sunday; and, if he did not see Addie on Sunday, he knew that the following week would not be a good one for him in Amsterdam, would be a bad, black week....

And it was only Grandmamma and Ernst and Klaasje who did not feel oppressed by the sombre, sudden, incomprehensible and unexpected event which the others were all trying to understand

and explain: to them the summer day had been all sunlight and the gloom had passed unperceived by them.

Next morning Addie returned. Constance, who was quite unstrung, had been twice and three times to the station in vain. At last she saw him:

"You didn't find him?" she asked, with conviction.

"Yes, I did."

"What? You found him? How? How was it possible?"

"I had an idea that he couldn't go farther than Rotterdam: he hadn't much money on him. I hunted and hunted until I found him."

"And you haven't brought him back with you!"

"No, I let him go."

"You let him go?"

"I think it's best: he was very anxious to go. He was angry at my finding him. I talked to him for a long time. He said that he wished to be under no more obligations, fond though he was of us, grateful though he felt...."

Constance, trembling, had taken Addie's arm; they went home on foot; the road lay in a bath of summer under the trees.

"He spoke sensibly. He had a vague idea of working his passage on a steamer as a sailor or stoker. I took a ticket for him. He will write to us regularly. I told him that Mr. Brauws, if he liked, could certainly give him some introductions in New York. He said he would see. He showed a certain decision, as if he were doing violence to something in his own character. It was rather strange.... I thought that I ought not to compel him to come back. He told me that he was certain of not passing his examination and that this was what got on his mind and upset him, that he couldn't concentrate on his books, that he would now look after himself.... There was a boat going to London; I gave him some money.... It's better this way, Mamma. Let him stand on his own legs. Here, the way things were going, he might have gone drudging on...."

She wept distractedly:

"We shall miss him so.... He was the life of the house.... Papa, Papa will miss him badly.... Oh, it's terrible!... Poor, poor Adeline!"

They reached home.

"Let me speak to Aunt Adeline first."

"My dear, my dear, make everything right.... Oh, put it so that Aunt thinks it right and accepts it: you can do everything, dear!"

"No, Mamma, I can't do everything."

"You can do everything, you *can*. What should we have done without you? Now that you have found him and talked to him and made things smooth for him, perhaps everything will be all right for him. If you hadn't found him ...! How did you know that he had gone to Rotterdam?"

"I felt almost sure of it, Mummie. But I didn't know anything for certain. I might have been mistaken."

"You look so tired."

"I have had a tiring day."

"Addie, to people outside, to the family we will say...."

"That he has gone to America ... a sudden idea ... with introductions from Mr. Brauws."

"My dear, how can you talk of it so calmly?"

"Mummie, perhaps it's better as it is ... for him. He was doing no good here. He wasn't working. And he was getting enervated in the midst of all his relations. He has developed a sudden energy; it would be a pity to stifle it. I ... I simply could not bring myself to do that."

"My boy, do you tell your aunt. Tell Papa, too, tell all of them, tell his sisters and Alex. I ... I can't tell them. I should only cry. I'm going upstairs, to my room. You'll tell them, won't you? You'll make it appear as if it's all right, as if it's quite natural, as if it's all for the best."

"Yes, Mummie dear, you go upstairs. I.. I'll tell it them, I'll tell all of them...."

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## CHAPTER XXVII

The oppressive, sultry, rainless summer days followed one after the other; and the night also waited in oppressive expectation of oppressive things, which were to happen and never happened, as though what we expected to happen immediately withdrew and withdrew farther and only hung over houses and people with heavy stormy skies: skies of blazing morning blue, until great grey-white clouds blew up from a mysterious cloudland and drifted past on high; only on the more distant horizons was there any lightning; and that came soundlessly, later in the day; the threat of a thunderstorm drove past; the foliage became scorched in the dust of advancing summer and faded with the approach of decay; and there was, almost, a sort of longing for autumn and for purple death in autumnal storms: a nature, tired with heavy, trailing summer life, that had never finally become anything and was always becoming something, never flashing forth in a bright achievement of summer but dragging her incompleteness from heavy day to heavy day, under the heavy immensity of skies, towards the later bursting delights of autumn: heavy wind, heavy rain, followed by the heavy death-struggle and unwillingness to die of that which had never been the glory of the sun and yet left no golden memory behind....

Often in those oppressive nights Marietje van Saetzema could not get to sleep, or else woke up with a sudden start. She had been dreaming that she was falling down an abyss, or gliding down a staircase or bumping her head against the ceiling, like a giant bluebottle. Then she would get up, draw the curtains and look out at the heavy night of trees, grey with darkness melting into darkness: the road beyond the house was grey, like an ashen path; the oak and beeches showed grey, their leafy tops unruffled by the wind; in the front garden the dust-covered standard roses stood erect as pikes and the roses drooped from them, grey and with the tired, pining attitude of heavy flowers hanging from limp stalks. All was grey and silent: only, in the very far distance, a dog barked. And the bedroom, still dark with the night—the nightlight had gone out—began to stifle Marietje so much that she softly opened the door and went through the attic, though Addie had forbidden her to wander about like this at night. She went carefully in noiseless slippers, pale in her night-dress, staring wide-eyed into the grey indoor twilight. She passed the doors of the maids' bedrooms and down the first flight of stairs, stepping very lightly, so that the stairs did not creak. Once on the staircase she breathed more freely, with relief at feeling something more spacious than the air of her room, the relief of unfettered movement, although the grey silence wove such strange great cobwebs all around her, through which she walked down the endless passages. She now went past Uncle's door, Aunt's door, Mamma's door, the girls' doors, past Addie's and Mathilde's empty rooms ... and she felt that she was very much in love with Addie, silently and without desire, and was always thinking of him, even though she did not always do as he told her, because she simply could not remain in her room and longed even for the out-of-door air, to feel it blowing through the filmy tissues that covered her young body. And, however much without desire, because Addie remained to her the utterly unattainable, yet there blossomed up in her a nervous passion like some strange flower or orchid or lily, seen in a waking dream, a blameless girl's dream of love, of soft, wistful lying in each other's arms and feeling the pressure of breast against breast or mouth against mouth and ecstatic thrills through all one's body.... Then Marietje would long for Addie, so that he might lay his hand upon her head: no more, that was enough for her, because she was also very fond of him, of his voice and his glance and his speech, of his care, of his sympathy, of everything abstract that came from him to her; she knew that, on his side, it was no more than gentle interest, but it was enough for her: she lived upon little like a bloodless lily, her body and soul needing no excess. She well knew at the moment that she was doing what she should not, wandering like that through the house, half awake, half asleep, because it was so fresh and cool to walk about like that half-naked. The night grew grey with dusk and there were deeper shadows in the corners, but she was not afraid, after she had once talked to Addie about the house and he had explained to her that, *if* there was anything of the past hovering about it, it could not be malign or angry, but rather well-disposed and on the alert, in case it could be of use.... He spoke to nobody but her like this; she knew that and it gave her a deep love for him, especially because he had said it so very simply and without any sort of exaggeration, as though it were the very simplest thing that he could have wished to say.... Nor did he speak like that often; once or twice at most he had spoken so; but it had reassured her greatly, ever since she had been frightened into fainting on the little staircase, all because of a sudden shadow which she thought that she saw and yet did not know if she really saw....

