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Author: Georg Ebers

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[NOTE: There is a short list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making an entire meal of them. D.W.]

THE BURGOMASTER'S WIFE

By Georg Ebers

Volume 2.

CHAPTER VII.

A second and third rainy day followed the first one. White mists and grey fog hung over the meadows. The cold, damp north-west wind drove heavy clouds together and darkened the sky. Rivulets dashed into the streets from the gutters on the steep roofs of Leyden; the water in the canals and ditches grew turbid and rose towards the edges of the banks. Dripping, freezing men and women hurried past each other without any form of greeting, while the pair of storks pressed closer to each other in their nest, and thought of the warm south, lamenting their premature return to the cold, damp, Netherland plain.

In thoughtful minds the dread of what must inevitably come was increasing. The rain made anxiety grow as rapidly in the hearts of many citizens, as the young blades of grain in the fields. Conversations, that sounded anything but hopeful, took place in many tap-rooms—in others men were even heard declaring resistance folly, or loudly demanding the desertion of the cause of the Prince of Orange and liberty.

Whoever in these days desired to see a happy face in Leyden might have searched long in vain, and would probably have least expected to find it in the house of Burgomaster Van der Werff.

Three days had now elapsed since Peter's departure, nay the fourth was drawing towards noon, yet the burgomaster had not returned, and no message, no word of explanation, had reached his family.

Maria had put on her light-blue cloth dress with Mechlin lace in the square neck, for her husband particularly liked to see her in this gown and he must surely return to-day.

The spray of yellow wall-flowers on her breast had been cut from the blooming plant in the window of her room, and Barbara had helped arrange her thick hair.

It lacked only an hour of noon, when the young wife's delicate, slender figure, carrying a white duster in her hand, entered the burgomaster's study. Here she stationed herself at the window, from which the pouring rain streamed in numerous crooked serpentine lines, pressed her forehead against the panes, and gazed down into the quiet street.

The water was standing between the smooth red tiles of the pavement. A porter clattered by in heavy wooden shoes, a maid-servant, with a shawl wrapped around her head, hurried swiftly past, a shoemaker's boy, with a pair of boots hanging on his back, jumped from puddle to puddle, carefully avoiding the dry places;—no horseman appeared.

It was almost unnaturally quiet in the house and street; she heard nothing except the plashing of the rain. Maria could not expect her husband until the beat of horses' hoofs was audible; she was not even gazing into the distance—only dreamily watching the street and the ceaseless rain.

The room had been thoughtfully heated for the drenched man, whose return was expected, but Maria felt the cold air through the chinks in the windows. She shivered, and as she turned back into the dusky room, it seemed as if this twilight atmosphere must always remain, as if no more bright days could ever come.

Minutes passed before she remembered for what purpose she had entered the room and began to pass the dusting-cloth over the writing-table, the piles of papers, and the rest of the contents of the apartment. At last she approached the pistols, which Peter had not taken with him on his journey.

The portrait of her husband's first wife hung above the weapons and sadly needed dusting, for until now Maria had always shrunk from touching it.

To-day she summoned up her courage, stood opposite to it, and gazed steadily at the youthful features of the woman, with whom Peter had been happy. She felt spellbound by the brown eyes that gazed at her from the pleasant face.

Yes, the woman up there looked happy, almost insolently happy. How much more had Peter probably given to his first wife than to her?

This thought cut her to the heart, and without moving her lips she addressed a series of questions to the silent portrait, which still gazed steadily and serenely at her from its plain frame.

Once it seemed as if the full lips of the pictured face quivered, once that the eyes moved. A chill ran through her veins, she began to be afraid, yet could not leave the portrait, and stood gazing upward with dilated eyes.

She did not stir, but her breath came quicker and quicker, and her eyes seemed to grow keener.

A shadow rested on the dead Eva's high forehead. Had the artist intended to depict some oppressive anxiety, or was what she saw only dust, that had settled on the colors?

She pushed a chair towards the portrait and put her foot on the seat, pushing her dress away in doing so. Blushing, as if other eyes than the painted ones were gazing down upon her, she drew it over the white stocking, then with a rapid movement mounted the seat. She could now look directly into the eyes of the portrait. The cloth in Maria's trembling hand passed over Eva's brow, and wiped the shadow from the rosy flesh. She now blew the dust from the frame and canvas, and perceived the signature of the artist to whom the picture owed its origin. "Artjen of Leyden," he called himself, and his careful hand had finished even the unimportant parts of the work with minute accuracy. She well knew the silver chain with the blue turquoises, that rested on the plump neck. Peter had given it to her as a wedding present, and she had worn it to the altar; but the little diamond cross suspended from the middle she had never seen. The gold buckle at Eva's belt had belonged to her since her last birthday—it was very badly bent, and the dull points would scarcely pierce the thick ribbon.

"She had everything when it was new," she said to herself. "Jewels? What do I care for them! But the heart, the heart—how much love has she left in Peter's heart?"

She did not wish to do so, but constantly heard these words ringing in her ears, and was obliged to summon up all her self-control, to save herself from weeping.

"If he would only come, if he would only come!" cried a voice in her tortured soul.

The door opened, but she did not notice it.

Barbara crossed the threshold, and called her by her name in a tone of kindly reproach.

Maria started and blushing deeply, said"

"Please give me your hand; I should like to get down. I have finished. The dust was a disgrace." When she again stood on the floor, the widow said, "What red cheeks you have! Listen, my dear sister-in-law, listen to me, child—!"

Barbara was interrupted in the midst of her admonition, for the knocker fell heavily on the door, and Maria hurried to the window.

The widow followed, and after a hasty glance into the street, exclaimed:

"That's Wilhelm Cornieliussohn, the musician. He has been to Delft. I heard it from his mother. Perhaps he brings news of Peter. I'll send him up to you, but he must first tell me below what his tidings are. If you want me, you'll find me with Bessie. She is feverish and her eyes ache; she will have some eruption or a fever."

Barbara left the room. Maria pressed her hands upon her burning cheeks, and paced slowly to and fro till the musician knocked and entered.

After the first greeting, the young wife asked eagerly:

"Did you see my husband in Delft?"

"Yes indeed," replied Wilhelm, "the evening of the day before yesterday."

"Then tell me—"

"At once, at once. I bring you a whole pouch full of messages. First from your mother."

"Is she well?"

"Well and bright. Worthy Doctor Groot too is hale and hearty."

"And my husband?"

"I found him with the doctor. Herr Groot sends the kindest remembrances to you. We had musical entertainments at his home yesterday and the day before. He always has the latest novelties from Italy, and when we try this motet here—"

"Afterwards, Herr Wilhelm! You must first tell me what my husband—"

"The burgomaster came to the doctor on a message from the Prince. He was in haste, and could not wait for the singing. It went off admirably. If you, with your magnificent voice, will only—"

"Pray, Meister Wilhelm?"

"No, dear lady, you ought not to refuse. Doctor Groot says, that when a girl in Delft, no one could support the tenor like you, and if you, Frau von Nordwyk, and Herr Van Aken's oldest daughter—"

"But, my dear Meister!" exclaimed the burgomaster's wife with increasing impatience, "I'm not asking about your motets and tabulatures, but my husband."

Wilhelm gazed at the young wife's face with a half-startled, half-astonished look. Then, smiling at his own awkwardness, he shook his head, saying in a tone of good-natured repentance:

"Pray forgive me, little things seem unduly important to us when they completely fill our own souls. One word about your absent husband must surely sound sweeter to your ears, than all my music. I ought to have thought of that sooner. So—the burgomaster is well and has transacted a great deal of business with the Prince. Before he went to Dortrecht yesterday morning, he gave me this letter and charged me to place it in your hands with the most loving greetings."

With these words the musician gave Maria a letter. She hastily took it from his hand, saying:

"No offence, Herr Wilhelm, but we'll discuss your motet to-morrow, or whenever you choose; to-day —"

"To-day your time belongs to this letter," interrupted Wilhelm. "That is only natural. The messenger has performed his commission, and the music-master will try his fortune with you another time."

As soon as the young man had gone, Maria went to her room, sat down at the window, hurriedly opened her husband's letter and read:

"MY DEAR AND FAITHFUL WIFE!

"Meister Wilhelm Corneliussohn, of Leyden, will bring you this letter. I am well, but it was hard for me to leave you on the anniversary of our wedding-day. The weather is very bad. I found the Prince in sore affliction, but we don't give up hope, and if God helps us and every man does his duty, all may yet be well. I am obliged to ride to Dortrecht to-day. I have an important object to accomplish there. Have patience, for several days must pass before my return.

"If the messenger from the council inquires, give him the papers lying on the right-hand side of the writing-table under the smaller leaden weight. Remember me to Barbara and the children. If money is needed, ask Van Hout in my name for the rest of the sum due me; he knows about it. If you feel lonely, visit his wife or Frail von Nordwyk; they would be glad to see you. Buy as much meal, butter, cheese, and smoked meat, as is possible. We don't know what may happen. Take Barbara's advice! Relying upon your obedience,

"Your faithful husband,

"PETER ADRIANSSOHN VAN DER WERFF."

Maria read this letter at first hastily, then slowly, sentence by sentence, to the end. Disappointed, troubled, wounded, she folded it, drew the wall-flowers from the bosom of her dress—she knew not why—and flung them into the peat-box by the chimney-piece. Then she opened her chest, took out a prettily-carved box, placed it on the table, and laid her husband's letter inside.

Long after it had found a place with other papers, Maria still stood before the casket, gazing thoughtfully at its contents.

At last she laid her hand on the lid to close it; but hesitated and took up a packet of letters that had lain amid several gold and silver coins, given by godmothers and godfathers, modest trinkets, and a withered rose.

Drawing a chair up to the table, the young wife seated herself and began to read. She knew these letters well enough. A noble, promising youth had addressed them to her sister, his betrothed bride. They were dated from Jena, whither he had gone to complete his studies in jurisprudence. Every word expressed the lover's ardent longing, every line was pervaded by the passion that had filled the writer's heart. Often the prose of the young scholar, who as a pupil of Doctor Groot had won his bride in Delft, rose to a lofty flight.

While reading, Maria saw in imagination Jacoba's pretty face, and the handsome, enthusiastic countenance of her bridegroom. She remembered their gay wedding, her brother-in-law's impetuous friend, so lavishly endowed with every gift of nature, who had accompanied him to Holland to be his groomsman, and at parting had given her the rose which lay before her in the little casket. No voice had ever suited hers so well; she had never heard language so poetical from any other lips, never had eyes that sparkled like the young Thuringian noble's looked into hers.

After the wedding Georg von Dornberg returned home and the young couple went to Haarlem. She had heard nothing from the young foreigner, and her sister and her husband were soon silenced forever. Like most of the inhabitants of Haarlem, they were put to death by the Spanish destroyers at the capture of the noble, hapless city. Nothing was left of her beloved sister except a faithful memory of her, and her betrothed bridegroom's letters, which she now held in her hand.

