

# **The Poor Gentleman eBook**

## **The Poor Gentleman by Hendrik Conscience**

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## Preface to the American Edition.

The story of "THE POOR GENTLEMAN," now given in our language for the first time, is one of the series in which M. Conscience has delineated various grades of female character in positions of trial. In "The Village Innkeeper" he has shown the weaker traits of woman distracted between an inborn sense of propriety and a foolish ambition for high, life. In the "Conscript" his heroine displays the nobler virtues of uncorrupted humble life; and, with few characters, taken from the lowest walks, he shows the triumph of honest, straightforward earnestness and pertinacious courage, even when they are brought in conflict with authority. "The Poor Gentleman" closes the series; and, selecting a heroine from the educated classes of his country-people M. Conscience has demonstrated how superior a *genuine woman* becomes to all the mishaps of fortune, and how successfully she subdues that imaginary *fate* before which so many are seen to fall.

It would be difficult to describe this remarkable work without analyzing the tale and criticizing its personages. This would anticipate the author and mar the interest of his story. We must confine ourselves, therefore, to general remarks on its structure and characteristics.

*Pontmartin*, the distinguished French *feuilletonist*, says, in one of his "Literary Chats," that these simple stories are "pearls set in Flemish gold,—a gold which alchemysts seek for in alembics and furnaces, but which Conscience has found in the inexhaustible veins of nature." "The Poor Gentleman," he remarks, "is a tale of not more than a hundred and fifty pages; but I would not give its shortest chapter for all the *romances* I ever read. The perplexed De Vlierbeck—who ought to have had Caleb Balderstone for a servant—is one of those characters that engrave themselves indelibly on our memory." In every trait and detail the author has attained a photographic minuteness; which, while it is distinct and sharp, never interferes with that motion, breadth, and picturesque effect that impart life and reality to a story. Nor can we doubt that it will be read and re-read as long as there is a particle of that feeling among us which installed the Vicar of Wakefield, Paul and Virginia, the Crock of Gold, the Sketch-book, and the Tales of a Traveller, among the heirlooms of every tasteful household. The "Tales of Flemish Life" are additions to that rare stock of home-literature which is at once amiable and gentle, simple and affectionate, familiar and tender, and which meets a quick response from every honest heart and earnest spirit.

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If it be objected that the stories are too short and sketchy for the praise that has been bestowed on them, it may be answered that in their translation we have had the best opportunity to observe the skill, power, and perception of character which constitute their real merit. Simple as they seem, they are written with masterly art. In design, elaborateness, tone, and finish, they resemble the works of the Flemish School which have made us familiar with the Low Countries and their people through the pictures of Ruysdael, Teniers, and Ostade. There is scarcely a leaf that does not display some of those recondite or evanescent secrets of human nature which either escape ordinary writers, or, when found by them, are spread out over volume instead of being condensed into a page.

Baltimore, August, 1856.

THE TRANSLATOR.

## CHAPTER I.

Near the end of July, 1842, an open *caleche* might have been seen rolling along one of the three highways that lead from the frontiers of Holland toward Antwerp. Although the vehicle had evidently been cleaned with the utmost care, every thing about it betokened decay. Its joints were open, discolored, and weather-beaten, and it swung from side to side on its springs like a rickety skeleton. Its patched leathers shone in the sunshine with the oil that had been used to freshen them, but the borrowed lustre could not hide the cracks and repairs with which they were defaced. The door-handles and other parts of the vehicle that were made of copper had been carefully polished, and the vestiges of silver-plating, still visible in the creases of the ornaments, denoted a former richness which had been almost entirely worn out by time and use.

The *caleche* was drawn by a stout, heavy horse, whose short and lumbering gait intimated very clearly that he was oftener employed in the plough and cart than in carrying his owner toward the capital.

A peasant-boy of seventeen or eighteen was perched on the driver's seat. He was in livery; a tarnished gold band adorned his hat, and brass buttons glistened on his coat; but the hat fell over his ears, and the coat was so large that the driver seemed lost in it as in a bag. The garments had been worn by many of the lackey's predecessors on the box, and, in a long series of years, had doubtless passed from coachman to coachman till they descended to their present possessor.

The only person in the vehicle was a man about fifty years old. He was unquestionably the master of both servant and cabriolet, for his look and deportment commanded respect and consideration. With head depressed and moody air, he sat motionless and dreamy in his seat till he heard the approach of other vehicles, when, suddenly lifting his

eyes, he would salute the strangers graciously and then instantly relapse into his former attitude. A moment's glance at this person was sufficient to excite an interest in



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him. His face, though hard and wrinkled, was so regular and noble in its contour, his look so mild and yet so earnest and penetrating, his broad brow so clear and lofty, that the most careless observer could not doubt that he was endowed with the best qualities of human nature. Besides this, there were unquestionable indications that he had been a sufferer. If a simple glance at his features did not impress one with a conviction of this fact, it was confirmed by the fringe of silvery hair that straggled over his temples, and the sombre, melancholy fire that glimmered in his eyes like the last rays of expiring hope.

His dress was in perfect keeping with his physiognomy. It was of that neat and simple style which always characterizes a man of the world who is governed by refined and elegant tastes. His linen was spotlessly white, his cloth extremely fine, and his well-brushed hat shone smartly in the sunshine. Occasionally, as some one passed on the road, he might be seen to draw forth a handsome gold snuff-box and inhale a pinch with so graceful an air that an observer would be convinced he belonged to the highest classes of society. A malicious eye, it is true, might have discovered by close inspection that the brush had been too familiar with his coat and worn it threadbare, that his silk hat had been doctored to preserve its lustre and smoothness, and that his gloves were elaborately darned. If an inquisitive critic could have pried into the bottom of the vehicle, he would have detected a large crack in the side of the left boot, beneath which a gray stocking had been carefully masked with ink. Still, all these signs of poverty were so artfully concealed, and his dress worn with so careless an air of opulence and ease, that every body might have supposed the traveller did not put on better clothes only because he had a whim for bad ones.

The *caleche* had rolled along rapidly for about two hours, when the driver suddenly drew up at a small inn on the dike outside of the city of Antwerp. The landlady and groom instantly sallied forth, and by their profound salutations and civility exhibited their marked respect for a well-known stranger.

"It's a fine day, Monsieur Vlierbeck, isn't it?" said the dame; "yet it's a trifle warm, however. Don't you think it would be well for the high-grounds if we had a sprinkle more of rain, Monsieur Vlierbeck? Shall we give the horse some hay, Monsieur Vlierbeck? But stay: I see, now, your coachman has brought his hay with him. Will you take anything, Monsieur Vlierbeck?"

While the hostess was pouring forth this torrent of questions, Monsieur De Vlierbeck got out of the vehicle, and, entering the house, addressed the most flattering compliments to the dame about her good looks, inquired as to the health of each of her children, and finished by apprising her that he was obliged to be in town instantly. Thereupon, shaking her cordially by the hand, yet with a condescending air that marked and

preserved the distance between them, he gave his orders to his lackey, and, with a farewell bow, walked toward the bridge leading into the city.

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At a solitary spot on the outer rampart Monsieur De Vlierbeck stopped, looked round as if to see if any one was observing him, dusted his garments, brushed his hat with a handkerchief, and then passed on through the Porte Rouge into the city of Antwerp.