She was now going down by that same little back staircase, almost longing to see a shadow and always thinking of Addie; but she saw nothing. White and as though walking in her sleep, she felt her way down the narrow little stairs. They creaked slightly. She next opened a door, leading into the long hall, which was like that of an old castle, so fine with its old wainscoting. The long Deventer carpet was paled by many years' traffic of feet; the front door seemed to vanish in the grey vista; on the oak cabinet the Delft jars gleamed dimly.... She walked in a waking dream on her noiseless slippers and now opened the door of the morning-room, all dark, with the blinds down—she was very white now in the darkness and could see her own whiteness—and she looked through the drawing-room into the conservatory, where Grannie was always accustomed to sit. The conservatory-windows showed faintly like transparent greynesses; and behind them, in the dawning light of very early morning, something of the dusk of the garden melted away: in the very early light it was all ash, the conservatory full of fading ash and the garden full of ash. Not an outline was visible as yet; and she gazed and gazed ... and thought it so strange—and yet perhaps not so very strange—that such outlines as did stand out in the conservatory against the grey windows were motionless as the outlines of two dark shadows sitting each at a window, as it were an old man and an old woman, looking out at the birth of morning, which very far in the distance gave just a reflexion of paler twilight....

Marietje now closed her eyes for an instant, then raised her lids again and stared at the



conservatory; and it was always that: the outline of the dark, brooding shadows, so very similar to unconsciousness, as if she were looking through atmosphere within atmosphere, invisible at other hours than those of the greyness of the ending night and the beginning of the morning melancholy.... The two irrealities remained grey against grey; and suddenly Marietje felt very cold and shivered, half naked as she was; and, in her shivering, it seemed to her that, very quickly, the shadows themselves shivered, as with a start of surprise, and disappeared, because she had dared to stare at them. Nothing was outlined any more against the conservatory-windows; only the morning between the trees grew paler: there was even a streak of white....

Marietje was cold. She left the room, forgot to shut the door after her and, going down the passage, made for the little back staircase and here also forgot to shut the door. Up, up she crept, shivering, with the noiseless tread of the soft slippers; across the attic now; and she stole into bed, quite cooled, and, after just thinking about what she had seen dimly outlined—perhaps—against the grey conservatory-windows, she fell asleep, peacefully, and dozed until late in the morning, peacefully and like a cold virgin now, with the bedclothes drawn up to her chin.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

Addie was out in the afternoon when Mathilde opened Constance' telegram:

"Please come see Emilie."

"There's always something," Mathilde grumbled to herself. "Addie is physician-in-ordinary to his relations. When it's not Klaasje, it's Adèletje, or Mary, or Emilie. There's always something.... What can be the matter with her now? He's only just been home. Oh, of course, she's always ill in the summer! I expect it's the same as last year...."

She had an angry impulse to tear up the telegram and say nothing to Addie, to tell him later that it must have gone astray. She did not destroy it, however, but laid it on the table where he would see it and then went out to the tennis-club. As a rule, she took the steam-tram<sup>[1]</sup> and alighted at the Witte Brug. This time, she ran against Erzeele, with his racket in his hand, in the Bezuidenhout.

"I was waiting for you," he said.

"How nice of you!... Let's take the steam-tram."

"Why not walk?"

They stepped out, along the Hertenkamp.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"Why?"

"You look so preoccupied."

"Oh, it's nothing!"

"You're out of humour."

"Need I say they want Addie again at home?"

"Who's ill this time?"

"Emilie."

"Mrs. van Raven?"

"Yes, she calls herself Mrs. van Naghel now."

"I know. She's the one who ran away with her brother, years ago."

"There was rather a scandal about that, wasn't there?"

"People didn't exactly know...."

"I don't like her. She's ill every summer. Then she becomes funny. And then she has to see my husband of course. Hence the telegram from Mamma."

"The other day ... Mrs. van der Welcke saw...."

"Saw what?"

"That I was holding your hand."

"What about it? You're a friend. We've known each other for years, since we were quite young.... Do you know, Mamma warned me against you...."

"Against me?"

"She was afraid that...."

"What?"

"You would fall in love with me."

"I am in love with you."

"Now, Johan, you're not to say that."

"You know I always have been."

"You were in love with Gerdy."

"For a minute only.... With you I have always been in love. Long ago. At our Cinderella dances.... In love? I've always loved you."

"You must not talk like that. I ... I love my husband."

"Yes, I know you do. But he doesn't make you happy."

She was silent. She did not wish to go on and say that she felt Addie so far above her, unattained and incomprehensible, that everything was coming to escape her, that her love was escaping her, that she felt herself sinking slowly, slowly, in a vague abyss, that it was only the children who made her find Addie again, every day, for a moment. She was silent. But there were tears in her eyes. Her healthy temperament, now slightly unnerved, had a need of much happiness for itself, even as a healthy plant needs much air and much water and does not know what it means to pine. The melancholy that sometimes overcame her was not native to her.

"Let's take the tram," she said. "I feel tired."

"It's better for you to walk," he said.

His voice was authoritative; and she allowed herself to be coerced: it was a hot afternoon and she dragged herself along mechanically beside him, both carrying their own rackets.

"Mamma's quite right, Johan," she said, abruptly. "It won't do for us to see each other so often, for me to talk to you so ... intimately."

"And why not, if you feel unhappy, if you want to unburden yourself to me?"

"No, no, it doesn't do.... Come, let's take the tram: we shall be too late for our tennis."

He looked out mechanically for the tram. They were at the corner of the Waalsdorp road; and he said:

"Look here, walk a little way with me. I don't feel like tennis. Do you?"

She let herself be dragged along and turned down the lonely, green road. She seemed to surrender feebly to his wishes; and she became aware that she was in a profound state of melancholy, a hesitation of not knowing things, of wavering, of feeling unhappy.

"Everything could have been so different," she said, almost crying.

"What do you mean? When?"

"If Addie...."

"If he what?"

"I don't know," she said. "I'm tired of thinking about it. It is not his fault."

"No, it's your fault."

"My fault?"

"Yes! Nothing would keep you from marrying him.... And I loved you."

"You? But you never asked me!"

"But you knew that I loved you. Yes, everything could have been different, oh, everything could have been so very different!"

She suddenly began to cry.

"Tilly!"

"Oh," she said, sobbing, "don't let us talk like this! Let's go to the tennis-club."

"No, no, I don't want to."

She turned.

"Tilly...."

"No, I won't go any farther. I'm going to the club. It'll distract me ... to play tennis."

She turned back; he followed her.

"Tilly, you're so unstrung. If you were a little calmer, I should tell you...."

"What?"

"That I can't bear to see you unhappy. Oh, I love you, I love you! Let us go away ... together."

"Go away? Where?"

"With each other. I love you, I love you, I have always loved you."

She stopped with a start:

"You're mad!"

"Why?"

"To suggest such a thing," she said, with a scornful laugh. "You're mad. You think that I...."

"Want to be unhappy all your life?"

"That I should consent to run away with you. I love my husband ... and my children ... and you imagine...."

"Yes," he said, "it was mad of me to suggest it. You love your husband, not me. You never allow me anything, not anything."

"Nothing ... at all?" she asked, scornfully.

"Nothing ... that counts," he retorted, hoarsely, roughly.

She shrugged her shoulders:

"You men always want ... that. Our happiness does not always consist ... of that."

"No, but ... if you loved me ... entirely...."

"Johan!" she cried.

They crossed the bridge and entered the Woods.

"If you ever dare speak to me like that again...."

"Very well, I won't."

"But you're always doing it.... We'd better not see each other at all."

"Not see each other?"

"No."

"I won't have that," he said. "I won't have that either."