They expressed love, the true, lofty love, that can speak with the tongues of angels and move mountains. There lay her husband's letter. Miserable scrawl! She shrank from opening it again, as she laid the beloved mementoes back into the box, yet her breast heaved as she thought of Peter. She knew too that she loved him, and that his faithful heart belonged to her. But she was not satisfied, she was not happy, for he showed her only tender affection or paternal kindness, and she wished to be loved differently. The pupil, nay the friend of the learned Groot, the young wife who had grown up in the society of highly educated men, the enthusiastic patriot, felt that she was capable of being more, far more to her husband, than he asked. She had never expected gushing emotions or high-strung phrases from the grave man engaged in vigorous action, but believed he would understand all the lofty, noble

sentiments stirring in her soul, permit her to share his struggles and become the partner of his thoughts and feelings. The meagre letter received to-day again taught her that her anticipations were not realized.

He had been a faithful friend of her father, now numbered with the dead. Her brother-in-law too had attached himself, with all the enthusiasm of youth, to the older, fully-matured champion of liberty, Van der Werff. When he had spoken of Peter to Maria, it was always with expressions of the warmest admiration and love. Peter had come to Delft soon after her father's death and the violent end of the young wedded pair, and when he expressed his sympathy and strove to comfort her, did so in strong, tender words, to which she could cling, as if to an anchor, in the misery of her heart. The valient citizen of Leyden came to Delft more and more frequently, and was always a guest at Doctor Groot's house. When the men were engaged in consultation, Maria was permitted to fill their glasses and be present at their conferences. Words flew to and fro and often seemed to her neither clear nor wise; but what Van der Werff said was always sensible, and a child could understand his plain, vigorous speech. He appeared to the young girl like an oak-tree among swaying willows. She knew of many of his journeys, undertaken at the peril of his life, in the service of the Prince and his native land, and awaited their result with a throbbing heart.

More than once in those days, the thought had entered her mind that it would be delightful to be borne through life in the strong arms of this steadfast man. Then he extended these arms, and she yielded to his wish as proudly and happily as a squire summoned by the king to be made a knight. She now remembered this by-gone time, and every hope with which she had accompanied him to Leyden rose vividly before her soul.

Her newly-wedded husband had promised her no spring, but a pleasant summer and autumn by his side. She could not help thinking of this comparison, and what entirely different things from those she had anticipated, the union with him had offered to this day. Tumult, anxiety, conflict, a perpetual alternation of hard work and excessive fatigue, this was his life, the life he had summoned her to share at his side, without even showing any desire to afford her a part in his cares and labors. Matters ought not, should not go on so. Everything that had seemed to her beautiful and pleasant in her parents' home—was being destroyed here. Music and poetry, that had elevated her soul, clever conversation, that had developed her mind, were not to be found here. Barbara's kind feelings could never supply the place of these lost possessions; for her husband's love she would have resigned them all— but what had become of this love?

With bitter emotions, she replaced the casket in the chest and obeyed the summons to dinner, but found no one at the great table except Adrian and the servants. Barbara was watching Bessie.

Never had she seemed to herself so desolate, so lonely, so useless as to-day. What could she do here? Barbara ruled in kitchen and cellar, and she—she only stood in the way of her husband's fulfilling his duties to the city and state.

Such were her thoughts, when the knocker again struck the door. She approached the window. It was the doctor. Bessie had grown worse and she, her mother, had not even inquired for the little one.

"The children, the children!" she murmured; her sorrowful features brightened, and her heart grew lighter as she said to herself:

"I promised Peter to treat them as if they were my own, and I will fulfil the duties I have undertaken." Full of joyous excitement, she entered the sick-room, hastily closing the door behind her. Doctor Bontius looked at her with a reproving glance, and Barbara said:

"Gently, gently! Bessie is just sleeping a little." Maria approached the bed, but the physician waved her back, saying:

"Have you had the purple-fever?"

"No."

"Then you ought not to enter this room again. No other help is needed where Frau Barbara nurses."

The burgomaster's wife made no reply, and returned to the entry. Her heart was so heavy, so unutterably heavy. She felt like a stranger in her husband's house. Some impulse urged her to go out of doors, and as she wrapped her mantle around her and went downstairs, the smell of leather rising from the bales piled in layers on the lower story, which she had scarcely noticed before, seemed unendurable. She longed for her mother, her friends in Delft, and her quiet, cheerful home. For the first time she ventured to call herself unhappy and, while walking through the streets with downcast eyes against the wind, struggled vainly to resist some mysterious, gloomy power, that compelled her to

minutely recall everything that had resulted differently from her expectations.

CHAPTER VIII.

After the musician had left the burgomaster's house, he went to young Herr Matanesse Van Wibisma's aunt to get his cloak, which had not been returned to him. He did not usually give much heed to his dress, yet he was glad that the rain kept people in the house, for the outgrown wrap on his shoulders was by no means pleasing in appearance. Wilhelm must certainly have looked anything but well-clad, for as he stood in old Fraulein Van Hoogstraten's spacious, stately hall, the steward Belotti received him as patronizingly as if he were a beggar.

But the Neopolitan, in whose mouth the vigorous Dutch sounded like the rattling in the throat of a chilled singer, speedily took a different tone when Wilhelm, in excellent Italian, quietly explained the object of his visit. Nay, at the sweet accents of his native tongue, the servant's repellent demeanor melted into friendly, eager welcome. He was beginning to speak of his home to Wilhelm, but the musician made him curt replies and asked him to get his cloak.

Belotti now led him courteously into a small room at the side of the great hall, took off his cloak, and then went upstairs. As minute after minute passed, until at last a whole quarter of an hour elapsed, and neither servant nor cloak appeared, the young man lost his patience, though it was not easily disturbed, and when the door at last opened serious peril threatened the leaden panes on which he was drumming loudly with his fingers. Wilhelm doubtless heard it, yet he drummed with redoubled vehemence, to show the Italian that the time was growing long to him. But he hastily withdrew his fingers from the glass, for a girl's musical voice said behind him in excellent Dutch:

"Have you finished your war-song, sir? Belotti is bringing your cloak."

Wilhelm had turned and was gazing in silent bewilderment into the face of the young noblewoman, who stood directly in front of him. These features were not unfamiliar, and yet—years do not make even a goddess younger, and mortals increase in height and don't grow smaller; but the, lady whom he thought he saw before him, whom he had known well in the eternal city and never forgotten, had been older and taller than the young girl, who so strikingly resembled her and seemed to take little pleasure in the young man's surprised yet inquiring glance. With a haughty gesture she beckoned to the steward, saying in Italian:

"Give the gentleman his cloak, Belotti, and tell him I came to beg him to pardon your forgetfulness."

With these words Henrica Van Hoogstraten turned towards the door, but Wilhelm took two hasty strides after her, exclaiming:

"Not yet, not yet, Fraulein! I am the one to apologize. But if you have ever been amazed by a resemblance—"

"Anything but looking like other people!" cried the girl with a repellent gesture.

"Ah, Fraulein, yet—"

"Let that pass, let that pass," interrupted Henrica in so irritated a tone that the musician looked at her in surprise. "One sheep looks just like another, and among a hundred peasants twenty have the same face. All wares sold by the dozen are cheap."

As soon as Wilhelm heard reasons given, the quiet manner peculiar to him returned, and he answered modestly:

"But nature also forms the most beautiful things in pairs. Think of the eyes in the Madonna's face."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"A Calvinist, Fraulein."

"And devoted to the Prince's cause?"

"Say rather, the cause of liberty."

"That accounts for the drumming of the war-song."

"It was first a gentle gavotte, but impatience quickened the time. I am a musician, Fraulein."

"But probably no drummer. The poor panes!"

"They are an instrument like any other, and in playing we seek to express what we feel."

"Then accept my thanks for not breaking them to pieces."

"That wouldn't have been beautiful, Fraulein, and art ceases when ugliness begins."

"Do you think the song in your cloak—it dropped on the ground and Nico picked it up—beautiful or ugly?"

"This one or the other?"

"I mean the Beggar-song."

"It is fierce, but no more ugly than the roaring of the storm."

"It is repulsive, barbarous, revolting."

"I call it strong, overmastering in its power."

"And this other melody?"

"Spare me an answer; I composed it myself. Can you read notes, Fraulein?"

"A little."

"And did my attempt displease you?"

"Not at all, but I find dolorous passages in this choral, as in all the Calvinist hymns."

"It depends upon how they are sung."

"They are certainly intended for the voices of the shopkeepers' wives and washerwomen in your churches."

"Every hymn, if it is only sincerely felt, will lend wings to the souls of the simple folk who sing it; and whatever ascends to Heaven from the inmost depths of the heart, can hardly displease the dear God, to whom it is addressed. And then—"

"Well?"

"If these notes are worth being preserved, it may happen that a matchless choir—"

"Will sing them to you, you think?"

"No, Fraulein; they have fulfilled their destination if they are once nobly rendered. I would fain not be absent, but that wish is far less earnest than the other."

"How modest!"

"I think the best enjoyment in creating is had in anticipation."

Henrica gazed at the artist with a look of sympathy, and said with a softer tone in her musical voice:

"I am sorry for you, Meister. Your music pleases me; why should I deny it? In many passages it appeals to the heart, but how it will be spoiled in your churches! Your heresy destroys every art. The works of the great artists are a horror to you, and the noble music that has unfolded here in the Netherlands will soon fare no better."

"I think I may venture to believe the contrary."

"Wrongly, Meister, wrongly, for if your cause triumphs, which may the Virgin forbid, there will soon be nothing in Holland except piles of goods, workshops, and bare churches, from which even singing and organ-playing will soon be banished."

"By no means, Fraulein. Little Athens first became the home of the arts, after she had secured her

liberty in the war against the Persians."

"Athens and Leyden!" she answered scornfully. "True, there are owls on the tower of Pancratius. But where shall we find the Minerva?"

While Henrica rather laughed than spoke these words, her name was called for the third time by a shrill female voice. She now interrupted herself in the middle of a sentence, saying:

"I must go. I will keep these notes."

"You will honor me by accepting them; perhaps you will allow me to bring you others."

"Henrica!" the voice again called from the stairs, and the young lady answered hastily:

"Give Belotti whatever you choose, but soon, for I shan't stay here much longer."

Wilhelm gazed after her. She walked no less quickly and firmly through the wide hall and up the stairs, than she had spoken, and again he was vividly reminded of his friend in Rome.

The old Italian had also followed Henrica with his eyes. As she vanished at the last bend of the broad steps, he shrugged his shoulders, turned to the musician and said, with an expression of honest sympathy:

"The young lady isn't well. Always in a tumult; always like a loaded pistol, and these terrible headaches too! She was different when she came here."

"Is she ill?"

"My mistress won't see it," replied the servant. "But what the cameriera and I see, we see. Now red—now pale, no rest at night, at table she scarcely eats a chicken-wing and a leaf of salad."

"Does the doctor share your anxiety?"

"The doctor? Doctor Fleuriel isn't here. He moved to Ghent when the Spaniards came, and since then my mistress will have nobody but the barber who bleeds her. The doctors here are devoted to the Prince of Orange and are all heretics. There, she is calling again. I'll send the cloak to your house, and if you ever feel inclined to speak my language, just knock here. That calling—that everlasting calling! The young lady suffers from it too."