As he entered a town where he was likely to find himself constantly an object of notice, he assumed a lofty carriage and self-satisfied air, which might have deceived any one into the belief that he was the happiest man on earth. And yet—alas, poor gentleman!—he was a prey to the profoundest agony! He was, perhaps, about to suffer *humiliation*,—a humiliation that would cut him to the very heart! But there was a being in the world whom he loved better than his life or honor,—his only child, his daughter! For her—how frequently had he already sacrificed his pride, how frequently had he suffered the pangs of martyrdom! Still, so great a slave was he to this passionate love that every new endurance, every new trial, raised him in his own estimation and exalted his pain into something that ennobled and sanctified his very nature!

His heart beat violently as he entered deeper and deeper into the heart of the city and approached the house he was about to visit. Soon after he stopped at a door, and, as he pulled the bell, his hand trembled violently in spite of extraordinary self-control; but as soon as a servant answered the summons he became master of himself again.

“Is the notary in?” inquired the old gentleman. The servant replied affirmatively, and, showing the visitor into a small room, went to apprise his master.

As soon as Monsieur De Vlierbeck was alone, he put his right foot over the left to hide the rent in his boot, drew forth the gold snuff-box, and made ready to take a pinch.

The notary came in. He was a spare, business-looking man, and was preparing to salute his guest graciously, but no sooner did he perceive who it was than his face grew dark and assumed that reserved air with which a cautious man arms himself when he expects a request which he is predetermined to refuse. Instead, therefore, of lavishing on Monsieur De Vlierbeck the compliments with which he habitually welcomed his visitors, the notary confined himself to a few cold words of recognition and then sat down silently in front of him.

Wounded and humbled by this ungracious reception, poor De Vlierbeck was seized with a chill and became slightly pale; still, he managed to rally his nerves, as he remarked, affably,—“Pray excuse me, sir; but, pressed by imperious necessity, I have come once more to appeal to your kindness for a small service.”

“What is it you wish of me?” answered the notary, tartly.

“I wish you to find another loan of a thousand *francs* for me,—or even less,—secured by a mortgage on my property. I do not want all the money at once, but I have especial need of two hundred *francs*, which I must ask the favor of you to lend me to-day. I trust

you will not deny me this trifling loan, which will extricate me from the deepest embarrassment.”

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"A thousand *francs*, on mortgage?" growled the notary; "and who, pray, will guarantee the interest? Your property is already mortgaged for more than it is worth."

"Oh! you are mistaken, sir," exclaimed Monsieur De Vlierbeck, anxiously.

"Not the least in the world! By order of the persons who have already accommodated you with money, I caused your property to be appraised at the very highest rates; and the consequence is that your creditors will not get back their loans unless it shall sell for an extraordinary price. Permit me to say, sir, that you have acted very foolishly: had I been in your place, I would not have sacrificed all my fortune, and my wife's too, to save a worthless fellow, even though he had been my brother!"

De Vlierbeck frowned, as a painful recollection shot through his mind, but said nothing, though his hand grasped the golden snuff-box as if he would have crushed it.

"By that imprudent act," continued the notary, "you have plunged yourself and your child into absolute want; for you can no longer disguise it. For ten years—and God knows at what cost—you have been able to keep the secret of your ruin; but the inevitable hour is approaching, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, when you will be forced to surrender every thing!"

De Vlierbeck riveted a look of doubt and agony on the notary as the latter continued:—

"I must tell you frankly the condition of your affairs. Monsieur de Hoogebaen died during his journey in Germany; his heirs found your bond for four thousand *francs*, and have directed me *not* to renew it. If Monsieur Hoogebaen was your friend his heirs certainly are not. During ten years you have failed to cancel this debt, and have paid two thousand *francs* interest; so that, for your own sake, it is time the transaction should be closed. Four months are still left, Monsieur Vlierbeck, before the expiration of—"

"*Only* four months!" interrupted the poor gentleman, in a distressed tone; "*only* four months, and then—oh, God!"

"Then your property will be sold according to law," said the notary, dryly, finishing the sentence. "I can well understand, sir, that this is a painful prospect; but, as it is a decree of fate that no one can control, you have nothing to do but prepare to receive the blow. Let me offer to sell your estate as if you 'were leaving the country.' By that means you will escape the mortification of a forced sale."

For several moments Monsieur De Vlierbeck remained silent, his face buried in his hands, as if crushed by the notary's advice and callousness. At length he replied, calmly but humbly,—

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“Your counsel is, perhaps, wise and generous; yet I will not follow it. You know that all my sacrifices, my painful life, my constant agony, have been patiently endured for the sake of my only child. You alone know that all I do has but, one purpose,—a purpose which I hold sacred. I have reason to believe that God is about granting the earnest prayer I have daily offered for ten years. My daughter is beloved by a rich gentleman, whose character I think I may confide in, and his family appears to sympathize in all his views. *Four months!* it is but a short time, alas! yet, ought I, by anticipating the legal period of a sale, to destroy all my fond hopes? Ought I instantly to welcome misery for myself and my child when I see the chance of sure relief from all we have suffered?”

“Then you want to *deceive* these people, whoever they may be? Do you not suppose that by such a course of conduct you may make your daughter still more wretched?”

At the word “*deceive*” the poor gentleman winced as if stung by an adder, while a nervous thrill ran through his limbs and suffused his face with a blush of shame.

“*Deceive!*” echoed he, bitterly; “oh, no! but I dare not, by a rash avowal of my want, stifle the love that is growing up mutually. Whenever it becomes necessary to be decided, I will make a loyal disclosure of my condition. If the declaration ruin my hopes I will follow your advice. I will sell all I have; I will quit the country and seek in some foreign land to maintain myself and my beloved child by teaching.” He stopped for a moment, as if swallowing his grief, and then continued, in a lower tone, half speaking to himself, “And, yet, did I not promise my dear wife on her death-bed—did I not promise it on the holy cross—that our child should not undergo such a fate? Ten years of suffering—ten abject years—have not sufficed to realize my promise; and now, at last, a feeble ray of hope struggles into my sombre future—” He grasped the notary’s hand, looked wildly but earnestly into his eyes, and added, in suppliant tones, “Oh, my friend, help me! help me in this last and trying effort; do not prolong my torture; grant my prayer, and as long as I live I will bless my benefactor, the savior of my child!”

The notary withdrew his hand as he answered, with some embarrassment, “Yet, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, I cannot comprehend what all this has to do with the loan of a thousand *francs!*”

De Vlierbeck thrust his rejected hand into his pocket as he replied, “Yes, sir, it *is* ridiculous, is it not, to fall so low and to see one’s happiness or misery depend on things about which other persons may laugh? And yet, alas! so it is! The young gentleman of whom I spoke to you is to dine with us to-morrow in company with his uncle,—the uncle invited himself,—and we have absolutely *nothing to give them!* Besides this, my child needs some trifles to appear decently before the guests,

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and it is probable that the civility will be returned by an invitation from them. Our isolation cannot long conceal our want. Sacrifices of all kinds have already been made to prevent our being overwhelmed with mortification." As he uttered these last words he drew forth his hand from his pocket with about two *francs* in small change, which he held exposed on his palm before the notary. "And now, behold," continued he, with a bitter smile,—“behold every cent I have in the world; and to-morrow rich people are to dine at my house! If my poverty is betrayed by any thing, farewell to my child’s prospects! For God’s sake, my good friend, be generous, and help me!”

“A thousand *francs*!” muttered the notary, shaking his head; “I can’t deceive my clients, sir. What pledge can you give to secure the loan? You possess nothing which is not already mortgaged beyond its value.”

“A thousand! five hundred! two hundred!” cried De Vlierbeck. “Lend me, at least, *something* to relieve me from this cruel difficulty!”

“I have no disposable funds,” replied the notary, coldly. “In a fortnight perhaps I may have some; but even then I could promise nothing positively.”