"And if I insist?"

"Even so."

"You don't make me any happier by talking like that; you make me even unhappier than I am."

"Oh, Tilly, I can't bear to see you unhappy!... What are we to do, what are we to do?"

"I don't know," she said, in a dead voice.

"You don't care for me."

"Not in that way. Why shouldn't we be friends?"

"That's nonsense. Friendship between a man and a woman? That's one of those notions which you picked up, I dare say, at Driebergen, among neurotic people. Between a man and a woman there's only ... yearning. I want you and I am in hell because I haven't got you."

"Yes, it's always ... that," she said; and she thought of Addie.

"Oh, if you would only go with me ... out of this."

"Would that make me happy?"

"I should live for you entirely. I have a little money...."

"That would make me happy, would it? To leave my husband, to leave my children?"

"Your husband, your children? But I should be there!"

"Yes, but...."

"You don't care for me."

"Not like that."

"All the same, you would become happy.... You never found happiness in your husband—you say so yourself—because you don't understand him. You would understand me."

She began to cry again:

"Oh," she said, "don't go on talking like that!"

"Do you care for me, Tilly, do you care for me?"

"Yes, Johan, I do care for you."

"Well?"

She stood still:

"Listen," she said, looking him straight in the eyes. "I care for you." Her voice sounded loving in spite of herself. "I care for you ... very much indeed. At this moment, perhaps even more than for Addie ... I'm not quite sure. A time may come ... *may* come, when I shall care for you even *more* ... certainly more than for Addie."

"Oh," he cried, "but then...."

"Don't speak," she said. "Listen to me. What you're asking of me ... I refuse."

"Why?"

"Because I am an honest woman.... Because I am naturally an honest woman.... Because I always mean to be an honest woman.... I could never do what you ask me to.... Because, even if I had to say good-bye to my husband, I should never, never be willing to say good-bye to my children."

"You love your children better?"

"Better? I love them in a way which a man like you simply cannot understand."

"Tilly! Tilly!"

"Be quiet!... There are people coming.... Be quiet!"

"Oh, Tilly, what then?"

"I don't know," she said, dully. "Oh, come along to the club; we'll play some tennis!"

She quickened her pace; he followed her, lurching like a drunken man.

- [1] Running from the Hague to Scheveningen through the Dunes, as opposed to the electric tram running through the Scheveningen Woods.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

When Addie found the telegram he at once took the train to Driebergen. It was evening when he arrived.

"What's the matter with Emilie?" he asked his mother.

"She's crying all day long," said Constance. "It's just like last year."

He went straight upstairs to Emilie's room and found her sobbing, sobbing in Adeline's arms.

"I'm at my wits' ends what to do with her," said Adeline.

"Leave me alone with her for a moment, Aunt," whispered Addie. "Here," feeling in his pocket, "here's a letter from Guy, posted in New York. You'll see that he has found work, thanks to Mr. Brauws' introduction."

Adeline left the room; Emilie went on sobbing. She flung herself on the floor, with her face against a chair and her hair dishevelled, her thin hands grasping the chair.

"Addie!" she cried. "Addie! Is that you?"

"Yes, Emilie."

"Oh, it's suffocating me, it's suffocating me!... Let me tell you about it!..."

He sat down and she came to him with the movement of an animal creeping towards him. She stammered incoherent words, but he understood them: he knew the words of old; he knew what she was saying: it had been the same thing last year and the year before. At the beginning of each summer there was some fit of madness which mastered her, a fit in which she lived all over again through things that had happened in the years long ago. Oh, it was a terrible secret which she always carried about with her, which no one knew, which no one had ever known! In the dark room, with the closed sun-blinds, the secret stifled her and had to be told, because it stifled her in her heart and throat.

"I must tell it you, Addie.... It was during those last days, those terrible days in Paris. Eduard, my husband, was in Paris and ... and he had been threatening me.... You remember, you *must* remember: I told you as much as that, didn't I?... He had come to look for me in Paris. He hated me ... and he hated, oh, how he hated Henri!... Henri, my poor brother, my brother!... Addie, Addie, let me tell you everything!... Whatever people may have thought, whatever people may

have said, none of it's true, it's all false! He was my brother, my own brother; and I loved him as a brother, though perhaps too much; and he loved me as a sister, though perhaps too much.... Oh, people are so wicked, so utterly wicked! They thought, they said ... As for me, I would never speak. Oh, Addie, your parents and you, your kindest and dearest of parents, never asked me a question, but took me to live with them in their house, which has become my sanctuary, where I can lead my cloistered life! Oh, Addie, I shall be grateful for ever and ever to your dear parents ... and to you! They never asked me anything, they have been like father and mother to me; I have been able to live under their roof, though my life has been nothing but remorse and pain.... Oh, Addie, let me tell you everything!... Henri was a clown in a circus—you know about that—and I, I made money by painting. We lived ... we lived together; we were both of us happy; then Eduard came.... Oh, he was like an evil spirit! Oh, when I dream of him now, I dream of a devil! Addie, Eduard came!... And it was he ... it was he...."

"I know, Emilie, I know."

The words burst from her in a scream:

"It was he ... he ... he ... who murdered Henri!"

"Hush, Emilie."

"Oh, I can't keep silent, I can't keep silent for ever; it chokes me, it chokes me, here!"

She uttered loud, hysterical cries, twisting herself against the chair; her eyes stared distractedly out of her face; her hair hung loose about her cheeks; her features were pale and distorted.

"It was after an evening when he had been playing in the circus ... and Eduard ... Eduard...."

"I know, I know.... Hush, Emilie!"

"He waited for him ... in the passage in front of the house where we lived ... and ... and he called him names ... they quarrelled.... Then ... then he *stabbed* him ... with a knife!"

"Hush, Emilie, hush!"

But she screamed it out: her screeches rang through the room. She wriggled like a madwoman against his knees; he stroked her dishevelled hair, to quiet her.

"Oh, your parents, your dear parents, Addie: they never asked me anything!... They came and fetched me: oh, Addie, that journey home, with his coffin between us, oh, those formalities at the frontiers!... Oh, Addie, your dear parents: they saved me: I was mad, I was mad, I was mad at that time! Now it's all coming back to me; I can't keep it to myself any longer!... You see, he waited for him, they began quarrelling about me and ... suddenly they were like two wild animals! Henri rushed at him ... and then Eduard stabbed him with his knife! The villain, the villain! He has been missing since then; I have never seen him again; only at night, at night I see him *with his knife*! Oh, Addie, Addie, help me!"

He gripped her by the arms with all his might and sought to control her; but she resisted. She was like a madwoman; in the sultry summer heat she was overmastered by the day-long vision that loomed up regularly with the first balmy warmth of spring. She was like a madwoman; she saw everything before her eyes; she lived the past over again.

"Nobody has ever known, Addie, except you, except you!"

"Hush, Emilie, hush!"

He tried to look into her eyes, but they avoided his. She twisted and turned as though she were in the grasp of a ravisher; she dragged herself along the floor, while his hand held her arms. Suddenly his eyes met hers and he held and pierced them deeply with his grey-blue glance. She fell back helplessly against a chair; her features, now relaxed, hung slackly, like an old woman's; her lips drooped. She lay huddled and moaning, with a monotonous moan of pain. Then she began to shake her head, up and down, up and down, grating the back of her head against the chair.

"Get up, Emilie."

She obeyed, let him help her up, hung like a rag in his hands. She fell back on her bed, with her eyes closed; and he rang the bell. It was Constance who entered.