When Wilhelm entered the street, it was only raining very slightly. The clouds were beginning to scatter, and from a patch of blue sky the sun was shining brightly down on Nobelstrasse. A rainbow shimmered in variegated hues above the roofs, but to-day the musician had no eyes for the beautiful spectacle. The bright light in the wet street did not charm him. The hot rays of the day-star were not lasting, for "they drew rain." All that surrounded him seemed confused and restless. Beside a beautiful image which he treasured in the sanctuary of his memories, only allowing his mind to dwell upon it in his happiest hours, sought to intrude. His real diamond was in danger of being exchanged for a stone, whose value he did not know. With the old, pure harmony blended another similar one, but in a different key. How could he still think of Isabella, without remembering Henrica! At least he had not heard the young lady sing, so his recollection of Isabella's songs remained unclouded. He blamed himself because, obeying an emotion of vanity, he had promised to send new songs to the proud young girl, the friend of Spain. He had treated Herr Matanesse Van Wibisma rudely on account of his opinions, but sought to approach her, who laughed at what he prized most highly, because she was a woman, and it was sweet to hear his work praised by beautiful lips. "Hercules throws the club aside and sits down at the distaff, when Omphale beckons, and the beautiful Esther and the daughter of Herodias—" murmured Wilhelm indignantly. He felt sorely troubled, and longed for his quiet attic chamber beside the dove-cote.

"Something unpleasant has happened to him in Delft," thought his father.

"Why doesn't he relish his fried flounders to-day?" asked his mother, when he had left them after dinner. Each felt that something oppressed the pride and favorite of the household, but did not attempt to discover the cause; they knew the moods to which he was sometimes subject for half a day.

After Wilhelm had fed his doves, he went to his room, where he paced restlessly to and fro. Then he seized his violin and wove all the melodies he had heard from Isabella's lips into one. His music had rarely sounded so soft, and then so fierce and passionate, and his mother, who heard it in the kitchen, turned the twirling-stick faster and faster, then thrust it into the firmly-tied dough, and rubbing her hands on her apron, murmured:

"How it wails and exults! If it relieves his heart, in God's name let him do it, but cat-gut is dear and it will cost at least two strings."

Towards evening Wilhelm was obliged to go to the drill of the military corps to which he belonged. His company was ordered to mount guard at the Hoogewoort Gate. As he marched through Nobelstrasse with it, he heard the low, clear melody of a woman's voice issuing from an open window of the Hoogstraten mansion. He listened, and noticing with a shudder how much Henrica's voice—for the singer must be the young lady—resembled Isabella's, ordered the drummer to beat the drum.

The next morning a servant came from the Hoogstraten house and gave Wilhelm a note, in which he was briefly requested to come to Nobelstrasse at two o'clock in the afternoon, neither earlier nor later.

He did not wish to say "yes"—he could not say "no," and went to the house at the appointed hour. Henrica was awaiting him in the little room adjoining the hall. She looked graver than the day before, while heavier shadows under her eyes and the deep flush on her cheeks reminded Wilhelm of Belotti's fears for her health. After returning his greeting, she said without circumlocution, and very rapidly:

"I must speak to you. Sit down. To be brief, the way you greeted me yesterday awakened strange thoughts. I must strongly resemble some other woman, and you met her in Italy. Perhaps you are reminded of some one very near to me, of whom I have lost all trace. Answer me honestly, for I do not ask from idle curiosity. Where did you meet her?"

"In Lugano. We drove to Milan with the same vetturino, and afterwards I found her again in Rome and saw her daily for months."

Then you know her intimately. Do you still think the resemblance surprising, after having seen me for the second time?"

"Very surprising."

"Then I must have a double. Is she a native of this country?"

"She called herself an Italian, but she understood Dutch, for she has often turned the pages of my books and followed the conversation I had with young artists from our home. I think she is a German lady of noble family."

"An adventuress then. And her name?"

"Isabella—but I think no one would be justified in calling her an adventuress."

"Was she married?"

"There was something matronly in her majestic appearance, yet she never spoke of a husband. The old Italian woman, her duenna, always called her Donna Isabella, but she possessed little more knowledge of her past than I."

"Is that good or evil?"

"Nothing at all, Fraulein."

"And what led her to Rome?"

"She practised the art of singing, of which she was mistress; but did not cease studying, and made great progress in Rome. I was permitted to instruct her in counterpoint."

"And did she appear in public as a singer?"

"Yes and no. A distinguished foreign prelate was her patron, and his recommendation opened every door, even the Palestrina's. So the church music at aristocratic weddings was entrusted to her, and she did not refuse to sing at noble houses, but never appeared for pay. I know that, for she would not allow any one else to play her accompaniments. She liked my music, and so through her I went into many aristocratic houses."

"Was she rich?"

"No, Fraulein. She had beautiful dresses and brilliant jewels, but was compelled to economize. Remittances of money came to her at times from Florence, but the gold pieces slipped quickly through her fingers, for though she lived plainly and eat scarcely enough for a bird, while her delicate strength required stronger food, she was lavish to imprudence if she saw poor artists in want, and she knew most of them, for she did not shrink from sitting with them over their wine in my company."

"With artists and musicians?"

"Mere artists of noble sentiments. At times she surpassed them all in her overflowing mirth."

"At times?"

"Yes, only at times, for she had also sorrowful, pitiably sorrowful hours and days, but as sunshine and shower alternate in an April day, despair and extravagant gayety ruled her nature by turns."

"A strange character. Do you know her end?"

"No, Fraulein. One evening she received a letter from Milan, which must have contained bad news, and the next day vanished without any farewell."

"And you did not try to follow her?"

Wilhelm blushed, and answered in an embarrassed tone:

"I had no right to do so, and just after her departure I fell sick— dangerously sick."

"You loved her?"

"Fraulein, I must beg you—"

"You loved her! And did she return your affection?"

"We have known each other only since yesterday, Fraulein von Hoogstraten."

"Pardon me! But if you value my desire, we shall not have seen each other for the last time, though my double is undoubtedly a different person from the one I supposed. Farewell till we meet again. You hear, that calling never ends. You have aroused an interest in your strange friend, and some other time must tell me more about her. Only this one question: Can a modest maiden talk of her with you without disgrace?"

"Certainly, if you do not shrink from speaking of a noble lady who had no other protector than herself."

"And you, don't forget yourself!" cried Henrica, leaving the room.

The musician walked thoughtfully towards home. Was Isabella a relative of this young girl? He had told Henrica almost all he knew of her external circumstances, and this perhaps gave the former the same right to call her an adventuress, that many in Rome had assumed. The word wounded him, and Henrica's inquiry whether he loved the stranger disturbed him, and appeared intrusive and unseemly. Yes, he had felt an ardent love for her; ay, he had suffered deeply because he was no more to her than a pleasant companion and reliable friend. It had cost him struggles enough to conceal his feelings, and he knew, that but for the dread of repulse and scorn, he would have yielded and revealed them to her. Old wounds in his heart opened afresh, as he recalled the time she suddenly left Rome without a word of farewell. After barely recovering from a severe illness, he had returned home pale and dispirited, and months elapsed ere he could again find genuine pleasure in his art. At first, the remembrance of her contained nothing save bitterness, but now, by quiet, persistent effort, he had succeeded, not in attaining forgetfulness, but in being able to separate painful emotions from the pure and exquisite joy of remembering her. To-day the old struggle sought to begin afresh, but he was not disposed to yield, and did not cease to summon Isabella's image, in all its beauty, before his soul.

Henrica returned to her aunt in a deeply-agitated mood. Was the adventuress of whom Wilhelm had spoken, the only creature whom she loved with all the ardor of her passionate soul? Was Isabella her lost sister? Many incidents were opposed to it, yet it was possible. She tortured herself with questions, and the less peace her aunt gave her, the more unendurable her headache became, the more plainly she felt that the fever, against whose relaxing power she had struggled for days, would conquer her.

CHAPTER IX.

On the evening of the third day after Wilhelm's interview with Henrica, his way led him through

Nobelstrasse past the Hoogstraten mansion.

Ere reaching it, he saw two gentlemen, preceded by a servant carrying a lantern, cross the causeway towards it.

Wilhelm's attention was attracted. The servant now seized the knocker, and the light of his lantern fell on the men's faces. Neither was unfamiliar to him.

The small, delicate old man, with the peaked hat and short black velvet cloak, was Abbe Picard, a gay Parisian, who had come to Leyden ten years before and gave French lessons in the wealthy families of the city. He had been Wilhelm's teacher too, but the musician's father, the Receiver-General, would have nothing to do with the witty abbe; for he was said to have left his beloved France on account of some questionable transactions, and Herr Cornelius scented in him a Spanish spy. The other gentleman, a grey-haired, unusually stout man, of middle height, who required a great deal of cloth for his fur-bordered cloak, was Signor Lamperi, the representative of the great Italian mercantile house of Bonvisi in Antwerp, who was in the habit of annually coming to Leyden on business for a few weeks with the storks and swallows, and was a welcome guest in every tap-room as the inexhaustible narrator of funny stories. Before these two men entered the house, they were joined by a third, preceded by two servants carrying lanterns. A wide cloak enveloped his tall figure; he too stood on the threshold of old age and was no stranger to Wilhelm, for the Catholic Monseigneur Gloria, who often came to Leyden from Haarlem, was a patron of the noble art of music, and when the young man set out on his journey to Italy had provided him, spite of his heretical faith, with valuable letters of introduction.

Wilhelm, as the door closed behind the three gentlemen, continued his way. Belotti had told him the day before that the young lady seemed very ill, but since her aunt was receiving guests, Henrica was doubtless better.

The first story in the Hoogstraten mansion was brightly lighted, but in the second a faint, steady glow streamed into Nobelstrasse from a single window, while she for whom the lamp burned sat beside a table, her eyes sparkling with a feverish glitter, as she pressed her forehead against the marble top. Henrica was entirely alone in the wide, lofty room her aunt had assigned her. Behind curtains of thick faded brocade was her bedstead, a heavy structure of enormous width. The other articles of furniture were large and shabby, but had once been splendid. Every chair, every table looked as if it had been taken from some deserted banqueting-hall. Nothing really necessary was lacking in the apartment, but it was anything but home-like and cosy, and no one would ever have supposed a young girl occupied it, had it not been for a large gilt harp that leaned against the long, hard couch beside the fireplace.

Henrica's head was burning but, though she had wrapped a shawl around her lower limbs, her feet were freezing on the uncarpeted stone floor.

A short time after the three gentlemen had entered her aunt's house, a woman's figure ascended the stairs leading from the first to the second story. Henrica's over-excited senses perceived the light tread of the satin shoes and the rustle of the silk train, long before the approaching form had reached the room, and with quickened breathing, she sat erect.

A thin hand, without any preliminary knock, now opened the door and old Fraulein Van Hoogstraten walked up to her niece.

The elderly dame had once been beautiful, now and at this hour she presented a strange, unpleasing appearance.

The thin, bent figure was attired in a long trailing robe of heavy pink silk. The little head almost disappeared in the ruff, a large structure of immense height and width. Long chains of pearls and glittering gems hung on the sallow skin displayed by the open neck of her dress, and on the false, reddish-yellow curls rested a roll of light-blue velvet decked with ostrich plumes. A strong odor of various fragrant essences preceded her. She herself probably found them somewhat overpowering, for her large glittering fan was in constant motion and fluttered violently, when in answer to her curt: "Quick, quick," Henrica returned a resolute "no, 'ma tante."