“Then, for the sake of friendship, I beseech you, lend me some money yourself!”

“I could never expect that you would return what I might lend,” said the notary, contemptuously; “and so it is an *alms* you ask of me?”

Poor De Vlierbeck trembled on his chair and became pale as ashes; his eyes flashed wildly and his brow knotted with frowns. Yet he quickly curbed the unwonted agitation, bowed his head, and sighed, resignedly, “ALMS! Alas! so be it! let me drink the very dregs of this bitter cup: *it is for my child!*”

The notary went to a drawer and took from it some five-franc-pieces, which he offered to his visitor. It is difficult to say whether the poor gentleman was wounded by the actual receipt of charity, or whether the sum was too small to be useful; but, without touching the money, he glanced angrily at the silver and fell back in his chair, covering his face with his hands.

Just at this moment a servant entered, announcing another visitor; and, as soon as the lackey left the apartment, Monsieur De Vlierbeck sprang from his chair, dashing away the tears that had gathered in his eyes. The notary pointed to the money, which he laid on the corner of the table; but the mortified guest turned away his head with a gesture of repugnant refusal.

“Pardon my boldness, sir,” said he, “but I have now only one favor to ask of you”

“And it is—?”

“That you will keep my secret for my daughter’s sake.”

‘Oh, as to that, make yourself easy. You know me well enough to be aware of my discretion. Do you decline this trifling aid?’

“Thanks! thanks!” cried the gentleman, pushing away the notary’s hand; and, trembling as if seized by a sudden chill, he rushed from the room and the house without waiting for the servant to open the door.



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Utterly overcome by the terrible blow to his hopes, beside himself with mortification, with his head hanging on his bosom and his eyes bent staringly on the ground, the poor fellow ran about the streets for a considerable length of time without knowing what he was about or whither he was going. At length the stern conviction of want and duty partially aroused him from his feverish dream, and he walked on rapidly in the direction of the gate of Borgenhout, till he found himself entirely alone among the fortifications.

He had no sooner reached this solitary quarter than a terrible conflict seemed to begin within him; his lips quivered and muttered incoherently, while his face exhibited a thousand different expressions of suffering, shame, and hope. After a while he drew forth from his pocket the golden snuff-box, looked long and sadly on the armorial engravings that adorned it, and then fell into a reverie, from which he suddenly aroused himself as if about taking a solemn resolution. With his eyes intently fixed on the box, he began to obliterate the arms with his knife, as he murmured, in a voice of tremulous emotion,—

“Remembrancer of my dear and excellent mother, protecting talisman that has so long concealed my misery and which I invoked as a sacred shield whenever poverty was on the eve of betraying me, last fragment of my ancestry, I must bid thee farewell; and—alas! alas!—my own hand must profane and destroy thee! God grant that the last service thou wilt ever render me may save us from overwhelming humiliation!”

A tear trickled down his wan cheek as his voice became still; but he went on with his task of obliteration till every trace of the crest and shield disappeared from the emblazoned lid. After this he returned to the heart of the town and passed through a number of small and lonely streets, glancing eagerly, but askance, at the signs as he passed onward in his agitation.

An hour had certainly elapsed in this bootless wandering, when he entered a narrow lane in the quarter of Saint Andre and uttered a sudden cry of joy as he caught a glimpse of the object for which he was in search. His eye lighted on a sign which bore the simple but ominous inscription—“SWORN PAWNBROKER.” He passed by the door and walked rapidly to the end of the lane; then, turning hastily, he retraced his steps, hastening or lingering as he noticed any one passing in his neighborhood, till at length he crept along the wall to the door, and, seeing the thoroughfare almost empty, rushed into the house and disappeared.

After a considerable time De Vlierbeck came forth from the money-lender’s and quickly gained another street. There was a slight expression of satisfaction in his eyes; but the bright blush that suffused his haggard cheeks gave token of the new humiliation through which the sufferer had passed. Walking rapidly from street to street, he soon reached a pastry-cook’s, where he filled a basket with a stuffed turkey, a pie, preserves, and various other smaller equipments for the table, and, paying for his purchases, told the cook that he would send his servant for the packages. Farther on he bought a couple of

silver spoons and a pair of ear-rings from a jeweller, and then proceeded on his way, probably to make additional acquisitions for the proposed entertainment.

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### CHAPTER II.

In our wild and thorny region of the North a brave and toilsome peasantry have long been engaged in victorious conflict with the barren sleep to which nature seemed to have condemned the soil. They have stirred up the sterile depths and watered them with their sweat; they have summoned science and industry to their aid, drained marshes, diverted the streamlets that descended toward the Meuse from the highlands and put them in circulation through innumerable arteries to fatten and enrich the land. What a glorious fight it was of man against matter! What a magnificent triumph it has been to convert the unthrifty Campine[A] into a fruitful and luxurious region! Indeed, our descendants will hardly believe their own eyes when in future times they shall behold grass-covered plains, flowery meadows, and fields waving with grain, where the lingering patriarchs of our day may point out the sites of burning sand-pits and barren moors!

[Footnote A: The Flemings have given the name of *Campine* to the vast uncultivated spaces extending in the north of Belgium from the vicinity of Antwerp to Venloo. The improvement of the *Campine*, undertaken on a large scale within some years, has already produced the happiest results.]

North of the city of Antwerp, toward the frontiers of Holland, there are but few traces of this gradual improvement. It is only along highroads that the traveller begins to observe the effect of liberal agriculture on the sandy soil, while, farther on toward the heart of the region, every thing is still bare and uncultivated. As far as the eye can penetrate, nothing is to be seen in that quarter but arid plains thinly covered with stunted vegetation, while the horizon is bounded by that blue and cloudy line which always marks the limit of a desert. Yet, as we journey over these vast spaces, it is impossible not to observe, from time to time, that a clear and slender rivulet meanders here and there over the moor, and that its verdant banks are studded with vigorous plants and thrifty trees; while in many places the hardy sons of toil who took advantage of the neighboring water, have opened their lonely farms, built comfortable houses, and frequently gathered themselves together in neat and thrifty villages.

In one of these spots, where meadow-land and pasturage have made agriculture profitable, and by the side of an unfrequented road, there is a farm of considerable size and value. The massive trees which spread their thick shade on every side attest that the spot has been occupied and cultivated for several generations. Besides, the ditches which surround it, and the stone bridge that leads to the principal gate, justify the belief that the estate has some right to be considered a lordly demesne. In the neighborhood it is known as GRINSELHOF. The entire front of the property is covered by the homestead of the farmer, comprising

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his stables and granges; so that, in fact, every thing in their rear is concealed by these edifices as well as by dense thickets and hedges which are growing in all the wild luxuriance of nature. Indeed, the dwelling of the proprietor was a mystery even to the farmer who worked the soil; for its surrounding copses were an impenetrable veil to his eyes, beyond which neither he nor his family were ever allowed to pass without special permission.

Within this lonely and sacred precinct, buried in foliage, was a large house, called THE CHATEAU, inhabited by a gentleman and his daughter, who, without a single servant, companion, or attendant, led the lonely lives of hermits. The neighbors said that it was avarice or ill-humor that induced a person possessed of so beautiful an estate to bury himself in such a solitude. The farmer who worked on the property carefully avoided all explanations as to the conduct or purpose of the proprietor, and sedulously respected the mysterious habits and fancies of his master. His business prospered; for the soil was fertile and the rent low. Indeed, he was grateful to his landlord, and, every Sunday, lent him a horse, which carried him and his daughter, in their weather-beaten *caleche*, to the village church. On great occasions the farmer's son performed the duty of lackey for the proprietor.