"We will undress her now, Mamma; she's much quieter. I'll ring for Aunt Adeline to help you."

He rang again and asked Truitje to go for Mrs. van Lowe. But, as soon as Emilie felt the touch of Constance' fingers, she began to moan anew and opened her eyes:

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, you're a dear, you're a dear! You never, never asked me!"

"Perhaps it will be better to leave her now, Mamma," whispered Addie.

Constance left the room, promising to remain within call with Adeline.

Emilie lay on the bed, her eyes staring straight before her, as though she still beheld all the horror of the past; and she went on moaning in fear and pain:

"Addie, Addie, it was Eduard ... it was Eduard who murdered Henri.... Oh, nobody knows, nobody

knows!... Uncle and Aunt never asked me.... People at the Hague say that it was I who made Eduard unhappy, that that is why he has gone away, disappeared.... Perhaps I did, perhaps I did make him unhappy.... I don't know, I don't know.... You see, I didn't know what I was doing when I married Eduard. I thought ... I thought it would be all right, I thought I cared for him ... Ssh, Addie, don't tell anybody, but I cared for Henri, for my brother, only. I swear, it was all quite beautiful what he and I felt for each other; there was never anything between us, never anything to be ashamed of!... But my life, Addie, my poor life, oh, my poor little life was quite wrecked, because I did not know, because I felt so strangely, because I fought against the common things of life, against my marriage, against my husband, and because all that was stronger than what I tried to do, what I myself did not really know, nor Henri, nor Henri either I...."

The heart-broken lamentation over her life moaned away in plaintive words and it was as though, after uttering herself, she sank into a dull vacancy, with her eyes wide open, staring through the room, as if she still saw all the things of the past but as if they were now vanishing after she had uttered herself. And it was the same every year: each time spring came round, the same strange, mysterious force compelled her to tell it, to tell it right out, to tell all the sad secret of her piteous wreck and failure of a woman's life, she a very small soul, crushed under too great a tragedy, under too great an affliction, something too strange, which had crushed her and yet not crushed her to death. She lived on, she had lived on for years, living her life devoid of all interest and yet still young; bonds seemed still to bind her body and soul to life; and there was nothing left for her except the pity of those who surrounded her and a dull resignation, which only once, in each year, as though roused by the warm torrents of spring or summer, burst forth into a thunder of storm.... It gathered, it gathered, she felt it threatening days beforehand, as though it were bursting within her brain; during those sleepless nights she lay with her head clasped in her hands; and it gathered, it gathered: a fit of nerves, a violent attack of nerves; and she called for Addie, the only one who knew; and she told him, she told it him again; and, after she had told it and had fallen asleep under his eyes, she woke a little calmer. Then, after days, after long, slow days, her quivering nerves became restful; she surrendered herself; and that dull resignation wove itself round her again, the summer beat hot and sultry upon her, the slow course of the monotonous days dragged her on and on. Nobody talked of it all; and then, one evening, in the garden, she found herself recovered, feeling strange and resigned, limp her hands, limp her arms, with poor Aunt Adeline beside her, quite cheered and receiving a short letter from Guy, while the girls and Aunt Constance put Grannie to bed and then Klaasje, that great big girl, who still always insisted on being taken to bed ... and while Uncle Ernst wandered round the pond, talking to himself ... and while Paul had not shown himself for three days, locking himself in his room, in the villa over there, lower down....

That was how she recovered, as if waking from a hideous dream; that was how she came to herself, in the evening, sitting in the garden with Aunt Adeline, reading and rereading Guy's letter, beside her. And a little further away sat Mr. Brauws and Uncle Henri: Uncle Henri who could not get used to Guy's absence ... and who fretted over it sometimes, with the tears standing wet in his eyes.

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## CHAPTER XXX

Addie returned to the Hague that evening; and seldom had he felt so heavy and listless, as if he knew nothing for himself. No, he knew nothing, nothing more for his poor self, as if he, as he grew older, daily lost more and more of the knowledge that is sacredly imparted for a man's own soul, like a far-lighting lamp casts its rays over the paths of his own destiny that lie dimly in the future.... Though he knew for others so often and so surely, for himself he knew nothing nowadays, nothing. Once he had known himself to be a dual personality; to-day he no longer knew which of the two he was. He felt like a prematurely old and decrepit young man, prematurely old and decrepit because life had become serious for him too early and opened out to him too early, so that he had fathomed it through and through: prematurely old and decrepit because his own life later had not trembled in the pure balance of his own twin forces of soul. He had felt fettered to the one; and it drew him down, while the other had not the power to lift him up to the height of pure self-realization....

He walked home from the station, late in the evening. He dragged himself along, his step was heavy and slow; over the dark masses of the Wood hung a sultry, pearl-grey summer night; the houses in the Bezuidenhout faded away white in the evening silence. Light rain-clouds dreamed in the sky: it would doubtless rain to-morrow; and far behind them lurked the threatening summer storm. For the present the evening sombreness drifted on as though in hushed expectation. Everything was still: the trees, the houses, the clouds. There was hardly anyone about; a last tram came rumbling out of the distance, from Scheveningen; and its bell seemed to ring through the space of the evening, very far behind him.

He walked on, dragged himself along past the houses. He was tired out, as he was every time that he practised hypnotism; in addition to this, it always broke his heart to leave Driebergen. How united he was with everybody and everything there! The house was his father's and his; the family was his mother's and his. As the child of his two parents, he felt at home there, in that great sombre house. But he no longer lived there, no longer worked there. In the crudely-bright, small, motley-painted house towards which he was wending, his wife awaited him; and he would

find his children.

Healthy children, a healthy wife: he had all that. What he had longed for, in his anxiety at what he saw in his mother's family, he now possessed: a healthy wife and healthy children. How they both of them loved the children; how united they were, where the children were concerned! All their difference arose from a spiritual misunderstanding, because at first they had not known.... Know? Did he know now? Did he know that he ought never to have taken a wife like Mathilde? Did he not know that it was his fault?

There was nothing else for him to do than to continue the sacrifice, all his life long; but the sacrifice was very heavy: living and working in contradiction to his impulses, in a sphere that was not his. It was this that made him ill and prematurely old. He saw no future before him. The sacrifice was killing something deep down in himself.

He felt a sudden rebellion: it was not a man's business to sacrifice himself like that. What was done was done. Mathilde must accommodate herself somehow. He would tell her that it wouldn't do, that the Hague was killing him, that he must go back to the house out there, to the village, to the district where he was of use and able to work. She would have to go with him.

But he saw her, as a sacrificial victim, offered up for a faith which she did not share, because of his mistake in life. No, no, he could never do it, could never tell her that the Hague was killing him, that she must accommodate herself and make the best of things. It was for him, for him to make the best of things: if he wished to remain in any sense just, he must continue to sacrifice himself, though it wore him to death.

How sombre and joyless it all was! How grey it all was, far and wide around him, like the very night that hung pearl-white close by and, farther away, dug itself into abysses of threatening darkness!

As he drew nearer home, his feet lagged more heavily. And suddenly, before turning down the street in which he lived, he dropped on to a bench and remained sitting as though paralyzed, with his head in his hand.

How hard and heavy it was for him, to have to go back like that to his own house! Oh, to remain sitting, just sitting like that until he had attained certain knowledge! He closed his eyes.