The old lady, however, was not at all disconcerted by the refusal, but merely repeated her "Quick, quick," more positively, adding as an important reason:

"Monseigneur has come and wants to hear you."

"He does me great honor," replied the young girl, "great honor, but how often must I repeat: I will not come."

"Is it allowable to ask why not, my fair one?" said the old lady.

"Because I am not fit for your society," cried Henrica vehemently, "because my head aches and my eyes burn, because I can't sing to-day, and because—because—because—I entreat you, leave me in peace."

Old Fraulein Van Hoogstraten let her fan sink by her side, and said coolly:

"Were you singing two hours ago—yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Then your headache can't be so very bad, and Denise will dress you."

"If she comes, I'll send her away. When I just took the harp, I did so to sing the pain away. It was relieved for a few minutes, but now my temples are throbbing with twofold violence."

"Excuses."

"Believe what you choose. Besides—even if I felt better at this moment than a squirrel in the woods. I wouldn't go down to see the gentlemen. I shall stay here. I have given my word, and I am a Hoogstraten as well as you."

Henrica had risen, and her eyes flashed with a gloomy fire at her oppressor. The old lady waved her fan faster, and her projecting chin trembled. Then she said curtly:

"Your word of honor! So you won't! You won't!"

"Certainly not," cried the young girl with undutiful positiveness.

"Everybody must have his way," replied the old lady, turning towards the door. "What is too wilful is too wilful. Your father won't thank you for this." With these words Fraulein Van Hoogstraten raised her long train and approached the door. There she paused, and again glanced enquiringly at Henrica. The latter doubtless noticed her aunt's hesitation, but without heeding the implied threat intentionally turned her back.

As soon as the door closed, the young girl sank back into her chair, pressed her forehead against the marble slab and let it remain there a long time. Then she rose as suddenly and hastily as if obeying some urgent summons, raised the lid of her trunk, tossed the stockings, bodices and shoes, that came into her way, out on the floor, and did not rise until she had found a few sheets of writing-paper which she had laid, before leaving her father's castle, among the rest of her property.

As she rose from her kneeling posture, she was seized with giddiness, but still kept her feet, carried to the table first the white sheets and a portfolio, then the large inkstand that had already stood several days in her room, and seated herself beside it.

Leaning far back in her chair, she began to write. The book that served as a desk lay on her knee, the paper on the book. Creaking and pausing, the goosequill made large, stiff letters on the white surface. Henrica was not skilled in writing, but to-day it must have been unspeakably difficult for her; her high forehead became covered with perspiration, her mouth was distorted by pain, and whenever she had finished a few lines, she closed her eyes or drank greedily from the water-pitcher that stood beside her.

The large room was perfectly still, but the peace that surrounded her was often disturbed by strange noises and tones, that rose from the dining-hall directly under her chamber. The clinking of glasses, shrill tittering, loud, deep laughter, single bars of a dissolute love-song, cheers, and then the sharp rattle of a shattered wine glass reached her in mingled sounds. She did not wish to hear it, but could not escape and clenched her white teeth indignantly. Yet meantime the pen did not wholly stop.

She wrote in broken, or long, disconnected sentences, almost incoherently involved. Sometimes there were gaps, sometimes the same word was twice or thrice repeated. The whole resembled a letter written by a lunatic, yet every line, every stroke of the pen, expressed the same desire uttered with passionate longing: "Take me away from here! Take me away from this woman and this house!"

The epistle was addressed to her father. She implored him to rescue her from this place, come or send for her. "Her uncle, Matanesse Van Wibisma," she said, "seemed to be a sluggish messenger; he had probably enjoyed the evenings at her aunt's, which filled her, Henrica, with loathing. She would go out into the world after her sister, if her father compelled her to stay here." Then she began a description of her aunt and her life. The picture of the days and nights she had now spent for weeks with the old lady, presented in vivid characters a mixture of great and petty troubles, external and mental humiliations.

Only too often the same drinking and carousing had gone on below as to-day—Henrica had always been compelled to join her aunt's guests, elderly dissolute men of French or Italian origin and easy morals. While describing these conventicles, the blood crimsoned her flushed cheeks still more deeply, and the long strokes of the pen grew heavier and heavier. What the abbe related and her aunt laughed at, what the Italian screamed and Monseigneur smilingly condemned with a slight shake of the head, was so shamelessly bold that she would have been defiled by repeating the words. Was she a respectable girl or not? She would rather hunger and thirst, than be present at such a banquet again. If the dining-room was empty, other unprecedented demands were made upon Henrica, for then her aunt, who could not endure to be alone a moment, was sick and miserable, and she was obliged to nurse her. That she gladly and readily served the suffering, she wrote, she had sufficiently proved by her attendance on the village children when they had the smallpox, but if her aunt could not sleep she was compelled to watch beside her, hold her hand, and listen until morning as she moaned, whined and prayed, sometimes cursing herself and sometimes the treacherous world. She, Henrica, had come to the house strong and well, but so much disgust and anger, such constant struggling to control herself had robbed her of her health.

The young girl had written until midnight. The letters became more and more irregular and indistinct, the lines more crooked, and with the last words: "My head, my poor head! You will see that I am losing my senses. I beseech you, I beseech you, my dear, stern father, take me home. I have again heard something about Anna—" her eyes grew dim, her pen dropped from her hand, and she fell back in the chair unconscious.

There she lay, until the last laugh and sound of rattling glass had died away below, and her aunt's guests had left the house.

Denise, the cameriera, noticed the light in the room, entered, and after vainly endeavoring to rouse Henrica, called her mistress.

The latter followed the maid, muttering as she ascended the stairs:

"Fallen asleep, found the time hang heavy—that's all! She might have been lively and laughed with us! Stupid race! 'Men of butter,' King Philip says. That wild Lamperi was really impertinent to-night, and the abbe said things—things—"

The old lady's large eyes were sparkling vinously, and her fan waved rapidly to and fro to cool the flush on her cheeks.

She now stood opposite to Henrica, called her, shook her and sprinkled her with perfumed water from the large shell, set in gold, which hung as an essence bottle from her belt. When her niece only muttered incoherent words, she ordered the maid to bring her medicine-chest.

Denise had gone and Fraulein Van Hoogstraten now perceived Henrica's letter, raised it close to her eyes, read page after page with increasing indignation, and at last tossed it on the floor and tried to shake her niece awake; but in vain.

Meantime Belotti had been informed of Henrica's serious illness and, as he liked the young girl, sent for a physician on his own responsibility, and instead of the family priest summoned Father Damianus. Then he went to the sick girl's chamber.

Even before he crossed the threshold, the old lady in the utmost excitement, exclaimed:

"Belotti, what do you say now, Belotti? Sickness in the house, perhaps contagious sickness, perhaps the plague."

"It seems to be only a fever," replied the Italian soothingly. "Come, Denise, we will carry the young lady to the bed."

"The doctor will soon be here."

"The doctor?" cried the old lady, striking her fan on the marble top of the table. "Who permitted you, Belotti—"

"We are Christians," interrupted the servant, not without dignity.

"Very well, very well," she cried. "Do what you please, call whom you choose, but Henrica can't stay here. Contagion in the house, the plague, a black tablet."

"Eccellenza is disturbing herself unnecessarily. Let us first hear what the doctor says."

"I won't hear him; I can't bear the plague and the small-pox. Go down at once, Belotti, and have the sedan-chair prepared. The old chevalier's room in the rear building is empty."

"But, Excellenza, it's gloomy, and so damp that the north wall is covered with mould."

"Then let it be aired and cleaned. What does this delay mean? You have only to obey. Do you understand?"

"The chevalier's room isn't fit for my mistress's sick niece," replied Belotti civilly, but resolutely.

"Isn't it? And you know exactly?" asked his mistress scornfully. "Go down, Denise, and order the sedan-chair to be brought up. Have you anything more to say, Belotti?"

"Yes, Padrona," replied the Italian, in a trembling voice. "I beg your excellenza to dismiss me."

"Dismiss you from my service?"

"With your excellenza's permission, yes—from your service."

The old woman started, clasped her hands tightly upon her fan, and said:

"You are irritable, Belotti."

"No, Padrona, but I am old and dread the misfortune of being ill in this house."

Fraulein Van Hoogstraten shrugged her shoulders and turning to her maid, cried:

"The sedan-chair, Denise. You are dismissed, Belotti."

CHAPTER X.

The night, on which sorrow and sickness had entered the Hoogstraten mansion, was followed by a beautiful morning. Holland again became pleasant to the storks, that with a loud, joyous clatter flew clown into the meadows on which the sun was shining. It was one of those days the end of April often bestows on men, as if to show them that they render her too little, her successor too much honor. April can boast that in her house is born the spring, whose vigor is only strengthened and beauty developed by her blooming heir.

It was Sunday, and whoever on such a day, while the bells are ringing, wanders in Holland over sunny paths, through flowery meadows where countless cattle, woolly cheep, and idle horses are grazing, meeting peasants in neat garments, peasant women with shining gold ornaments under snow-white lace caps, citizens in gay attire and children released from school, can easily fancy that even nature wears a holiday garb and glitters in brighter green, more brilliant blue, and more varied ornaments of flowers than on work-days.

A joyous Sunday mood doubtless filled the minds of the burghers, who to-day were out of doors on foot, in large over-crowded wooden wagons, or gaily-painted boats on the Rhine, to enjoy the leisure hours of the day of rest, eat country bread, yellow butter, and fresh cheese, or drink milk and cool beer, with their wives and children.

The organist, Wilhelm, had long since finished playing in the church, but did not wander out into the fields with companions of his own age, for he liked to use such days for longer excursions, in which walking was out of the question.

They bore him on the wings of the wind over his native plains, through the mountains and valleys of Germany, across the Alps to Italy. A spot propitious for such forgetfulness of the present and his daily surroundings, in favor of the past and a distant land, was ready. His brothers, Ulrich and Johannes, also musicians, but who recognized Wilhelm's superior talent without envy and helped him develop it, had arranged for him, during his stay in Italy, a prettily-furnished room in the narrow side of the pointed roof of the house, from which a broad door led to a little balcony. Here stood a wooden bench on which Wilhelm liked to sit, watching the flight of his doves, gazing dreamily into the distance or, when inclined to artistic creation, listening to the melodies that echoed in his soul.

This highest part of the house afforded a beautiful prospect; the view was almost as extensive as the one from the top of the citadel, the old Roman tower situated in the midst of Leyden. Like a spider in its web, Wilhelm's native city lay in the midst of countless streams and canals that intersected the meadows. The red brick masonry of the city wall, with its towers and bastions, washed by a dark strip of water, encircled the pretty place as a diadem surrounds a young girl's head; and like a chaplet of loosely-bound thorns, forts and redoubts extended in wider, frequently broken circles around the walls. The citizens' herds of cattle grazed between the defensive fortifications and the city wall, while beside and beyond them appeared villages and hamlets.