It is an afternoon of one of the last days of July. The sun has nearly finished his daily course, and is declining rapidly toward the horizon; still, his rays, though less ardent than at noontide, are hot enough to make the air close and stifling. At Grinselhof the last beams of the setting luminary play gayly over the foliage, gilding the tree-tops with sparkling light, while, on the eastern side of the dense foliage, the long, broad shadows begin to fall athwart the sward, and prepare the groves for the gentle and refreshing breeze that springs up at twilight.

Sadness and gloom hang over the sombre chateau and its grounds; a deathlike silence weighs like a gravestone on the desolate scene; the birds are songless; the wind is still; not a leaf stirs; and light alone seems to be living in that dreary solitude. No one could observe the entire absence of noise, motion, and vitality, without being impressed with the idea that nature had been suddenly plunged in a deep and magic sleep.

Suddenly the foliage at the end of a thicket in the distance is seen to stir, while a cloud of twittering birds, frightened from the herbage, flies rapidly across the little path, which is immediately occupied by a young female dressed entirely in white, who dashes from between the branches with a silken net in pursuit of a butterfly. The beautiful apparition, with loose and streaming hair, seemed rather to fly than run, as her light and rapid steps, full of eagerness and animation, scarcely touched the earth while darting after the gaudy insect. How graceful she is, as, halting for an instant beneath the coquettish moth,

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she looks up to behold its gold-and-purple wings dancing round her head, mocking and playing with its gay pursuer! She thinks she has caught it; but, alas! the edge of her net only touched the butterfly's wings, and away it dashes, over hedge and copse, far, far beyond her reach! How beautiful she is, as, in that golden light, warmed with exercise and excitement, her eyes glistening, her lips parted, her graceful arms stretched upward, she stands gazing, half pleased, half disappointed, after the departing insect, till it is lost in the evening sky! Wind and sunshine have slightly tanned her delicate cheeks, but their roses are only heightened into the glow of perfect health. Beneath her high and polished brow, coal-black eyes shine through long and silken fringes, while a chiselled mouth discloses rows of faultless pearls between lips which shame the coral! Her stately head is framed in masses of long, curling hair; and, as the locks are floated over her ivory shoulders by rapid motion, the proud and arching lines of her swan-like neck are fully displayed in all their splendor. Her form is lithe and supple, and its graceful contour is modestly marked by a snowy dress. As she lifts her head and gazes at the sky, a poet might easily fancy her to be some fanciful "being of the air," and convert her into the fairy queen of the solitary realm!

For a long while this beautiful woman wandered about the paths of the lonely garden, seemingly absorbed in reveries of various kinds. At times she was gay, at times sad. At length she approached a bed of violets, which, from the training of the plants, had evidently, been carefully tended, and, observing that they languished under the intense heat of the past day, began to grieve over them.

"Alas! my dear little flowers, why did I neglect to water you yesterday? You are very thirsty, are you not, my charming pets?"

For a moment or two she was quiet, still gazing at the violets, and then continued, in the same dreamy tone:—

"But then, alas! since yesterday my mind has been so disturbed, so happy, so—" Her eyes fell, and a blush crimsoned her cheeks, as she murmured, softly, "GUSTAVE!"

Motionless as a statue, and absorbed in her enchanting dream, she forgot the poor little violets, and, probably, the whole world.

"His image ever, ever before me! his voice ever ringing in my ears! Why try to escape their fascination? Oh, God! what is this that is passing within me? My heart trembles; sometimes my blood bounds wildly through my veins, and then again it creeps and freezes; and yet how happy I am! what inexpressible joy fills my very soul!"

She was silent; then, seeming suddenly to rouse herself, she raised her head and threw back the thick curls, as if anxious to disembarass her mind of a haunting thought.

“Wait, my dear flowers,” said she, smiling, to the violets; “wait a moment: I will comfort and refresh you.”

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With this she disappeared in the grove, and, in a short time, brought from it a few twigs and leaves, which she arranged in a little trellis over the flower-beds, so as to shadow the violets completely from the sun. After this she took a small watering-pot and ran across the grass to a basin or tank in the middle of the garden, around which a number of weeping-willows drooped their branches into the water. On her arrival its surface was perfectly smooth; but hardly had her image been reflected in the tank when it appeared to swarm with living creatures. Hundreds of gold-fishes, of all colors, swam toward her with their mouths gaping from the water, as if the poor little animals were trying to speak to her. Holding on by the trunk of the nearest willow, she bent gracefully over the pond and tried to fill her watering-pot without touching the gold-fish.

“Come, come; let me alone just now,” said she, as she carefully avoided them; “I haven’t time to play with you; I will bring you your dinner after a while.”

But the fish fluttered around the watering-pot until she withdrew it from the tank; and, even after her departure, continued to crowd toward the bank she had touched with her foot.

The young lady watered her flowers and replaced the pot gently on the ground; then, retiring slowly to the solitary house, she returned after a while at the same slow pace, and, throwing some crumbs to the fish, began to saunter slowly about the garden-paths, inattentive to every thing but her own absorbing thoughts. At length she reached a spot where a gigantic catalpa-tree overarched the garden and bent its branches almost to the earth. A table and a couple of chairs stood beneath the fresh and fragrant shade, and a book, inkstand, and embroidery-frame, gave token that the retreat had not long been abandoned by the lady herself. She seated herself in one of the chairs, took up the book, then the embroidery, let them fall one after another, and finally leaned her beautiful head on her hand, like one who is weary in spirit and anxious for rest.

For a while her large dreamy eyes were vaguely fixed, as if gazing into space; at intervals a smile played around her mouth, and her lips moved as if talking with a friend. Occasionally her drooping eyelids closed entirely; but the lashes quickly reopened, only to fall more heavily than before, till at last a profound sleep or intense reverie seemed to get possession of her mind and body.

But did she sleep? There is no doubt that her spirit watched and was happy; for a pleasant expression constantly played over her features, and, if sometimes it became serious, the joyous look quickly returned with all its radiance. She had long been plunged by this happy dream into complete forgetfulness of real life, when a noise of wheels and the neigh of a horse was heard at the gateway, disturbing the silence of Grinselhof. Still the maiden was not aroused.

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The old *caleche* returned from the city, drew up near the stable, and the farmer and his wife ran out to salute their master and put up the horse. While they were thus engaged, Monsieur De Vlierbeck got out of the vehicle and spoke to them kindly, but in a voice so full of sadness that both looked at him with astonishment. In fact, the gravity of this singular person never abandoned him even in his most affable moods; but at that moment his physiognomy indicated a degree of intense depression which was by no means habitual. He seemed altogether worn out with fatigue, and his eyes, which were commonly so vivacious, drooped, dull and languishing, beneath their heavy lids.

The horse was quickly put in the stable, and the young lackey, who had already divested himself of his livery, took several baskets and packets from the vehicle, carried them into the farm-house, and placed them on the table of the antechamber.

"And now, Master John," said De Vlierbeck, approaching the farmer, "I shall have need of you. There will be company to-morrow at Grinselhof. Monsieur Denecker and his nephew dine here."

The farmer, perfectly stupefied by the announcement and scarcely able to believe his own ears, looked at his master with staring eyes and gaping mouth, and, after a moment's hesitation, stammered forth,—

"That large, rich gentleman, sir, who sits near you every Sunday at high mass?"

"The same, John. Is there any thing surprising in it?"

"And young Monsieur Gustave, who spoke to *mademoiselle* in the churchyard when church was over?"

"The same!"