He felt himself conquered, overcome.... Suddenly, as in a dream, voices struck upon his ear; and he seemed to recognize the voices. He rose mechanically and, past the houses, along the silent pavement, saw approaching the dark figures of two people walking slowly, a man and a woman. Their voices sounded clearly, though he could not catch the words; he recognized the leisurely forms. It was Johan Erzeele and Mathilde.

They did not see him. They walked on very slowly and Addie followed behind them. Johan seemed to be persistently pleading, Mathilde seemed to be refusing something. Addie's heart beat fearfully as he followed after them; and a jealousy suddenly flared up amid his dull dejection. Was she not his wife, was she not his wife? And why, lately, was she always looking for Johan and he for her? Was it not always so: always these tennis-parties together, always meeting at friends' houses where he, Addie, never went?... Where were they coming from now? Where had they been? Was he bringing her home? How intimate their conversation sounded, how sad almost! Had they grown fond of each other, in a dangerous increasing friendship?

He followed them unobserved, almost glad to have surprised them, suspicious in his jealous grief. Did not he still love his wife, notwithstanding their deep-seated differences?... He slackened his pace and followed very slowly.... After his first access of jealousy, he seemed rather to feel a certain curiosity to observe in silence, to make a diagnosis. His nature got the upper hand of him, the nature of one who is born to heal and who, before healing, diagnoses the disease. Yes, jealousy still smouldered within him; but he felt even more distinctly the craving for knowledge. Did he not still love Mathilde?... Ah, but was she indispensable to his life?

That suddenly became clear to him: indispensable to his life she was not.... His children, yes: they belonged to all of them, to all of them yonder, in the old house, the old family-house. She, his wife, did not. His children were indispensable to his life: he felt that clearly. Mathilde, Mathilde was not. For Mathilde, as he now walked behind her and Johan, he felt only the curiosity to analyze and classify the nature of the disease, nothing but that. Even the jealousy died away in him, the child of his jealous parents.... He continued to follow them. He saw Erzeele put his arm through Mathilde's.

He now quickened his pace slightly. His heels rang on the pavement through the night air, regularly, faster than before. The two in front looked round. They gave a start. He caught them up:

"I seemed to recognize you ... in the distance," he said, calmly and naturally, while they were unable to speak and Erzeele withdrew his arm.

"I have come from the station."

"I didn't expect you till to-morrow," said Mathilde, faintly, in spite of herself.

"I finished earlier. Emilie is much more peaceful.... How are the children?"

"All right."

"Where have you been this evening?"

"I went and had tea at Johan's sister's.... Johan was seeing me home."

"But now that Van der Welcke's here ... to see you home...." said Erzeele.

"Not at all," replied Addie. "Come a little way farther."

They walked on, Mathilde between the two men. Addie talked conventionally. They hardly answered. Meanwhile he observed them. His curiosity roused him, gave him a sudden new interest, as though he was treating a case of serious illness.

"I'll say good-bye here," said Erzeele, as they turned down the side-street.

They both shook hands with him and walked home more silently, suddenly dragging their feet.

Addie felt in his pocket for the key:

"It's late," he said, mechanically.

"Getting on for twelve," replied Mathilde, dully.

He saw that her eyes were red with weeping. He said nothing. They went upstairs without speaking. On reaching the nursery, they both crept in for a moment on tip-toe and looked into the little cots. The nurse was sleeping in the next room, with the door open between. They exchanged a smile, because the babies were sleeping so prettily. Then they went to Mathilde's bedroom. Once they had crossed the threshold, it seemed to him as if they were strangers.

"I'm tired," said Mathilde.

"So am I," said Addie.

He kissed her, left her and went to his own bedroom. Through the closed door he could follow her movements, heard her undressing, heard the rustle of her clothes. He sank into a chair and stared in front of him:

"I know," he thought, with his eyes very wide. "She loves him and he loves her. I ... I no longer love her.... She has never been indispensable to my existence.... I made a mistake. I did not know for myself...."

He did not sleep that night. Next morning early he said to Mathilde:

"Tilly, I want to talk to you."

"What about?"

"About ourselves."

She raised her eyebrows impatiently:

"What for?" she asked. "We have had that sort of talk so often. It leads to nothing. It tires me."

"Yes, you're looking tired ... and ill. You're not happy."

"Oh, never mind my happiness!"

"But what else did we come here for, Tilly, except your happiness?"

"That's true," she said, without interest. "You did it for my sake. It was nice of you."

"But it did no good."

"No, it did no good. And it would be better...."

"What?"

"For you to go back to Driebergen, Addie."

"I agree," he said, gently.

She started:

"What do you mean?"

"I was thinking the same thing."

"What?"

"That I ought to go back to Driebergen."

She looked at him in surprise:

"And I?" she asked.

"You remain here ... with the children."

"I don't understand."

"You stay in the Hague ... you and the children."



"And you?"

"I'll go down there."

"I don't understand," she repeated.

"I mean what I say, Tilly," he said. "It is better...."

"What?"

"That we should separate."

"Separate?"

"Perhaps. For a longer or shorter period."

She stared at him:

"Do you want a divorce?"

"I think so."

She continued to stare at him and choked down her tears:

"Addie, do you no longer love me?"

"No," he said, gently.

She looked deep in his eyes, affronted:

"What do you mean?"

"That I don't love you, any longer, enough to live with you. I beg your pardon, Tilly, if I have spoilt your life, if I have shattered your life. I have spoilt and shattered it. I beg your pardon ... if you can forgive me."

"Only a little while ago ... you told me that you cared for me."

"I thought so at the time ... It seemed to mean so much to me."

"And now?"

"Now I don't".

She rebelled with injured pride:

"Then why did you ask me to marry you?"

"Yes, that was just it."

"Just what?"

"The mistake.... Tell me, do you still love me?"

"No," she said, proudly.

"So you see: it's better...."

"That we should be divorced."

"Don't you think so yourself?"

"And the children?" she asked.

"That's my punishment," he said, gently. "They will remain with you."

"You entrust them to me?"

"I do."

"Addie!" she cried, with a sob.

"You still love me a little, Tilly...."

She only sobbed.

"But not so much as you did," he assured her. "You are in love with Erzeele."

"Erzeele?"

"Yes."

"He is a friend."

"He may become more ... later," he forced himself to say, uncleaned as yet of jealousy, because she was still his wife.

"Addie," she said, "I am to blame. If I could only have got accustomed to things, like all of you, at Driebergen ... I should have been happy."

"Yes, but it is not your fault that you couldn't."

"I don't want a divorce," she said.

"Why not?"

"For my sake ... and the children's."

"The children's?"

"For their sake especially. No, Addie, I don't want it. Unless...."

"What?"

"Unless you want it ... for your own sake, to be free, to marry somebody else."

"No."

"Then I don't want it either. If you assure me...."

"I do assure you."

"Then I don't want it either."

"And Erzeele?"

"No," she said, shaking her head. "It's not as people say."

"What do they say?"

"That he is my lover. He's not that."

"I never supposed he was."

"I value his friendship ... but I could not be his wife."

"Why not?"

"Because I am your wife."

"Do you feel that?"

"Always."

"My poor child!" he said, in spite of himself.

"Why do you pity me?" she asked, proudly.

"Because I have done you a wrong. Because I am unable to atone."

"You have done me no wrong. We loved each other very much ... then. At that time ... I thought I understood you. Now I no longer understand you. You breathe too rarefied an air for me."

"No, it isn't that. But...."

"What?"

"Nothing. So, Tilly, you don't want us to be divorced."

She looked at him anxiously:

"No," she entreated.

"Well, dear, then we won't be," he said, gently. "Only ... our present life ... is no life at all. So it will be better if...."