On this clear April day, looking towards the north, Haarlem lake was visible, and on the west, beyond the leafy coronals of the Hague woods, must be the downs which nature had reared for the protection of the country against the assaults of the waves. Their long chain of hillocks offered a firmer and more unconquerable resistance to the pressure of the sea, than the earthworks and redoubts of Alfen, Leyderdorp and Valkenburg, the three forts situated close to the banks of the Rhine, presented to hostile armies. The Rhine! Wilhelm gazed down at the shallow, sluggish river, and compared it to a king deposed from his throne, who has lost power and splendor and now kindly endeavors to dispense benefits in little circles with the property that remains. The musician was familiar with the noble, undivided German Rhine; and often followed it in imagination towards the south but more often still his dreams conveyed him with a mighty leap to Lake Lugano, the pearl of the Western Alps, and when he thought of it and the Mediterranean, beheld rising before his mental vision emerald green, azure blue, and golden light; and in such hours all his thoughts were transformed within his breast into harmonies and exquisite music.

And his journey from Lugano to Milan! The conveyance that bore him to Leonardo's city was plain and overcrowded, but in it he had found Isabella. And Rome, Rome, eternal, never-to-be-forgotten Rome, where so long as we dwell there, we grow out of ourselves, increase in strength and intellectual power, and which makes us wretched with longing when it lies behind us.

By the Tiber Wilhelm had first thoroughly learned what art, his glorious art was; here, near Isabella, a new world had opened to him, but a sharp frost had passed over the blossoms of his heart that had unfolded in Rome, and he knew they were blighted and could bear no fruit—yet to-day he succeeded in recalling her in her youthful beauty, and instead of the lost love, thinking of the kind friend Isabella and dreaming of a sky blue as turquoise, of slender columns and bubbling fountains, olive groves and marble statues, cool churches and gleaming villas, sparkling eyes and fiery wine, magnificent choirs and Isabella's singing.

The doves that cooed and clucked, flew away and returned to the cote beside him, could now do as they chose, their guardian neither saw nor heard them.

Allertssohn, the fencing-master, ascended the ladder to his watch-tower, but he did not notice him until he stood on the balcony by his side, greeting him with his deep voice.

"Where have we been, Herr Wilhelm?" asked the old man. "In this cloth-weaving Leyden? No! Probably with the goddess of music on Olympus, if she has her abode there."

"Rightly guessed," replied Wilhelm, pushing the hair back from his forehead with both hands. "I have been visiting her, and she sends you a friendly greeting."

"Then offer one from me in return," replied the other, "but she usually belongs to the least familiar of my acquaintances. My throat is better suited to drinking than singing. Will you allow me?"

The fencing-master raised the jug of beer which Wilhelm's mother filled freshly every day and placed in her darling's room, and took a long pull. Then wiping his moustache, he said:

"That did me good, and I needed it. The men wanted to go out pleasuring and omit their drill, but we forced them to go through it, Junker von Warmond, Duivenvoorde and I. Who knows how soon it may be necessary to show what we can do. Roland, my fore man, such imprudence is like a cudgel, against which one can do nothing with Florentine rapiers, clever tierce and quarto. My wheat is destroyed by the hail."

"Then let it be, and see if the barley and clover don't do better," replied Wilhelm gaily, tossing vetches and grains of wheat to a large dove that had alighted on the parapet of his tower.

"It eats, and what use is it?" cried Allertssohn, looking at the dove. "Herr von Warmond, a young man after God's own heart, has just brought me two falcons; do you want to see how I tame them?"

"No, Captain, I have enough to do with my music and my doves."

"That is your affair. The long-necked one yonder is a queer-looking fellow."

"And of what country is he probably a native? There he goes to join the others. Watch him a little while and then answer me."

"Ask King Solomon that; he was on intimate terms with birds."

"Only watch him, you'll find out presently."

"The fellow has a stiff neck, and holds his head unusually high."

"And his beak?"

"Curved, almost like a hawk's! Zounds, why does the creature strut about with its toes so far apart? Stop, bandit! He'll peck that little dove to death. As true as I live, the saucy rascal must be a Spaniard!"

"Right, it is a Spanish dove. It flew to me, but I can't endure it and drive it away; for I keep only a few pairs of the same breed and try to get the best birds possible. Whoever raises many different kinds in the same cote, will accomplish nothing."

"That gives food for thought. But I believe you haven't chosen the handsomest species."

"No, sir. What you see are a cross between the carrier and tumblers, the Antwerp breed of carrier pigeons. Bluish, reddish, spotted birds. I don't care for the colors, but they must have small bodies and large wings, with broad quills on their flag-feathers, and above all ample muscular strength. The one yonder stop, I'll catch him—is one of my best flyers. Try to lift his pinions."

"Heaven knows the little thing has marrow in its bones! How the tiny wing pinches; the falcons are not much stronger."

"It's a carrier-dove too, that finds its way alone."

"Why do you keep no white tumblers? I should think they could be watched farthest in their flight."

"Because doves fare like men. Whoever shines very brightly and is seen from a distance, is set upon by opponents and envious people, and birds of prey pounce upon the white doves first. I tell you, Captain, whoever has eyes in his head, can learn in a dove-cote how things come to pass among Adam and Eve's posterity on earth."

"There is quarrelling and kissing up here just as there is in Leyden."

"Yes, exactly the same, Captain. If I mate an old dove with one much younger, it rarely turns out well. When the male dove is in love, he understands how to pay his fair one as many attentions, as the most elegant gallant shows the mistress of his heart. And do you know what the kissing means? The suitor feeds his darling, that is, seeks to win her affection by beautiful gifts. Then the wedding comes, and they build a nest. If there are young birds, they feed them together in perfect harmony. The aristocratic doves brood badly, and we put their eggs under birds of more ordinary breed."

"Those are the noble ladies, who have nurses for their infants."

"Unmated doves often make mischief among the mated ones."

"Take warning, young man, and beware of being a bachelor. I'll say nothing against the girls who remain unmarried, for I have found among them many sweet, helpful souls."

"So have I, but unfortunately some bad ones too, as well as here in the dove-cote. On the whole my wards lead happy married lives, but if it comes to a separation—"

"Which of the two is to blame?"

"Nine times out of ten the little wife."

"Roland, my fore man, exactly as it is among human beings," cried the fencing-master, clapping his hands.

"What do you mean by your Roland, Herr Allerts? You promised me a short time ago—but who is coming up the ladder?"

"I hear your mother."

"She is bringing me a visitor. I know that voice and yet. Wait. It's old Fraulein Van Hoogstraten's

steward."

"From Nobelstrasse? Let me go, Wilhelm, for this Glipper crew—"

"Wait a little while, there is only room for one on the ladder," said the musician, holding out his hand to Belotti to guide him from the last rung into his room.

"Spaniards and the allies of Spain," muttered the fencing-master, opened the door, and called while descending the ladder: "I'll wait down below till the air is pure again."

The steward's handsome face, usually smoothly shaven with the most extreme care, was to-day covered with a stubbly beard, and the old man looked sad and worn, as he began to tell Wilhelm what had occurred in his mistress's house since the evening of the day before.

"Years may make a hot-tempered person weaker, but not calmer," said the Italian, continuing his story. "I can't look on and see the poor angel, for she isn't far from the Virgin's throne, treated like a sick dog that is flung out into the court-yard, so I got my discharge."

"That does you honor, but was rather out of place just now. And has the young lady really been carried to the damp room?"

"No, sir. Father Damianus came and made the old excellenza understand what the holy Virgin expected of a Christian, and when the padrona still tried to carry out her will, the holy man spoke to her in words so harsh and stern that she yielded. The signorina is now lying in bed with burning cheeks, raving in delirium."

"And who is attending the patient?"

"I came to you about the physician, my dear sir, for Doctor de Bout, who instantly obeyed my summons, was treated so badly by the old excellenza, that he turned his back upon her and told me, at the door of the house, he wouldn't come again."

Wilhelm shook his head, and the Italian continued, "There are other doctors in Leyden, but Father Damianus says de Bont or Bontius, as they call him, is the most skilful and learned of them all, and as the old excellenza herself had an attack of illness about noon, and certainly won't leave her bed very speedily, the way is open, and Father Damianus says he'll go to Doctor Bontius himself if necessary. But as you are a native of the city and acquainted with the signorina, I wanted to spare him the rebuff he would probably meet from the foe of our holy Church. The poor man has enough to suffer from good-for-nothing boys and scoffers, when he goes through the city with the sacrament."

"You know people are strictly forbidden to disturb him in the exercise of his calling."

"Yet he can't show himself in the street without being jeered. We two cannot change the world, sir. So long as the Church had the upper hand, she burned and quartered you, now you have the power here, our priests are persecuted and scorned."

"Against the law and the orders of the magistrates."

"You can't control the people, and Father Damianus is a lamb, who bears everything patiently, as good a Christian as many saints before whom we burn candles. Do you know the doctor?"

"A little, by sight."

"Oh, then go to him, sir, for the young lady's sake," cried the old man earnestly. "It is in your power to save a human life, a beautiful young life."

The steward's eyes glittered with tears. As Wilhelm laid his hand on his arm, saying kindly: "I will try," the fencing-master called: "Your council is lasting too long for me. I'll come another time."

"No, Meister, come up a minute, This gentleman is here on account of a poor sick girl. The poor, helpless creature is now lying without any care, for her aunt, old Fraulein Van Hoogstraten, has driven Doctor de Bont from her bed because he is a Calvinist."

"From the sick girl's bed?"

"It's abominable enough, but the old lady is now ill herself."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried the fencing-master, clapping his hands. "If the devil himself isn't afraid of her and wants to fetch her, I'll pay for his post-horses. But the girl, the sick girl?"

"Herr Belotti begs me to persuade de Bont to visit her again. Are you on friendly terms with the doctor?"

"I was, Wilhelm, I was; but—last Friday we had some sharp words about the new morions, and now the learned demi-god demands an apology from me, but to sound a retreat isn't written here—"

"Oh, my dear sir," cried Belotti, with touching earnestness. "The poor child is lying helpless in a raging fever. If Heaven has blessed you with children—"

"Be calm, old man, be calm," replied the fencing master, stroking Belotti's grey hair kindly. "My children are nothing to you, but we'll do what we can for the young girl. Farewell till we meet again, gentlemen. Roland, my fore man, what shall we live to see! Hemp is still cheap in Holland, and yet such a monster has lived amongst us to be as old as a raven."

With these words he went down the ladder. On reaching the street, he pondered over the words in which he should apologize to Doctor Bontius, with a face as sour as if he had wormwood in his mouth; but his eyes and bearded lips smiled.

His learned friend made the apology easy for him, and when Belotti came home, he found the doctor by the sick girl's bed.

CHAPTER XI.

Frau Elizabeth von Nordwyk and Frau Van Bout had each asked the burgomaster's wife to go into the country with them to enjoy the beautiful spring day, but in spite of Barbara's persuasions, Maria could not be induced to accept their invitation.

A week had elapsed since her husband's departure, a week whose days had run their course from morning to evening as slowly as the brackish water in one of the canals, intersecting the meadows of Holland, flowed towards the river.

Sleep loves the couches of youth, and had again found hers, but with the rising of the sun the dissatisfaction, anxiety and secret grief, that slumber had kindly interrupted, once more returned. She felt that it was not right, and her father would have blamed her if he had seen her thus.