"Oh, sir, they are such rich people! They have bought all the land around Echelpoel. They have at least ten horses in the stable at their *chateau*, without counting those they have in town. Their carriage is silver from top to bottom."

"I know it; and it is exactly on that account that I desire to receive them in a becoming manner. You must be ready; your wife and your son also. I shall call you to-morrow morning very early. You will willingly lend a hand to help me, won't you?"

"Certainly, certainly, sir; a word from you is enough. I am always happy to be able to serve you in any way."

"Thank you for your kindness, John. We understand one another, my worthy fellow; and so farewell till to-morrow."



Monsieur De Vlierbeck entered the farm-house, gave some orders to the young man in relation to the things he had taken from the vehicle, and, passing through the screening grove, walked on to Grinselhof.

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As soon as he was out of the farmer's sight his physiognomy assumed a more serene expression, and there was a smile on his lips as he cast his eyes around in search of some one in the solitude of the garden. At a turn of the path his eye fell suddenly on the sleeping girl. How beautiful she was in her calm repose! The golden twilight covered her with its bright reflection, and threw a rosy tint on every thing about her. Thick curls strayed in beautiful disorder over her cheeks, and snowy flowers, shaken from the catalpa's branches by the evening breeze, had fallen around her in profusion. She still dreamed, and the happy smile yet rested on her features. De Vlierbeck gazed earnestly at his sleeping child, and raised his eyes to heaven as he said, tremulously,—“Thanks, Almighty Father! she is happy! Let my martyrdom be prolonged; but may all my sufferings render thee compassionate for her!”

After this short and ardent ejaculation he threw himself into a chair, leaned his arm carefully on the table, and, resting his hand on it, remained still as a statue. For a long time he watched his sleeping child, while his face seemed to reflect each emotion that flitted across the delicate features of the maiden. Suddenly a modest blush overspread her brow, and her lips began to articulate. The old gentleman watched her narrowly, and, although she had not spoken in connected sentences, he caught one of those stray words which often betoken what is passing in a dreamer's mind.

“‘GUSTAVE!’ She dreams of Gustave. May God be propitious to us! Ah, yes, my child,” exclaimed her father, “open thy heart to hope! Dream, dream; for who knows what is in store for us? Yet, no!—let us not destroy these happy moments by cold reality! Sleep, sleep! let thy soul enjoy the heavenly enchantment of love which it is awakening!”

Monsieur De Vlierbeck continued for a while his quiet observation of the sleeper, and then, rising, passed behind her chair and imprinted a long kiss on her forehead.

Still half-dreaming, the sleeper slowly opened her eyes; and, the moment she perceived who had awakened her, she sprang into her father's arms with a bound, and, hanging round his neck, overwhelmed him with questions and kisses.

Vlierbeck gently disengaged himself from his daughter's embrace, as he remarked, in a tone of raillery,—

“It seems altogether unnecessary, Lenora, to inquire what new beauties you have discovered in Vondel's ‘Lucifer.’ You have not had time, I take it for granted, to begin the comparison between this masterpiece of our native tongue and Milton's ‘Paradise Lost’?”

“Ah! father,” murmured Lenora, “my mind is indeed strangely troubled. I do not know what is the matter with me; I cannot even read with attention.”

“Come, Lenora, my child, don’t be sad. Sit down: I have something of importance to tell you. You do not know why I went to town to-day, do you? It was because we are to have company to dinner to-morrow!”

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Lenora gazed at her father with an earnest and questioning look.

"It is Monsieur Denecker," continued he:—"the wealthy merchant, you know, who sits near me at church and lives at the *chateau* of Echelpoel."

"Oh, yes! I remember him, father; he always speaks to me so kindly, and never fails to help me from the carriage when we go to church."

"But your eyes ask, I see, Lenora, whether he is coming *alone*. *Another* person will accompany him, my girl!"

"*Gustave!*" exclaimed the maiden, involuntarily and blushing.

"Exactly! Gustave will be here," replied Monsieur De Vlierbeck. "Don't tremble on that account, Lenora; and don't become frightened because your innocent heart may find itself opening to the dawn of new sensations. Between us, my child, there can be no secret that my love will not discover."

His daughter's eyes looked inquiringly into his own, as if asking an explanation of the enigma. But all of a sudden, as if a ray had darted unexpectedly into her soul, she threw her arms around the old man's neck and hid her face in his bosom.

"Oh, father! beloved father," murmured she, "your kindness is unbounded!"

For some moments the old gentleman did not put aside the affectionate caresses of his child; but by degrees his expression became gloomy; tears started into his eyes, and he said, in broken tones,—

"Lenora, whatever may happen to us in life, thou wilt always love thy father thus, wilt thou not?"

"Always, always, father!"

"Lenora, my child," continued he, with a sigh, "thy tender affection is my only recompense and happiness here below: never deprive my soul of its consolation!"

The sad tone in which these words were uttered touched the maiden's heart so deeply that she took her father's hands, without saying a syllable, and wept in silence with her head in his bosom.

For a long time they remained thus motionless, absorbed by a feeling which was neither joy nor sorrow but seemed to acquire its power and mastery by the mingling of these opposite sentiments.

Monsieur De Vlierbeck's expression was the first to change. His features became severe as he bent his head downward reproachfully. In truth, the strange words that started the tears into his daughter's eyes had excited the reflection in his own mind that another person was, perhaps, about to share his Lenora's love and probably to separate him from her forever. He was ready for every sacrifice, were it even infinitely greater, provided it contributed to the happiness of his child; yet the very idea of separation caused his heart to bleed at every pore. By degrees he stifled this selfish anxiety, and, striving to control himself, raised his daughter with a kiss.

"Come, Lenora," said he, "be gay again! Isn't it a happy thing that our hearts can sometimes get into the shade after they have been too much in the sunshine? Let us go into the house. We have many arrangements to make in order to receive our guests becomingly."

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Lenora obeyed her father in silence, and followed him slowly, while the tears still dropped from her beautiful eyes.

Some hours afterward Monsieur De Vlierbeck might have been seen seated in the principal saloon of Grinselhof, near a little lamp, with his elbows on the table. The apartment was dark and dreary, for the feeble rushlight illuminated but a single spot and cast the distant and lofty ceiling into vague obscurity. The flickering flame threw long and sombre shadows over the wall, while a line of old portraits in the panels seemed to fix their stern and immovable eyes on the table. Amid the gloom nothing came out with distinctness but the calm and noble face of the poor old gentleman, who sat there, absorbed in his reflections, fixed as a statue.

At length, rising from his chair and cautiously walking on tiptoe to the end of the room, he stopped and listened at the closed door. "She sleeps," said he, in a low voice; and, raising his eyes to heaven, added, with a sigh, "may God protect her rest!" Then, returning to the table, he took the lamp, and, opening a large safe which was imbedded in the wall, he went down on his knees and drew forth some napkins and a table-cloth, which he unfolded carefully to see whether they were torn or stained. As he refolded the articles one after the other, a smile betokened that he was pleased with his examination. Rising from this task, he went back to the table, from the drawer of which he took a piece of buckskin and whiting. Mashing the latter with a knife-handle, he began to rub and polish several silver forks and spoons which were in a basket. The salt-cellars and other small articles of table-service, which were mostly of the same metal, were all subjected to a similar process, and soon glittered brightly in the feeble lamplight.

While he was engaged in this strange work, the soul of the poor old man was busy with a thousand conflicting thoughts and recollections. He was constantly muttering to himself; and many a tear escaped from his lids as he dreamed over the past and repeated the names of the loved and lost!