"If what?"

"If I don't stay with you, if I go away."

"And I?"

"You remain here, in this house, where everything is as you like it. You stay ... with our children."

"Our ... our children," she stammered.

"Perhaps later...."

"What?"

"Because of our children, we shall come together again ... when all misunderstanding has disappeared."

"I don't follow you."

"Perhaps you will later. But perhaps also ... you will become so fond of Erzeele ... that...."

She shook her head, stared before her.

"We never know," said Addie, gently.

"No," she said, pensively. "I know nothing ... nothing now. I used to think ... that you knew everything."

"I do sometimes know things ... for others. I have not known for myself."

"And now?"

"Now I know better ... for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, now I *know*, Tilly ... that it is better for you ... that I should leave you...."

"For good?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps for a long time ... only...."

"And the children? Won't you be longing for them?"

It was more than he could bear; and he said nothing, only nodded yes. Then he said:

"But they will be all right ... with you, Tilly."

It was more than she could bear either. She fell into a chair, sobbing.

"Don't be unhappy, Tilly," he said. "We *must* make a change. If we remain as we are, we shall end by hating each other.... Don't be unhappy about parting ... when you reflect ... that it is really out of the question for us to remain together."

"You are right," she said, coldly. "So...."

"You will stay here. You will live here. That is, if you like."

"And you?"

"I? I shall go home."

She felt her jealousy of all of them, out there:

"Yes," he said, gently.

"If you don't love me," she burst out, "they will not need to console you long."

"I shall feel regret ... because I have spoilt your life ... and because I sha'n't see the children any more."

"Spoilt my life?" she said, proudly. "You have not done that."

He did not answer.

"The children?" she continued. "Why should you not see them ... when you want to?"

"Would you allow that?"

"Allow it? They are your children. I have nothing to say in the matter. In fact...."

"In fact?"

"I should not think it right ... if you did not see them often."

"Then I shall come."

"Of course.... But to go on living here ... would be too expensive."

"No, not at all. I ... I shall want nothing ... out there. Whatever I make is yours."

"I can't accept it."

"Yes, you can ... for the children. It's better, Tilly, that everything should remain as it is."

"Very well," she consented. "Only, Addie ... it's not a solution."

"There can be no solution ... until you know that you care enough for Johan Erzeele...."

"No, no, I don't!"

"That you care enough for Johan Erzeele to...."

"I don't know, I don't know ... and I refuse to discuss it."

"I understand that, Tilly. Then ... there can be no solution yet, can there? We know nothing about a solution. I am simply giving you back your life, as far as I can, and you are doing the same to me. Later we will see what happens. It will all come of itself. What do we know? We know nothing ... for ourselves. Knowledge will all come of itself. Do you understand?"

"No."

"You will, later.... You will live here, with the children; you will see me hardly at all. I shall not see the children for a time. It will be as though I were on a journey. They are so small: oh, I hope that

they won't miss me and that, when they do see me again, they will know me!... So you will be alone ... with the children ... It may be that you will want me back then, that the former love will return.... In my case too, perhaps.... We shall see. It will ... it will all come of itself and we ... we know nothing.... Perhaps, in years to come, we shall be living quietly together again ... with the children. Or else...."

"What?"

"Or else you will be far away from me ... and will have found your happiness with another."

She put her hands before her eyes:

"I don't see it.... I don't know...."

"Now you are being honest. No, you don't know if you will come to care so much as that for Johan.... And I ... I will be honest too! I don't know if I shall ever care for you again.... But we must wait, Tilly; and the best thing therefore is to leave each other and ... and not to talk to each other again until it has come of itself and until we know.... You will not be alone in the world; for, if ever I can do anything for you, I will come to you. I shall never forget you."

"Yes, perhaps that will be best," she said, in a dead voice. "I shall try to look at it like that ... and to live alone ... with the children. I shall not see Johan again."

"No, no, on the contrary: you must see him."

"Why?"

"So as to know. You will never be *weak*."

"No, I shall never be that."

"You know how he feels towards you."

"How do you know?"

"I know you do.... You know what he feels for you. But you do not know what you feel for him."

"Addie! Oh, Addie!"

"Don't deny it. Be honest. These are the last words, perhaps, that we shall exchange for quite a long time. I am going away now."

"Now?"

"Yes.... Write to me when there's any occasion."

"Very well."

"Good-bye, Tilly."

She was silent, sat staring before her, with her hands clasped over her knees. No, she did not understand him, but she could not act otherwise than he wished.

He was gone; and suddenly she felt very lonely. She heard him upstairs packing, rummaging in his cupboards.

And she began to reflect, sadly:

"He acts differently and speaks differently from anybody else. Divorced? Oh, no, I don't want that ... if he doesn't want it for himself!... I ... at least ... not yet.... No, no, nor ever.... Oh, I don't know, I don't know!... I am fond of Johan.... If I were free now, if I were a girl still.... But Addie, the children.... I don't know, I don't know.... That was why Addie thought it would be well ... for us not to see each other ... for a time. How he will miss the children!... Oh dear, is he really, really going? Yes, I hear him upstairs ... packing.... What will people say? Not that it matters. We can say that he has to read, quietly, out there ... at Driebergen.... We can tell people something of the kind ... even if they do understand.... I simply can't go back to Driebergen. ... Oh, how will it work out, how will it all work out? That is just what Addie doesn't know either.... Do I? No, Heaven help me, I don't know any more than he does!... I am fond of Johan: shall I grow fonder of him, now that I am less fond of Addie? I don't know, I don't know.... Oh, if only I hadn't my children! ... As it is, I could wish, my God, how I could wish, for his sake and the children's, that I knew how to be happy at Driebergen, in that house of theirs, with all of them, and that I could go back to it! Shall I ever go back to it?... Shall I be Johan's wife one day, after all?... Oh, it is all so dark and uncertain!... Addie says a solution will come of itself.... We know nothing, he says.... Must I let it come as it will?... But how will it come?... Oh, even Addie, who is so wise, can find no solution!... There is ... there is no solution yet!... Will there ever be one?... Oh, if I could go back ... to the house down there!... Should I *ever* be able to? Perhaps years hence! Perhaps never! Who can tell?... Is Johan ... really fond of me? Not only because he admires me ... not only for *that*?... Oh, that was the only reason why Addie loved me!... I know it now, I know it: that was his one idea, to have healthy children.... Now we are parted: parted for ever?... Or shall we come together again one day? Shall we ever become husband and wife again ... or not?... I do care for Johan. He is so matter-of-fact, so simple: I should have become very happy and simple with him, without all this thinking about things which I can't grasp or feel ... and which came haunting me down there, at Driebergen, gradually.... Oh, if I could only force myself to live there again!... But perhaps I never

can! Perhaps, in three or four years' time, I shall be Johan's wife ... and have to give up the children, the poor children, to Addie!..."

Now she sobbed, because she did not know. The days and months would drift past slowly and slowly before she knew....

There is a sacred knowledge for ourselves, a knowledge so sacred that we know it only ... when the future is here....

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## CHAPTER XXXI

The months drifted by.

"It is strange," said Brauws, "that we haven't heard from Addie lately."

"How long is it since we did?" asked Constance, vaguely.

"Nearly a week."

"Yes, it must be close upon a week."

"His last letters were brighter."

"Do you think the travelling is doing him good?"

"He doesn't travel as another man would. In the three months that he has been away...."

"Yes, he will have learnt a good deal that will be useful to him ... in his profession."