There are women who are ashamed of rosy cheeks, unrestrained joy in life, to whom the emotion of sorrow affords a mournful pleasure. To this class Maria certainly did not belong. She would fain have been happy, and left untried no means of regaining the lost joy of her heart. Honestly striving to do her duty, she returned to little Bessie; but the child was rapidly recovering and called for Barbara, Adrian or Trautchen, as soon as she was left alone with her.

She tried to read, but the few books she had brought from Delft were all familiar, and her thoughts, ere becoming fixed on the old volumes, pursued their own course.

Wilhelm brought her the new motet, and she endeavored to sing it; but music demands whole hearts from those who desire to enjoy her gifts, and therefore melody and song refused comfort as well as pleasure to her, whose mind was engrossed by wholly different things. If she helped Adrian in his work, her patience failed much sooner than usual. On the first market-day, she went out with Trautchen to obey her husband's directions and make purchases and, while shopping at the various places where different wares were offered—here fish, yonder meat or vegetables, amid the motley crowd, hailed on every side by cries of: "Here, Frau Burgermeisterin! I have what you want, Frau Burgermeisterin!" forgot the sorrow that oppressed her.

With newly-animated self-reliance, she examined flour, pulse and dried fish, making it a point of honor to bargain carefully; Barbara should see that she knew how to buy. The crowd was very great everywhere, for the city magistrates had issued a proclamation bidding every household, in view of the threatened danger, to supply itself abundantly with provisions on all the market-days; but the purchasers made way for the burgomaster's pretty young wife, and this too pleased her.

She returned home with a bright face, happy in having done her best, and instantly went into the kitchen to see Barbara.

Peter's good-natured sister had plainly perceived how sorely her young sister-in-law's heart was

troubled, and therefore gladly saw her go out to make her purchases. Choosing and bargaining would surely dispel her sorrows and bring other thoughts. True, the cautious house-keeper, who expected everything good from Maria except the capacity of showing herself an able, clever mistress of the house, had charged Trautchen to warn her mistress against being cheated. But when in market the demand is two or three times greater than the supply, prices rise, and so it happened that when Maria told the widow how much she had paid for this or that article, Barbara's "My child, that's perfectly unheard-of!" or, "It's enough to drive us to beggary," followed each other in quick succession.

These exclamations, which under the circumstances were usually entirely unjustifiable, vexed Maria; but she wished to be at peace with her sister-in-law, and though it was hard to bear injustice, it was contrary to her nature and would have caused her pain to express her indignation in violent words. So she merely said with a little excitement:

"Please ask what other ladies are paying, and then Scold, if you think it right."

With these words she left the kitchen.

"My child, I'm not scolding at all," Barbara called after her, but Maria would not hear, hastily ascended the stairs and locked herself into her room. Her joyousness had again vanished.

On Sunday she went to church. After dinner she filled a canvas-bag with provisions for Adrian, who was going on a boating excursion with several friends, and then sat at the window in her chamber.

Stately men, among them many members of the council, passed by with their gaily-dressed wives and children; young girls with flowers in their bosoms moved arm in arm, by twos and threes, along the footpath beside the canal, to dance in the village outside the Zyl-Gate. They walked quietly forward with eyes discreetly downcast, but many a cheek flushed and many an ill-suppressed smile hovered around rosy lips, when the youths, who followed the girls moving so decorously along, as gaily and swiftly as sea-gulls flutter around a ship, uttered teasing jests, or whispered into their ears words that no third party need hear.

All who were going towards the Zyl-Gate seemed gay and careless, every face showed what joyous hours in the open air and sunny meadows were anticipated. The object that attracted them appeared beautiful and desirable to Maria also, but what should she do among the happy, how could she be alone amid strangers with her troubled heart? The shadows of the houses seemed especially dark to-day, the air of the city heavier than usual, as if the spring had come to every human being, great and small, old and young, except herself.

The buildings and the trees that bordered the Achtergracht were already casting longer shadows, and the golden mists hovering over the roofs began to be mingled with a faint rosy light, when Maria heard a horseman trotting up the street. She drew herself up rigidly and her heart throbbed violently. She would not receive Peter any differently from usual, she must be frank to him and show him how she felt, and that matters could not go on so, nay she was already trying to find fitting words for what she had to say to him. Just at that moment, the horse stopped before the door. She went to the window; saw her husband swing himself from the saddle and look joyously up to the window of her room and, though she made no sign of greeting, her heart drew her towards him. Every thought, every fancy was forgotten, and with winged steps she flew down the corridor to the stairs. Meantime he had entered, and she called his name. "Maria, child, are you there!" he shouted, rushed up the steps as nimbly as a youth, met her on one of the upper stairs and drew her with overflowing tenderness to his heart.

"At last, at last, I have you again!" he cried joyously, pressing his lips to her eyes and her fragrant hair. She had clasped her hands closely around his neck, but he released himself, held them in his, and asked: "Are Barbara and Adrian at home?"

She shook her head.

The burgomaster laughed, stooped, lifted her up like a child, and carried her into his room. As a beautiful tree beside a burning house is seized by the neighboring flames, although immediately protected with cold water, Maria, in spite of her long-cherished resolve to receive him coolly, was overwhelmed by the warmth of her husband's feelings. She cordially rejoiced in having him once more, and willingly believed him, as he told her in loving words how painfully he had felt their separation, how sorely he had missed her, and how distinctly he, who usually lacked the ability to remember an absent person, had had her image before his eyes.

How warmly, with what convincing tones he understood how to give expression to his love to-day! She was still a happy wife, and showed him that she was without reserve.

Barbara and Adrian returned home, and there was now much to tell at the evening meal. Peter had

had many a strange experience on the journey, and gained fresh hope, the boy had distinguished himself at school, and Bessie's sickness might already be called a danger happily overcome. Barbara was radiant with joy, for all seemed well between Maria and her brother.

The beautiful April night passed pleasantly away. When Maria was braiding black velvet into her hair the next morning, she was full of grateful emotion, for she had found courage to tell Peter that she desired to have a larger share in his anxieties than before, and received a kind assent. A worthier, richer life, she hoped, would now begin. He was to tell her this very day what he had discussed and accomplished with the Prince and at Dortrecht, for hitherto no word of all this had escaped his lips.

Barbara, who was moving about in the kitchen and just on the point of catching three chickens to kill them, let them live a little longer, and even tossed half a handful of barley into their coop, as she heard her sister-in-law come singing down-stairs. The broken bars of Wilhelm's last madrigal sounded as sweet and full of promise as the first notes of the nightingale, which the gardener hears at the end of a long winter. It was spring again in the house, and her pleasant round face, in its large cap, looked as bright and unclouded as a sunflower amid its green leaves, as she called to Maria:

"This is a good day for you, child; we'll melt down the butter and salt the hams."

The words sounded as joyous as if she had offered her an invitation to Paradise, and Maria willingly helped in the work, which began at once. When the widow moved her hands, tongues could not remain silent, and the conversation that had probably taken place between Peter and his wife excited her curiosity not a little.

She turned the conversation upon him cleverly enough, and, as if accidentally, asked the question:

"Did he apologize for his departure on the anniversary of your wedding-day?"

"I know the reason; he could not stay."

"Of course not, of course not; but whoever is green the goats eat. We mustn't allow the men to go too far. Give, but take also. An injustice endured is a florin, for which in marriage a calf can be bought."

"I will not bargain with Peter, and if anything weighed heavily on my mind, I have willingly forgotten it after so long a separation."

"Wet hay may destroy a barn, and any one to whom the hare runs can catch him! People ought not to keep their troubles to themselves, but tell them; that's why they have tongues, and yesterday was the right time to make a clean breast of everything that grieves you."

"He was in such a joyous mood when he came home, and then: Why do you think I feel unhappy?"

"Unhappy. Who said so?"

Maria blushed, but the widow seized the knife and opened the hen-coop.

Trautchen was helping the two ladies in the kitchen, but she was frequently interrupted in her work, for this morning the knocker on the door had no rest, and those who entered must have brought the burgomaster no pleasant news, for his deep, angry voice was often audible.

His longest discussion was with Herr Van Hout, who had come to him, not only to ask questions and tell what occurred, but also to make complaints.

It was no ordinary spectacle, when these two men, who, towering far above their fellow-citizens, not only in stature, but moral earnestness and enthusiastic devotion to the cause of liberty, declared their opinions and expressed their wrath. The inflammable, restless Van Hout took the first part, the slow, steadfast Van der Werff, with mighty impressiveness, the second.

A bad disposition ruled among the fathers of the city, the rich men of old families, the great weavers and brewers, for to them property, life and consideration were more than religion and liberty, while the poor men, who laboriously supported their families by the sweat of their brows, were joyously determined to sacrifice money and blood for the good cause.

There was obstacle after obstacle to conquer. The scaffolds and barns, frames and all other wood-work that could serve to conceal a man, were to be levelled to the earth, as all the country-houses and other buildings near the city had formerly been. Much newly-erected woodwork was already removed, but the rich longest resisted having the axe put to theirs. New earthworks had been commenced at the important fort of Valkenburg; but part of the land, where the workmen were obliged to dig, belonged to a brewer, who demanded a large sum in compensation for his damaged meadow. When the siege was

raised in March, paper-money was restored, round pieces of pasteboard, one side of which bore the Netherland lion, with the inscription, "Haec libertatis ergo," while the other had the coat-of-arms of the city and the motto "God guard Leyden." These were intended to be exchanged for coin or provisions, but rich speculators had obtained possession of many pieces, and were trying to raise their value. Demands of every kind pressed upon him, and amid all these claims the burgomaster was also compelled to think of his own affairs, for all intercourse with the outside world would soon be cut off, and it was necessary to settle many things with the representative of his business in Hamburg. Great losses were threatening, but he left no means untried to secure for his family what might yet be saved.

He rarely saw wife or children; yet thought he was fulfilling the promise Maria had obtained from him the evening after his return, when he briefly answered her questions or voluntarily gave her such sentences as "There was warm work at the town-hall to-day!" or, "It is more difficult to circulate the paper-money than we expected!" He did not feel the kindly necessity of having a confidante and expressing his feelings, and his first wife had been perfectly contented and happy, if he sat silently beside her during quiet hours, called her his treasure, petted the children, or even praised her cracknels and Sunday roast. Business and public affairs had been his concern, the kitchen and nursery hers. What they had shared, was the consciousness of the love one felt for the other, their children, the distinction, honors and possessions of the household.

Maria asked more and he was ready to grant it, but when in the evening she pressed the wearied man with questions he was accustomed to hear only from the lips of men, he put her off for the answers till less busy times, or fell asleep in the midst of her inquiries.

She saw how many burdens oppressed him, how unweariedly he toiled—but why did he not move a portion of the load to other shoulders?

Once, during the beautiful spring weather, he went out with her into the country. She seized upon the opportunity to represent that it was his duty to himself and her to gain more rest.

He listened patiently, and when she had finished her entreaty and warnings, took her hand in his, saying:

"You have met Herr Marnix von St. Aldegonde and know what the cause of liberty owes him. Do you know his motto?"

She nodded and answered softly: "Repos ailleurs."

"Where else can we rest," he repeated firmly.