"Poor brother!" ejaculated he; "but one man alone in the world knows what I have done for thee, and yet that man accuses me of bad faith and ingratitude! And thou, poor brother, art wandering in the icy solitudes of America, a prey perhaps to sickness and suffering, while for months no kindly look is fixed upon thee in that wilderness where thou earnest thy miserable wages! Son of a noble race! thou hast become a slave to the stranger, and thy toil serves to amass the fortunes which others are to enjoy! My love for thee has made me suffer martyrdom; but, as God is my judge, my affection has remained entire,—untouched! May thy soul, O brother, feel this aspiration of mine even in the isolation where thou art suffering; and may the consciousness of my love be a balm for thy misery!"

The poor gentleman was absorbed for some time in painful meditation; but after a while his dream seemed over, and he betook himself again to work. He placed all the silver

utensils side by side on the table, and, after carefully counting and examining them, resumed his soliloquy:—

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"Six forks! eight spoons! We shall be four at table: it will be necessary to be careful; else it will easily be seen something is wanting. I think, however, it will do. I must give very precise instructions to John's wife, for she is a clever woman, and knows what she is about!"

As he uttered the last words he replaced the silver in the basket and locked it in the safe; after which he took the lamp, and, leaving the saloon on tiptoe, descended through a little door into a large vaulted cellar. Here he hunted about for a considerable time amid stacks of empty bottles, and at last succeeded in finding what he was in search of; but his face became extremely pale as he drew three bottles from the sand.

"Good heavens! *only three bottles!*" exclaimed he; "three bottles of *table-wine*! and Monsieur Denecker is such a connoisseur of vintages! What shall I do if they ask for more when these three bottles are empty? I have it! I do not drink, and Lenora drinks very little; so there will be *two* bottles for Monsieur Denecker and *one* for his nephew! But, even at the worst, what is the use of anxiety? Let *luck* settle it!"

With this De Vlierbeck went into the corners of the cellar, where he gathered from the walls a quantity of cobwebs, which he wound artistically around the bottles and covered with dust and sand.

On reaching the saloon he went to work with paste and paper to mend some rents in the tapestry on the wall; and then, after passing nearly half an hour in brushing his clothes and disguising their threadbare spots with water and ink, he came back to the table and made preparations for a task which was still more singular than any he had hitherto been engaged in. Taking from the drawer a silk thread, an awl, and a bit of wax, he put his boot on his knees and began to mend the rents in the leather with the skill of a cobbler! It will readily be supposed that this odd occupation stirred a variety of emotions in the heart of the poor gentleman; violent twitches and spasms passed over his face; his cheeks became red, then deadly pale; till at last, yielding to a passionate impulse, he cut the silk, threw it on the table, and, with his hands stretched toward the portraits, cried out, with struggling passion,—

"Yes! behold me,—behold me,—ye whose noble blood runs in my veins! You, brave captain, who, fighting at the side of Egmont, at St. Quentin, gave your life for your country,—you, statesman and ambassador, who, after the battle of Pavia, rendered such eminent services to the Emperor Charles,—you, benefactor of your race, who endowed so many hospitals and churches,—you, proud bishop, who, as priest and scholar, defended so bravely your faith and your God,—behold me, all of you, not only from that senseless canvas, but from the bosom of God where you are at rest! He whom you have seen at the wretched task of mending his boots, and who devotes his life to the concealment



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of his poverty,—he is your descendant, your son! If the gaze of his fellow-men tortures him, before you at least he is not ashamed of debasing toil! glorious ancestry! you have fought the foes of your native land with sword and pen; but I,—I have to contend with unmerited shame and mockery, without a hope of ultimate triumph or glory; my weary soul sinks under its burden, and the world has nothing in store for me but scorn and contempt! And, yet, have I ever stained your noble escutcheon? All that I have done is generous and honest in the sight of God;—nay, the very fountain-head of my wo is love and compassion! Yes, yes!—fix your glittering eyes on me; contemplate me in the abyss of poverty where I am fallen! From the bottom of that pit I lift my brow boldly toward you, and your silent glance does not force me to grovel in the earth with shame! Here, in the presence of your noble images, I am alone with my soul, with my conscience;—hero, no mortification can touch the being who, as gentleman, Christian, brother, and father, has sacrificed himself to duty!"

His voice ceased; and for a few moments he stood still in the midnight silence, looking at the antique portraits as the last echoes died away in the lofty apartment, with his arms stretched toward the pictures as if invoking the beings they represented.

"Poor, senseless creature," continued he, after a while, clasping his hands and lifting them anew to heaven, "thy soul seeks deliverance in dreams! Yes; it is, perhaps, a dream, an illusion! Yet, thanks, thanks to the Almighty that allows even a dream to fortify me with courage and endurance! Enough: reality once more stares me in the face; and yet I defy the mocking spectre which points to ruin and misery!"

"And then to-morrow,—to-morrow!" continued he; "wilt thou not tremble beneath the glance of those who seek the secret of thy life? Yes; study well thy part; have ready thy mask; go on bravely with thy cowardly farce! And now begone; thy nightly task is done;—beg, beg from sleep the oblivion of what thou art and of thy threatening future! *Sleep!* I tremble at the very thought of it! Father in heaven, have mercy on us!"

### CHAPTER III.

At daybreak next morning everybody was busy at Grinselhof. John's wife and her serving-maid scoured the corridor and staircase; the farmer cleaned his stable; his son weeded the grass from the garden-walks. Very early in the day Lenora set matters in order in the dining-room and arranged with artistic taste all the pretty things she could find on the mantel-piece and tables. There was a degree of life and activity about Grinselhof that had not been seen in that solitude for many a year, and everybody went to work with alacrity, as if anxious to dispel the gloom that hung so long over the lonely dwelling. In the midst of the industrious crowd Monsieur De Vlierbeck might be seen moving about with words of encouragement and expressions of satisfaction; nor did he

manifest the slightest symptom of the anxiety that was secretly gnawing his heart. A pleasant smile flattered his humble dependants, as he gave them to understand that their labors would be greatly honored by the approval of his expected guests.

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The farmer and his spouse had never seen De Vlierbeck so pleasant and so gay; and, as they sincerely loved their master, they were as much delighted by his joy as if they had been preparing for a village fair in which they were to take part. They never dreamed of pay for their generous toil, but derived their most grateful recompense from the pleasure they imparted to the hermit and his child.

As soon as the principal preparations were completed, De Vlierbeck called his daughter and gave the necessary instructions for the dinner. Lenora was to confine herself to drilling the farmer's wife in serving the dishes with which she was not familiar. The old cooking-apparatus was lighted; wood kindled and crackled in the chimney; coals glistened in the grate; and high above the roof-tree, clouds of smoke betokened the good cheer that was to adorn the tables. Baskets of game were opened; stuffed poultry, savory pasties, and choice viands, were brought forth; dishes of green peas, beans, and other vegetables, appeared; and the women were speedily in a turmoil of stringing, shelling, cutting, washing, and stewing.

Lenora herself did not shun her part in these humble duties, and amused her companions by the pleasant chat with which she whiled away the hours. The rustics, who had rarely enjoyed an opportunity of seeing her so closely or of enjoying a familiar conversation with the beauty, were of course delighted with her gay and affable manners; nor could they avoid expressing their pleasure when a few notes of a popular song happened to drop from Lenora's lips.

The servant-maid instantly rose, and whispered, loud enough to be heard by Lenora,—

"Oh, pray, do beg *mademoiselle* to sing a verse or two of that song! I heard it at a distance the other day; and it was so beautiful that, fool as I am, I blubbered like a baby for half an hour behind the rose-bushes. And yet I think it was rather her sweet voice than the words that made me cry."