"His letters were cheerful."

"I'm longing badly to see him again ... Listen to the wind!"

"That's the autumn coming."

"The summer is past. This is our typical weather. Look, here, out of my window, you can see the clouds coming up over the moor as you never do downstairs, because the trees in the garden hide all the view."

"Up here it reminds me sometimes of the Hague, in the Kerkhoflaan."

"But it's wider, wider...."

"And finer."

"There, they're coming up, the clouds.... That must be rain.... They're all grey and dark purple: I have never seen such purple as in our skies down here."

"You're able to live under them now."

"Now I am. But it took so long ... that I had to get old first. I'm old now and it's all right now.... Look, look: the clouds are drifting along.... That means storm...."

"For days on end."

"Oh, I am yearning for Addie!... How long is it since we saw him? Three months, isn't it?... Three months! What an age!... We are all yearning for him...."

"His father is counting the days till he returns.... Poor Hans!"

"Poor Henri!... Even Mamma was asking the other day, where Addie was."

"She always knows him."

"Ernst and Paul can't get on without him."

"And he has an excellent influence on Alex: the boy's doing very well."

"Yes, he's grown so calm and manly ... latterly."

"Guy's letters are satisfactory, are they not?"

"Yes. It's kind of you, Brauws, to take so much interest ... in all of us."

"Well, I'm living ... with you all."

"You belong to us."

"It is like one family."

"Family.... Yes, there is such a thing as family. In the old days, I often used to think that it was just a word."

"No, it's there, only...."

"Yes, I understand what you mean.... Sometimes it does not begin to take shape until we ourselves are no longer young.... It was there for Mamma, whereas for us, at that time ... But for Mamma it was an illusion and...."

"For us ... it is indeed a reality...."

"In so far that we think so ... we old people."

"No, no, it is so."

"I am quite willing to believe it is.... Yes.... Addie ought soon to be home again."

"And then?"

"I think ... he will stay *here*."

"And Mathilde?"

"*There* ... with the children."

"That is not a solution."

"No, but Addie says...."

"That it will have to come...."

"Later, of itself."

"I dare say he's right.... How is she?"

"Reconciled ... more reconciled.... I saw her the other day."

"Don't leave her to herself."

"No, we are not doing that.... It's not her fault. And she is a good mother to her children."

"As you say, it's not her fault."

"Nor Addie's either. It's our fault: Henri's and mine."

"Why?"

"I don't know, I feel it is. It's all our fault. It's still the punishment dragging along."

"No, no!"

"Yes, it is. Our child was doomed not to be happy ... because of us."

"No."

"You know quite well that you too ... look on it like that."

"Not entirely.... If he had had certain understanding for himself...."

"He couldn't, because...."

"Hush! Say no more on that subject.... There *is* a knowledge.... which is so sacred ... Which of us has that certain understanding for himself?... We all just let it come...."

"Look how dark it's growing."

"Here comes the rain."

"It's lashing against the windows."

"Strange that, even in this weather, the house and this room don't seem sombre ... to me."

"There is an air of so much affection in the house.... If Addie would only come! If he would only come now!... Tell me, Brauws, what is your opinion? What will be the end of it? Will they ever go back to each other?"

"Possibly ... later...."

"You can't say it positively?"

"Oh, no!"

"Do you think that she cares for Erzeele?"

"It's difficult to say."

"She doesn't know, herself. Only the other day she told me so herself: she herself doesn't know.... Will the children prevent her?"

"Who can say?"

"Is it right ... that Addie should let things decide themselves?"

"Perfectly right."

"Say that ... say that again. I sometimes doubt. Is it right that Addie should let things decide themselves?"

"Yes, I am firmly persuaded that it is right."

"Is she ... strong enough?"

"I think so ... in that way ... of course she mustn't sit still, with her hands folded.... She will have to find herself."

"Oh, if she could only feel in sympathy with all of us!... *If* she ever comes back, I swear that I shall...."

"What?"

"Nothing. I was thinking.... Then I begin to hope that she and all of us will feel alike.... And, strangely enough, I see that in everything. We all want it. *If* she comes back, I am almost sure that we shall all ... do a great deal ... to make her ours...."

"And to make her happy...."

"*If* she comes back.... How delightful it would be, *if* she came back ... with the children."

"Delightful?"

"I mean ... yes, I mean delightful.... Lives that have once been interlaced...."

"Are bad to pull apart. I agree.... And Hans?"

"Oh, even he ... even he will try!"

"Who knows? Perhaps one day it'll be like that."

"For the present, there's nothing to be said."

"No, nothing."

"It's all still mystery and darkness."

"Listen to the rain."

"The sky is black."

"What's the time?"

"Almost dinner-time."

"There goes the bell."

"Shall we go downstairs?"

They went down the dark staircase. The wind howled round the house. The old lady was sitting at the window of the conservatory at the back when Constance and Brauws entered.

"It's blowing hard," she said. "There are great branches falling from the trees in the garden."

"Aren't you too cold in here, Mamma?"

The old woman did not understand; and Constance put a shawl over her shoulders:

"Will you come in, Mamma, when you feel too cold?"

The old woman nodded, without understanding. She remained sitting where she was. She had already had something to eat, with Marietje to wait on her: she never sat down to table with the others.

The second bell rang.

"Come," said Constance.

Paul was there and noticed how miserable Van der Welcke looked:

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Van der Welcke was carving:

"I loathe carving," he said. "Addie always used to do it, or Guy."

"I never learnt how," said Paul, secretly fearing the gravy.

"Give it to me, Hans," said Brauws.

They were silent round the table; the wind howled outside.

"The gas is burning badly," said Constance.

"How nice-looking Mary is growing now that she's down here!" said Paul. "There, you needn't go blushing: your old uncle may surely pay you a compliment."

"Well, Uncle Paul, I'm not as young as all that myself: I'm getting on for thirty."

"And you, Klaasje," said Paul, "you're eating like a grown-up person."

"I do eat nicely now, don't I, Auntie?" said Klaasje, proudly.

Constance nodded to her with a smile.

"Only Gerdy ... she's not doing well," thought Paul. "How pale she looks!... Ah, well! Perhaps it'll all come right later for the poor child.... He or another.... Love, it's a strange thing: I never felt it."

He felt a shiver pass through him and said:

"It's cold to-day, Constance."

"Yes. We shall start fires to-morrow."

"It's blowing bitterly outside. And what a draught! I'm sure there's a draught in the house! What do you say, Ernst?"

Ernst looked up:

"There's no draught," he said. "I'm quite warm. You people are always feeling things that don't exist."

"Why is it so dark to-day?" asked Adeline, as though waking from a dream.

"The gas is burning badly," said Constance.

"Truitje," said Van der Welcke, "take the key and see that the meter is turned on full."

"Grandmamma was very tired to-day," said Marietje.

"Grandmamma hardly ate anything at all," said Adèletje.

"She's getting very old," said Constance, sadly.

The meal dragged on. They exchanged only an occasional word.

"We're very cosy, among ourselves, like this," said Constance, fondly. "Oh, I wish that Dorine would come and live here too!"

"Nothing will induce her to," said Paul.

"No, I'm afraid not."

A carriage drove up outside, drove through the garden.

"Hark!" said Constance.

"It's Addie!" said Van der Welcke.

"But he never wired!"

Gerdy had got up: she rushed outside, leaving the door open. A cold draught blew in. They all rose. The bell had rung; Truitje opened the door.