A slight shiver ran through her limbs, and as she withdrew her hands, she could not help thinking: "Where else;—so not here. Rest and happiness have no home here." She did not utter the words, but could not drive them from her mind.

CHAPTER XII.

During these May days the Hoogstraten mansion was the quietest of all the houses in quiet Nobelstrasse. By the orders of Doctor Bontius and the sick lady's attorney, a mixture of straw and sand lay on the cause-way before it. The windows were closely curtained, and a piece of felt hung between the door and the knocker. The door was ajar, but a servant sat close behind it to answer those who sought admission.

On a morning early in May the musician, Wilhelm Corneliussohn, and Janus Dousa turned the corner of Nobelstrasse. Both men were engaged in eager conversation, but as they approached the straw and sand, their voices became lower and then ceased entirely.

"The carpet we spread under the feet of the conqueror Death," said the nobleman. "I hope he will lower the torch only once here and do honor to age, little worthy of respect as it may be. Don't stay too long in the infected house, Herr Wilhelm."

The musician gently opened the door. The servant silently greeted him and turned towards the stairs to call Belotti; for the "player-man" had already enquired more than once for the steward.

Wilhelm entered the little room where he usually waited, and for the first time found another visitor

there, but in a somewhat peculiar attitude. Father Damianus sat bolt upright in an arm-chair, with his head drooping on one side, sound asleep. The face of the priest, a man approaching his fortieth year, was as pink and white as a child's, and framed by a thin light-brown beard. A narrow circle of thin light hair surrounded his large tonsure, and a heavy dark rosary of olive-wood beads hung from the sleeper's hands. A gentle, kindly smile hovered around his half-parted lips.

"This mild saint in long woman's robes doesn't look as if he could grasp anything strongly" thought Wilhelm, "yet his hands are callous and have toiled hard."

When Belotti entered the room and saw the sleeping priest, he carefully pushed a pillow under his head and beckoned to Wilhelm to follow him into the entry.

"We won't grudge him a little rest," said the Italian. "He has sat beside the padrona's bed from yesterday noon until two hours ago. Usually she doesn't know what is going on around her, but as soon as consciousness returns she wants religious consolation. She still refuses to take the sacrament for the dying, for she won't admit that she is approaching her end. Yet often, when the disease attacks her more sharply, she asks in mortal terror if everything is ready, for she is afraid to die without extreme unction."

"And how is Fraulein Henrica?"

"A very little better."

The priest had now come out of the little room. Belotti reverently kissed his hand and Wilhelm bowed respectfully.

"I had fallen asleep," said Damianus simply and naturally, but in a voice less deep and powerful than would have been expected from his broad breast and tall figure. "I will read the mass, visit my sick, and then return. Have you thought better of it, Belotti?"

"It won't do sir, the Virgin knows it won't do. My dismissal was given for the first of May, this is the eighth, and yet I'm still here—I haven't left the house because I'm a Christian! Now the ladies have a good physician, Sister Gonzaga is doing her duty, you yourself will earn by your nursing a place among the martyrs in Paradise, so, without making myself guilty of a sin, I can tie up my bundle."

"You will not go, Belotti," said the priest firmly. "If you still insist on having your own way, at least do not call yourself a Christian."

"You will stay," cried Wilhelm, "if only for the sake of the young lady, to whom you still feel kindly." Belotti shook his head, and answered quietly:

"You can add nothing, young sir, to what the holy Father represented to me yesterday. But my mind is made up, I shall go; yet as I value the holy Father's good opinion and yours, I beg you to do me the favor to listen to me. I have passed my sixty-second birthday, and an old horse or an old servant stands a long time in the market-place before any one will buy them. There might probably be a place in Brussels for a Catholic steward, who understands his business, but this old heart longs to return to Naples—ardently, ardently, unutterably. You have seen our blue sea and our sky, young sir, and I yearn for them, but even more for other, smaller things. It now seems a joy that I can speak in my native language to you, Herr Wilhelm, and you, holy Father. But there is a country where every one uses the same tongue that I do. There is a little village at the foot of Vesuvius—merciful Heavens! Many a person would be afraid to stay there, even half an hour, when the mountain quakes, the ashes fall in showers, and the glowing lava pours out in a stream. The houses there are by no means so well built, and the window-panes are not so clean as in this country. I almost fear that there are few glass windows in Resina, but the children don't freeze, any more than they do here. What would a Leyden house-keeper say to our village streets? Poles with vines, boughs of fig-trees, and all sorts of under-clothing on the roofs, at the windows, and the crooked, sloping balconies; orange and lemon-trees with golden fruit grow in the little gardens, which have neither straight paths nor symmetrical beds. Everything there grows together topsy-turvy. The boys, who in rags that no tailor has darned or mended, clamber over the white vineyard walls, the little girls, whose mothers comb their hair before the doors of the houses, are not so pink and white, nor so nicely washed as the Holland children, but I should like to see again the brown-skinned, black-haired little ones with the dark eyes, and end my days amid all the clatter in the warm air, among my nephews, nieces and blood-relations."

As he uttered these words, the old man's features had flushed and his black eyes sparkled with a fire, that but a short time before the northern air and his long years of servitude seemed to have extinguished. Since neither the priest nor the musician answered immediately, he continued more quietly:

"Monseigneur Gloria is going to Italy now, and I can accompany him to Rome as courier. From thence I can easily reach Naples, and live there on the interest of my savings free from care. My future master will leave on the 15th, and on the 12th I must be in Antwerp, where I am to meet him."

The eyes of the priest and the musician met. Wilhelm lacked courage to seek to withhold the steward from carrying out his plan, but Damianus summoned up his resolution, laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, and said:

"If you wait here a few weeks more, Belotti, you will find the true rest, the peace of a good conscience. The crown of life is promised to those, who are faithful, unto death. When these sad days are over, it will be easy to smooth the way to your home. We shall meet again towards noon, Belotti. If my assistance is necessary, send for me; old Ambrosius knows where to find me. May God's blessing rest upon you, and if you will accept it from me, on you also, Meister Wilhelm."

After the priest had left the house, Belotti said, sighing:

"He'll yet force me to yield to his will. He abuses his power over souls. I'm no saint, and what he asks of me—"

"Is right," said Wilhelm firmly.

"But you don't know what it is to throw away, like a pair of worn-out shoes, the dearest hope of a long, sad life. And for whom, I ask you, for whom? Do you know my padrona? Oh! sir, I have experienced in this house things, which your youth does not dream could be possible. The young lady has wounded you. Am I right or wrong?"

"You are mistaken, Belotti."

"Really? I am glad for your sake, you are a modest artist, but the signorina bears the Hoogstraten name, and that is saying everything. Do you know her father?"

"No, Belotti."

"That's a race—a race! Have you never heard anything of the story of our signorina's older sister?"

"Has Henrica an older sister?"

"Yes, sir, and when I think of her.—Imagine the signorina, exactly like our signorina, only taller, more stately, more beautiful."

"Isabella!" exclaimed the musician. A conjecture, which had been aroused since his conversation with Henrica, appeared to be confirmed; he seized the steward's arm so suddenly and unexpectedly, that the latter drew back, and continued eagerly: "What do you know of her? I beseech you, Belotti, tell me all."

The servant looked up the stairs, then shaking his head, answered:

"You are probably mistaken. There has never been an Isabella in this house to my knowledge, but I will gladly place myself at your service. Come again after sunset, but you must expect to hear no pleasant tale."

Twilight had scarcely yielded to darkness, when the musician again entered the Hoogstraten mansion. The little room was empty, but Belotti did not keep him waiting long.

The old man placed a dainty little waiter, bearing a jug of wine and a goblet, on the table beside the lamp and, after informing Wilhelm of the invalids' condition, courteously offered him a chair. When the musician asked him why he had not brought a cup for himself too, he replied:

"I drink nothing but water, but allow me to take the liberty to sit down. The servant who attends to the chambers has left the house, and I've done nothing but go up and down stairs all day. It tries my old legs, and we can expect no quiet night."

A single candle lighted the little room. Belotti, who had leaned far back in his chair, opened his clenched hands and slowly began:

"I spoke this morning of the Hoogstraten race. Children of the same parents, it is true, are often very unlike, but in your little country, which speaks its own language and has many things peculiar to itself—you won't deny that—every old family has its special traits. I know, for I have been in many a noble household in Holland. Every race has its own peculiar blood and ways. Even where—by your leave—there is a crack in the brain, it rarely happens to only one member of a family. My mistress has more of her French mother's nature. But I intended to speak only of the signorina, and am wandering too far

from my subject."

"No, Belotti, certainly not, we have plenty of time, and I shall be glad to listen to you, but first you must answer one question."

"Why, sir, how your cheeks glow! Did you meet the signorina in Italy?"

"Perhaps so, Belotti."

"Why, of course, of course! Whoever has once seen her, doesn't easily forget. What is it you wish to know?"

"First, the lady's name."

"Anna."

"And not Isabella also?"

"No, sir, she was never called anything but Anna."

"And when did she leave Holland?"

"Wait; it was—four years ago last Easter."

"Has she dark, brown or fair hair?"

"I've said already that she looked just like Fraulein Henrica. But what lady might not have fair, brown or dark hair? I think we shall reach the goal sooner, if you will let me ask a question now. Had the lady you mean a large semi-circular scar just under the hair, exactly in the middle of her forehead?"

"Enough," cried Wilhelm, rising hastily. "She fell on one of her father's weapons when a child."

"On the contrary, sir, the handle of Junker Van Hoogstraten's weapon fell on the forehead of his own daughter. How horrified you look! Oh! I have witnessed worse things in this house. Now it is your turn again: In what city of my home did you meet the signorina?"

"In Rome, alone and under an assumed name. Isabella—a Holland girl! Pray go on with your story, Belotti; I won't interrupt you again. What had the child done, that her own father—"

"He is the wildest of all the wild Hoogstratens. Perhaps you may have seen men like him in Italy—in this country you might seek long for such a hurricane. You must not think him an evil-disposed man, but a word that goes against the grain, a look askance will rob him of his senses, and things are done which he repents as soon as they are over. The signorina received her scar in the same way. She was a mere child, and of course ought not to have touched fire-arms, nevertheless she did whenever she could, and once a pistol went off and the bullet struck one of the best hunting-dogs. Her father heard the report and, when he saw the animal lying on the ground and the pistol at the little girl's feet, he seized it and with the sharp-edged handle struck—"

"A child, his own daughter!" exclaimed Wilhelm indignantly.

"People are differently constituted," Belotti continued. "Some, the class to which you probably belong, cautiously consider before they speak or act; the second reflect a long time and, when they are ready, pour forth a great many words, but rarely act at all; while the third, and at their head the Hoogstraten family, heap deeds on deeds, and if they ever think, it is only after the act is accomplished. If they then find that they have committed an injustice, pride comes in and forbids them to confess, atone for, or recall it. So one misfortune follows another; but the gentlemen pay no heed and find forgetfulness in drinking and gambling, carousing and hunting. There are plenty of debts, but all anxiety concerning them is left to the creditors, and boys who receive no inheritance are supplied with a place at court or in the army; for the girls, thank God, there is no lack of convents, if they confess our holy religion, and both have expectations from rich aunts and other blood relations, who die without children."

"You paint in vivid colors."