"Oh, yes! do sing it for us; it would give us so much pleasure! Your voice is like a nightingale's; and I remember too, that my poor mother—alas! she is long ago in heaven—used to sing me to sleep with that blessed song. Pray, sing it for us, *mademoiselle*."

"It's very long," said Lenora, smiling.

"But if you only sing averse or two; it is a holiday with us, you know, *mademoiselle*!"

"Well," returned Lenora, musingly, "if it will make you happy why should I refuse? Listen:—

"Beside a deep and rapid stream  
A lonely maiden sat;

With sighs her snowy bosom heaved,  
And tears bedewed the ground!

“A noble walked along the bank  
And saw her bitter grief;  
And, as her tears overflowed his heart,  
It melted for the maid!”

‘Speak, maiden, speak!’ the wanderer cried!  
‘Why moan you here alone?’—  
‘Ah, sir, an orphan-child am I,  
Whom God alone can save!’

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'Ah! seest thou not yon grassy mound  
There sleeps my mother dear.  
Behold yon rock, above the flood;  
There fell my father down!

'The whirling torrent bore him on;  
He struggled long in vain;  
My brother leaped to help his sire,  
And both together sank!

'And now I fly our silent hut,  
Where desolation dwells,  
To mourn upon this dreary bank,  
And watch the wave and grave!'

'No longer grieve,' the stranger said,  
'Thy heart shall ache no more;  
A father and a brother too  
To thee, poor lonely girl, I'll be!'

"He took her hand; he led her off;  
In garments rich he clad the maid;  
Before the altar promised love,  
And blessed her life in happy home!"[A]

[Footnote A: This simple and popular ballad, known in the Campine as *The Orphan*, is sung by all classes to an air which is full of touching melody.]

As Lenora was about beginning the last verse of her song De Vlierbeck appeared on the sill of the kitchen door, and the peasants instantly rose in alarm at the freedom with which they were sitting in the presence of their young mistress, listening to her songs; but the poor gentleman at once understood the meaning of her action, and with a gesture of approval signaled them to be quiet. As the last words died on his ear,—“I’m glad to see you amusing yourselves,” said he; “but, now that the song is ended, I want your services in another quarter, my good woman.”

Followed by Bess, the farmer’s wife, he ascended to the dining-room, where the tablecloth was already laid and every thing in order for the reception of the dishes. Bessy’s son was already there in livery, with a napkin over his arm; and De Vlierbeck immediately began to assign them their several tasks during the service of dinner, and to repeat and drill them in their tasks till he was perfectly satisfied with their performances.



The hour for dinner was at length near at hand. Every thing was ready in the kitchen, and all were at their posts. Lenora, in full dress and with a palpitating heart, lingered in her chamber; while her father, with a book which he appeared to be reading, sat beneath the *catalpa* in the garden.

It was about two o'clock when a splendid equipage, drawn by a pair of superb English horses, entered the demesne of Grinselhof and drew up in front of the portal. De Vlierbeck welcomed his guests courteously, and Monsieur Denecker gave orders to the coachman to return precisely at five o'clock, as matters of importance required his presence in Antwerp before nightfall.

Denecker was a large, stout person, dressed rather extravagantly, but in a style of studied carelessness which he evidently regarded as stylish. The expression of his face, it must be owned, was rather vulgar, and exhibited a compound of cunning and good-nature tempered by indifference. But Gustave, his nephew, belonged to an entirely different class of persons. His tall figure was graceful and easy, his countenance frank and manly, and his whole demeanor denoted refined manners and high cultivation. Blue eyes and blonde hair imparted a poetic air to his head; but an energetic glance and lofty brow took from it every expression of sentimental weakness.

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No sooner had De Vlierbeck presented his guests to Lenora, in the saloon, than Denecker broke forth in exclamations of undisguised admiration—

“How charming, how beautiful she is! and yet so hidden in this Grinselhof of yours, Monsieur de Vlierbeck! What a shame, sir! what a shame!”

In the mean time Gustave and Lenora had moved off to a short distance from the old gentlemen, and were busy in a chat of their own, inaudible to the rest but evidently interesting to themselves, for they were observed not only to blush but tremble. Denecker, in fact, could not help observing the young people’s emotion; and, as De Vlierbeck passed down the saloon with him, remarked that the young beauty was evidently turning his nephew’s head. “He talks of her constantly,” said he, “and I don’t know what may come of it; but I give you fair warning, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, if you are unwilling to see something more than compliments between these children you had better take time by the forelock. It will soon be too late to reason with them; for my nephew, with all his calm gentleness, is not the man to retreat before difficulties.”

De Vlierbeck was secretly delighted by the merchant’s counsels, but was too wise to display anxiety.

“You are joking, Monsieur Denecker,” said he: “I can’t think there is a particle of danger. They are both young, and there is nothing surprising in mutual attraction under such circumstances. There can hardly be any thing serious in their intercourse. But, come,” added he, aloud; “I perceive that dinner is served; and so let us adjourn to the table!” Gustave led in the blushing girl, and the elders followed admiringly in their rear, while the merchant shook his finger coquettishly at his gallant nephew. De Vlierbeck placed Monsieur Denecker opposite him at table, and made Gustave the *vis-a-vis* of Lenora.

Bess brought in the dishes, while her son waited on the guests. The viands were prepared with considerable skill, and Denecker took frequent occasion to express his satisfaction with their exquisite flavor. In truth, he was rather surprised at the sumptuousness of the repast; for he had been prepared to expect lenten fare in a household which was renowned throughout the neighborhood for its austere economy.

In a short time the conversation became general; and Lenora astonished Monsieur Denecker by the extent of her information and the admirable style in which she expressed herself and did the honors of the table. But, notwithstanding her ease and freedom while conversing with the uncle, an observer could not help detecting that she was shy, if not absolutely embarrassed, when obliged to reply to some casual remark of the nephew. Nor was Gustave more at ease than the maiden. In fact, they were both happy at heart because fate had thrown them together; but they would have been quite willing to enjoy that delicious silence which in love is often more eloquent than in language.

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In the mean while De Vlierbeck rattled away, with the ease of a man of the world, on all subjects that might interest his guests; yet he listened, with equal good manners, to Denecker's conversation, and now and then adroitly threw in such hints as allowed him to speak learnedly upon commercial matters. The merchant was gratified by his deferential civility, and was drawn toward his entertainer by a stronger bond than that of mere social politeness.

Indeed, all went on swimmingly, and all were pleased with themselves. De Vlierbeck was especially gratified to find that Bess and her boy performed their tasks so well, and that the spoons and plates were so quickly washed and brought back that it was impossible to notice the deficiency of their number. One thing alone began to worry him. He saw with pain that while Denecker was busy with his food and chat he was equally busy with the wine, and that glass after glass disappeared with more rapidity than was agreeable to his supply. Besides this, Gustave, who was probably anxious for some excuse to have a word with Lenora upon any pretext, constantly asked permission to fill her glass; so that, very soon after the soup and meat had been disposed of, the first bottle was entirely emptied.

Civility required that it should be immediately replaced; and, as De Vlierbeck observed that the more Monsieur Denecker talked the more he drank, he thought he might try whether less conversation would not moderate the merchant's thirst. But, alas! he was disappointed; for at that moment Denecker introduced the topic of wine, and, lauding the generous juice of the grape, expressed surprise at the extraordinary sobriety of his host. With this he redoubled his attack on the bottle, and was in some degree, though less vigorously, seconded by Gustave. De Vlierbeck's agony became more and more intense as he saw the rosy fluid sink and sink in the second bottle, until at length the last drop was drained into the merchant's glass.