"Oh, Addie, Addie!" Gerdy exclaimed. "Is that you? Have you come back at last? We have missed you so frightfully!"

It was he. She flung herself into his arms and embraced him, with a little sob.

They all welcomed him home; they no longer noticed the draught, no longer heard the wind. They hardly ate anything now, hurriedly finishing their dinner.

"Come into the drawing-room," said Constance, "it's warmer there. I don't know why the dining-room should be so chilly."

"We'll set the stove going to-morrow," said Van der Welcke.

His face had brightened up out of recognition.

"Let's see how you're looking, old chap."

He, the father, was so much excited that the tears came to Addie's eyes. The others left the two of them together in the drawing-room with Van der Welcke while in the dimly-lighted dining-room the old woman seemed to be asleep.

"How are you, my boy?"

"Very well indeed, Dad."

"And now ... you're staying here?"

"Yes, I'm staying ... with all of you."

"Yes, this is your home.... And your wife?"



"We shall see. That will settle itself."

"So ... there's nothing certain yet ... about Mathilde?"

"No, nothing certain.... I write to her once a month; she writes rather oftener ... about the children. She's very good to them."

"So ... no talk of a divorce?"

"No, no talk of that.... Perhaps, later, all will come right between us. Perhaps, on the other hand, she will feel that she would sooner be free ... in spite of the children."

They both thought of Erzeele.

"So you don't know anything yet?"

"No, not yet. It will settle itself. It must settle itself some day."

"You see, my boy, I'm different. In your place, I should have fought a duel with Erzeele. I should have had a divorce ... if my wife didn't care for me, if she cared for Erzeele."

"Yes, Father, I know, that's you. I'm different."

"You're better."

"No, not better. But, whatever I may be, I am first of all your son."

"You, my son? You're my friend, my pal; always have been."

"And suppose I now wanted to be ... your son? I have come back feeling very sad and very tired, because I feel that I am much to blame."

"Nothing has happened?"

"No."

"What has happened? Nothing at all. You're too fond of thinking. What you have to do now is to seek your own happiness. Just selfishly."

"Perhaps ... if I can. Perhaps that will become Mathilde's happiness too. We shall see. But I don't feel certain of myself. I don't know things. And I now feel ... not your friend and pal but your son, Father. I seem to feel it for the first time."

"You always used to know things."

"For you, Daddie, and for Mamma. But now, now...."

"Now you're my son."

"Yes."

"My big boy."

"Father."

Van der Welcke was standing in front of him; Addie was sitting down. And Van der Welcke now took his son's head in his hands.

"Father," said Addie, "I wonder if you realize ... how devotedly I love you! It's something that I feel only for my parents and for my children, not for any woman."

"You're a funny chap," said Va der Welcke.

"But it is not your fault. It is your parents' fault."

"If you only knew," Addie repeated, "how devotedly I love you ... and Mamma!... And all of them here a bit too!... If I had my children here, then.... Perhaps, perhaps they will come back later ... very much later, with ... with Mathilde.... Look here, if that ever happens, we must all of us ... behave differently to her."

"Yes, my dear boy."

"Or try to."

"Yes, old fellow, I know what you mean. We'll all do it ... for your sake."

"You see, she *is* my wife. I ... I am to blame for everything. If you will try...."

"Yes."

"*If* she comes back.... Perhaps she won't come...."

"Do you want her to?"

"Yes, I do. I can't do without my children ... like this."

"But you'll see them now and again."

"Yes. So, if she *does* come back, you promise, Dad...."

"That I'll try."

"And, if they will all try, then ... then I shall be happy."

"Yes, they'll do it, for your sake. But...."

"If she comes back, I honestly believe ... that she will have learnt ... also to try ... to like us all a little."

"You mustn't be angry, Addie, that it was not like that at once. She is so different ... from all of us."

"Yes, it's my fault."

"No, my boy, don't go thinking that and worrying about it."

"No, Father."

"What you've got to do now is to try and be happy among us all ... to work ... to pick up your work again, you know."

"Yes, just so."

"And then, gradually, to let things *come* ... as you say.... Would it upset you very much if she and Erzeele...."

"Yes. Because I should then feel my shortcomings towards her still more strongly.... And also because of my children."

"Perhaps things will come right, later, my boy."

"Perhaps."

"Take it all calmly now ... and don't worry. And just do your work here quietly."

"Yes, Father.... Oh, I feel that you are my father!"

"Perhaps for the first time!... A different part for your old ruffian of a father!"

"You're not an old ruffian, you're...."

Addie stood up and embraced his father.

"Don't squeeze the breath out of my body!" said Van der Welcke. "You're strong enough still. And you're looking well too. Your eyes look interested again, even though they're a bit too pensive. And they were always calm.... Did you have an interesting time abroad?"

"I saw a great deal of misery ... but also a great deal of good-will...."

"That's it: do what you can here, just simply, in your own surroundings. Oh, my dear chap, how glad I am that you're back!"

Gerdy looked in at the door:

"May we *never* come in?... Uncle Henri, you're being selfish about Addie!..."

"You may come in, dear."

Addie took her hands:

"Will you be strong, Gerdy?"

She sobbed and laughed through her tears:

"I have tried to be all the time, Addie," she whispered. "But for you...."

"You know, life isn't *all* your first suffering."

"No, so you've told me."

"And you must believe it.... It will help you.... You have such a long future before you."

"Yes. Oh, Addie, Addie, but for you...."

"What?"

"I should have died! I have suffered so, I have suffered so!"

"And you see so much suffering around you.... But life...."

"Isn't all your first suffering ... as you say."

"And you must believe it."

"Yes, I'll try."

Constance entered:

"Am I to see nothing of my boy this evening?" she asked, banteringly.

He took her in a clinging embrace:

"You've got him home for good now."

She gave a sob:

"My poor child ... then I haven't lost you?"

"Lost me? Why?"

"A son...."

"You've always been afraid ... of losing me. But you never have lost me."

"No, never.... Tell me, dear, am I to blame? I am to blame, am I not?"

"How?"

"About Mathilde."

"No, you're not to blame.... But, *if* she comes back, later, with the children, Mamma, let us try...."

"Yes, dear, yes."

"We will, won't we? We must try ... to bring ourselves into harmony with her as far as possible...."

"Yes, yes, I will try."

"And all of us."

"Yes, all of us."

"That's so, Gerdy, isn't it? We must all...."

"What did you say, Addie?"

"I was saying, Gerdy, *if* Mathilde comes back, later on...."

"Yes...."

"Would you be willing to try ... with all of us, with Papa and Mamma, with every one of us ... to get into harmony with her as far as possible, so that she...."

"Yes, oh, Addie, yes! I'll try!"

"You will?"

"Oh, yes!... If she comes back, I'll try, Addie, I'll try."

"My dear, listen to it blowing."

"That's *our* wind, Mamma."

"Yes, always."

Marietje and Adèletje had now gone into the dining-room; Adeline and Emilie came after them.

"Why is it so dark in there?" asked Marietje.

"Grandmamma's taking a nap."

"We must take her to bed," said Constance.

Adèletje turned up the gas.

"Auntie!" cried Marietje, in alarm.

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie ... come here!"

Constance came in, with Addie and Gerdy.

"Is Grandmamma ... is Grandmamma...?" stammered Marietje, aghast.

They all looked at the old woman. She was sitting as usual, sitting quietly in her big chair, with her veined and wrinkled hands folded in her black lap. Her head hung back, framed white in her white hair. All knowledge was hers now; and her old mouth smiled because of it, encouragingly....

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