But they are true, and they all suit the Junker; though to be sure he need not keep his property for sons, since his wife gave him none. He met her at court in Brussels, and she came from Parma."

"Did you know her?"

"She died before I came to the padrona's house. The two young ladies grew up without a mother. You

have heard that their father would even attack them, yet he doubtless loved them and would never resolve to place them in a convent. True, he often felt—at least he freely admitted it in conversations with her excellenza—that there were more suitable places for young girls than his castle, where matters went badly enough, and so he at last sent his oldest daughter to us. My mistress usually could not endure the society of young girls, but Fraulein Anna was one of her nearest relatives, and I know she invited her of her own accord. I can still see in memory the signorina at sixteen; a sweeter creature, Herr Wilhelm, my eyes have never beheld before or since, and yet she never remained the same. I have seen her as soft as Flemish velvet, but at other times she could rage like a November storm in your country. She was always beautiful as a rose and, as her mother's old cameriera—she was a native of Lugano—had brought her up, and the priest who taught her came from Pisa and was acknowledged to be an excellent musician, she spoke my language like a child of Tuscany and was perfectly familiar with music. You have doubtless heard her singing, her harp and lute-playing, but you should know that all the ladies of the Hoogstraten family, with the exception of my mistress, possess a special talent for your art. In summer we lived in the beautiful country-house, that was torn down before the siege by your friends—with little justice I think. Many a stately guest rode out to visit us. We kept open house, and where there is a good table and a beautiful young lady like our signorina, the gallants are not far off. Among them was a very aristocratic gentleman of middle age, the Marquis d'Avennes, whom her excellenza had expressly invited. We had never received any prince with so much attention; but this was a matter of course, for his mother was a relative of her excellenza. You must know that my mistress; on her mother's side, is descended from a family in Normandy. The Marquis d'Avennes was certainly an elegant cavalier, but rather dainty than manly. He was soon madly in love with Fraulein Anna, and asked in due form for her hand. Her excellenza favored the match, and the father said simply: 'You will take him!' He would listen to no opposition. Other gentlemen don't consult their daughters when a suitable lover appears. So the signorina became the marquis's betrothed wife, but the padrona said firmly that her niece was too young to be married. She induced Junker Van Hoogstraten, whom she held as firmly as a farrier holds a filly, to defer the wedding until Easter. The outfit was to be provided during the winter. The condition that he must wait six months was imposed on the marquis, and he went back to France with the ring on his finger. His betrothed bride did not shed a single tear for him, and as soon as he had gone, flung the engagement ring into the jewel-cup on her dressing-table, before the eyes of the camariera, from whom I heard the story. She did not venture to oppose her father, but did not hesitate to express her opinion of the marquis to her excellenza, and her aunt, though she had favored the Frenchman's suit, allowed it. Yet there had often been fierce quarrels between the old and young lady, and if the padrona had had reason to clip the wild falcon's wings and teach her what is fitting for noble ladies, the signorina would have been justified in complaining of many an exaction, by which the padrona had spoiled her pleasure in life. I am sorry to destroy the confidence of your youth, but whoever grows grey, with his eyes open, will meet persons who rejoice, nay to whom it is a necessity to injure others. Yet it is a consolation, that no one is wicked simply for the sake of wickedness, and I have often found—how shall I express it?—that the worst impulses arise from the perversion, or even the excess of the noblest virtues, whose reverse or caricature they become. I have seen base envy proceed from beautiful ambition, contemptible avarice from honest emulation, fierce hate from tender love. My mistress, when she was young, knew how to love truly and faithfully, but she was shamefully deceived, and now rancor, not against an individual, but against life, has taken possession of her, and her noble loyalty has become tenacious adherence to bad wishes. How this has happened you will learn, if you will continue to listen.

"When winter came, I was ordered to go to Brussel, and establish the new household in splendid style. The ladies were to follow me. It was four years ago. The Duke of Alva then lived as viceroy in Brussels, and this nobleman held my mistress in high esteem, nay had even twice paid us the honor of a visit. His aristocratic officers also frequented our house, among them Don Luis d'Avila, a nobleman of ancient family, who was one of the duke's favorites. Like the Marquis d'Avennes, he was no longer in his early youth, but was a man of totally different stamp; tall, strong as if hammered from steel, a soldier of invincible strength and skill, a most dreaded seeker of quarrels, but a man whose glowing eyes and wonderful gift of song must have exerted a mysterious, bewitching power over women. Dozens of adventures, in which he was said to have taken part, were told in the servant's hall and half of them had some foundation of truth, as I afterwards learned by experience. If you suppose this heart-breaker bore any resemblance to the gay, curly-haired minions of fortune, on whom young ladies lavish their love, you are mistaken; Don Luis was a grave man with close-cut hair, who never wore anything but dark clothes, and even carried a sword, whose hilt, instead of gold and silver, consisted of blackened metal. He resembled death much more than blooming love. Perhaps this very thing made him irresistible, since we are all born for death and no suitor is so sure of victory as he.

"The padrona had not been favorably disposed to him at first, but this mood soon changed, and at New Year's he too was admitted to small evening receptions of intimate friends. He came whenever we invited him, but had no word, no look, scarcely a greeting for our young lady. Only when it pleased the signorina to sing, he went near her and sharply criticised anything in her execution that chanced to

displease him. He often sang himself too, and then usually chose the same songs as Fraulein Anna, as if to surpass her by his superior skill.

"So things went on till the time of the carnival. On Shrove-Tuesday the padrona gave a large entertainment, and when I led the servants and stood behind the signorina and Don Luis, to whom her excellenza had long been in the habit of assigning the seat beside her niece, I noticed that their hands met under the table and rested in each other's clasp a long time. My heart was so full of anxiety, that it was very hard for me to keep the attention so necessary on that evening—and when the next morning, the padrona summoned me to settle the accounts, I thought it my duty to modestly remark that Don Luis d'Avila's wooing did not seem disagreeable to the young lady in spite of her betrothal. She let me speak, but when I ventured to repeat what people said of the Spaniard, angrily started up and showed me to the door. A faithful servant often hears and sees more than his employers suspect, and I had the confidence of the padrona's foster-sister, who is now dead; but at that time Susanna knew everything that concerned her mistress.

"There was a bad prospect for the expectant bridegroom in France, for whenever the padrona spoke of him, it was with a laugh we knew, and which boded no good; but she still wrote frequently to the marquis and his mother, and many a letter from Rochebrun reached our house. To be sure, her excellenza also gave Don Luis more than one secret audience.

"During Lent a messenger from Fraulein Van Hoogstraten's father arrived with the news, that at Easter he, himself, would come to Brussels from Haarlem, and the marquis from Castle Rochebrun, and on Maundy Thursday I received orders to dress the private chapel with flowers, engage posthorses, and do several other things. On Good Friday, the day of our Lord's crucifixion—I wish I were telling lies—early in the morning of Good Friday the signorina was dressed in all her bridal finery. Don Luis appeared clad in black, proud and gloomy as usual, and by candle-light, before sunrise on a cold, damp morning—it seems to me as if it were only yesterday—the Castilian was married to our young mistress. The padrona, a Spanish officer and I were the witnesses. At seven o'clock the carriage drove up, and after it was packed Don Luis handed me a little box to put in the vehicle. It was heavy and I knew it well; the padrona was in the habit of keeping her gold coin in it. At Easter the whole city learned that Don Luis d'Avila had eloped with the beautiful Anna Van Hoogstraten, after killing her betrothed bridegroom in a duel on Maundy-Thursday at Hals on his way to Brussels—scarcely twenty-four hours before the wedding.

"I shall never forget how Junker Van Hoogstraten raged. The padrona refused to see him and pretended to be ill, but she was as well as only she could be during these last few years."

"And do you know how to interpret your mistress's mysterious conduct?" asked Wilhelm.

"Yes sir; her reasons are perfectly evident. But I must hasten, it is growing late; besides I cannot tell you minute particulars, for I was myself a child when the event happened, though Susanna has told me many things that would probably be worth relating. Her excellenza's mother was a Chevreaux, and my mistress spent the best years of her life with her mother's sister, who during the winter lived in Paris. It was in the reign of the late King Francis, and you doubtless know that this great Prince was a very gallant gentleman, who was said to have broken as many hearts as lances. My padrona, who in those days was very beautiful, belonged to the ladies of his court, and King Francis especially distinguished her. But the young lady knew how to guard her honor, for she had early found in the gallant Marquis d'Avennes a knight to whom she was loyally devoted, and for whom she had wept bitterly many a night. Like master, like servant, and though the marquis had worn the young lady's color for years and rendered her every service of an obedient knight, his eyes and heart often wandered to the right and left. Yet he always returned to his liege-lady, and when the sixth year came, the Chevreaux's urged the marquis to put an end to his trifling and think of marriage. My mistress began to make her preparations, and Susanna was a witness of her consultation with the marquis about whether she would keep or sell the Holland estates and castles. But the wedding did not take place, for the marquis was obliged to go to Italy with the army and her excellenza lived in perpetual anxiety about him; at that time the French fared ill in my country, and he often left her whole months without news. At last he returned and found in the Chevreaux's house his betrothed wife's little cousin, who had grown up into a charming young lady.

"You can imagine the rest. The rose-bud Hortense now pleased the marquis far better than the Holland flower of five and twenty. The Chevreaux's were aristocratic but deeply in debt, and the suitor, while fighting in Italy, had inherited the whole of his uncle's great estate, so they did not suffer him to sue in vain. My mistress returned to Holland. Her father challenged the marquis, but no blood was spilled in the duel, and Monsieur d'Avennes led a happy wedded life with Hortense de Chevreaux. Her son was the signorina's hapless lover. Do you understand, Herr Wilhelm? She had nursed and fostered the old grudge for half a life time; for its sake she had sacrificed her own kinswoman to Don Luis, but in

return she repaid by the death of the only son of a hated mother, the sorrow she had suffered for years on her account."

The musician had clenched the handkerchief, with which he had wiped the perspiration from his brow, closely in his hand, and asked:

"What more have you heard of Anna?"

"Very little," replied Belotti. "Her father has torn her from his heart, and calls Henrica his only daughter. Happiness abandons those who are burdened by a father's curse, and she certainly did not find it. Don Luis is said to have been degraded to the rank of ensign on account of some wild escapades, and who knows what has become of the poor, beautiful signorina. The padrona sometimes sent money to her in Italy, by way of Florence, through Signor Lamperi—but I have heard nothing of her during the last few months."

"One more question, Belotti," said Wilhelm, "how could Henrica's father trust her to your mistress, after what had befallen his older daughter in her house?"

"Money—miserable money! To keep his castle and not lose his inheritance, he resigned his child. Yes, sir, the signorina was bargained for, like a horse, and her father didn't sell her cheap. Drink some wine, sir, you look ill."

"It is nothing serious," said Wilhelm, "but the fresh air will probably do me good. Thanks for your story, Belotti."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Art ceases when ugliness begins

Debts, but all anxiety concerning them is left to the creditors

Despair and extravagant gayety ruled her nature by turns

Repos ailleurs

The best enjoyment in creating is had in anticipation

To whom the emotion of sorrow affords a mournful pleasure

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BURGOMASTER'S WIFE — VOLUME 02 ***

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