"Yes," said Denecker, "your wine is both old and good; but I have always found, in tasting liquors, that if we don't change them we lose their flavor. I take it for granted that you have a first-rate cellar, if I may judge by your first samples; so I propose that we now try a bottle of your *Chateau-margaux*; and, if we have time, we can finish with a bottle of *hochheimer*. I never drink *champagne*: it is a bad liquor for wine-drinkers."

As the last words fell from Denecker, poor De Vlierbeck grew deadly pale, as his frightened spirit went rummaging through the cracks and crannies of his brain for some inspiration or expedient which might extricate him from his deep perplexity.

"*Chateau-margaux*?" inquired he, with a calm smile. "Certainly, sir, if you wish it." And then, turning to the lackey,—*"John,"* said he, "bring a bottle of *Chateau-margaux*: you will find it in the third cellar on the left-hand side."



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But the rustic stared at his master with gaping mouth, as if he had been addressed in one of the dead languages. Seeing the predicament, and mastering it rapidly,—

“Excuse me,” said De Vlierbeck, rising; “he would not find it, I fear. I will be back in a moment.”

Rushing into the kitchen, he seized the third and last bottle and descended to the cellar, where he stopped to draw breath and compose himself.

“*Chateau-margaux! hochheimer! champagne!*” exclaimed poor De Vlierbeck, “and not another drop of wine in my house but what is in this last bottle of claret! What *shall* I do? what *can* I do?” continued he, as he held the cobwebbed bottle in one hand and stroked his chin with the other. “But no matter: there’s no time for reflection: the die is cast, and may God help me in my need!”

He ascended the stair, entered the dining-room with the corkscrew in the last cork, and found that during his absence Lenora had ordered fresh glasses on the table.

“This wine,” said De Vlierbeck, holding the bottle knowingly to the light, “is at least twenty years old, Monsieur Denecker, and I sincerely hope it will please your palate.” So saying, he filled the glasses of uncle and nephew, and gazed anxiously in their faces for the verdict.

Denecker tasted the wine, drop by drop, like an epicure, and, shaking his head disappointedly,—

“There’s a mistake, doubtless,” said he; “for it’s the identical wine we had before.”

De Vlierbeck feigned surprise admirably, tasted the wine in turn, and replied,—

“I *believe* you are right, and that I *have* made a mistake; yet, as the bottle is opened and not bad, suppose we drink it before I make another descent to the cellar’ There’s abundance of time.”

“I’ve no objection,” answered the merchant, “provided you help us, so as to get through it the quicker.” And so the column in the third and last bottle diminished more rapidly than its predecessors, till two or three glasses alone remained at the bottom to crown the festival.

Poor De Vlierbeck could no longer conceal his agitation. He tried to keep his eyes off the fatal bottle; but a sort of fascination drew him back to it, and each time with increased anxiety. That dreadful word ‘*Chateau-margaux*’ rang in his ears. His face blushed and grew pale, and a cold, clammy sweat stood in big beads on his forehead. Yet he felt that he had not entirely exhausted his resources, and resolved to fight the battle of humiliation to the end. He wiped his brow and cheeks, coughed, and turned

aside as if about to sneeze. By dint of these manoeuvres he continued to conceal his nervousness till Denecker grasped the bottle to pour out its last drop. As he clasped the neck, a chill seized the hysterical frame of the poor gentleman, a deadly paleness overspread his features, and his head fell with a groan against the tall back of the chair. Was it in truth a fainting-fit, or did the sufferer take advantage of his emotion to play a part and escape the embarrassment of his situation?

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In a moment the whole party were on their feet, while Lenora screamed and ran to her father.

"It's nothing," said De Vlierbeck, striving, after a minute or two, to rally himself. "I am faint; the confined air of this room overcame me. Let me walk a while in the garden and I will soon be better."

As he said this he staggered to his feet, and, supported by Lenora and Gustave, moved toward the garden, followed by Denecker with an expression of the deepest concern. A short rest in the open air beneath the shade of a noble chestnut-tree quickly restored a faint color to De Vlierbeck's cheek and enabled him to tranquillize their anxiety about his sudden attack.

"I will rest here a while out of doors," said he, "for fear the fit might return; and perhaps a slow walk in the garden might hasten my recovery."

"It will do both of us good," answered Denecker; "and, besides, as I have to quit you at five o'clock, I don't want to leave Grinselhof without seeing its garden. Let us take a turn through your walks, and afterward we shall have time enough to finish another bottle."

As he said this he passed Lenora's arm within his own, and, casting a coquettish glance at Gustave, began their promenade. By degrees De Vlierbeck rallied sufficiently to take part in the chat; and gardening, agriculture, sporting, and a hundred different country topics, were fully discussed. Lenora recovered her spirits and charmed their commercial guest by the mingled charms of her intellectual cleverness and innocent gayety. Wild as a deer, she dared him to run a race with her, and danced along the paths by his side full of mirth and sportiveness. In truth, Denecker was altogether captivated by the ingenuous girl, and, as he looked on her radiant face, could not help thinking that the future had some happy days in store for his gallant nephew. After a while Lenora strayed off in advance with Gustave, while the two elders lingered lazily along the path. Gustave was charmed with the flowers, the plants, the gold-fish, which Lenora pointed out to him; nor was he at all desirous to shorten their delicious flirtation by returning to the table. This chimed precisely with the anxiety of De Vlierbeck, who employed every stratagem he could conceive to keep his guest in the open air. He told stories, repeated jokes, appealed to Denecker's commercial knowledge, and even quizzed him a little when he found their conversation beginning to flag. In fact, he was rejoicing that five o'clock, and, of course, the carriage, were rapidly approaching, when Denecker suddenly recalled his nephew from a distant quarter of the garden where he was strolling with Lenora.

"Come, Gustave; come," said he; "if you wish to drink a parting glass with us let us get in, for the coach will be here in a moment."

De Vlierbeck instantly became pale as a sheet, and, trembling from head to foot, stared silently at Denecker, who could no longer restrain his surprise at these exhibitions.

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"Are you ill, sir?" said he.

"My stomach is a singular one, Monsieur Denecker, and I suffer spasms if you even mention *wine*! It is a strange malady; but—Oh, I hear your coach, Monsieur Denecker; and there it is, drawing up, I see, at the gateway."

Of course Denecker spoke no more of wine; but, as he could not help noticing the alacrity with which De Vlierbeck hailed the prospect of his departure, he would have been deeply mortified, if not offended, had not the previous hospitality of his host satisfied him of their welcome. He thought, perhaps, that he ought to attribute his entertainer's conduct to some singular nervous disease which he masked under an antipathy for wine; and accordingly he took leave with a warm and friendly farewell.

"I have passed a delightful afternoon with you, Monsieur De Vlierbeck," said he. "We have found ourselves, I am sure, extremely happy in your and your daughter's charming society. It is a pleasure added to my life to have made your acquaintance; and I hope that further intimacy may assure me your friendship. In the mean while, let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kind reception."

As he finished the sentence, Lenora and Gustave joined them.

"My nephew," continued Denecker, "will confess, as I have done, that he has spent few happier hours than those that are just gone. I hope, Monsieur de Vlierbeck, that you and your charming daughter will return our visit and dine with us. Yet I shall have to ask your pardon for postponing the pleasure it will afford us till I return from Frankfort, where I am summoned, the day after to-morrow, on urgent business. It is probable I may be detained away a couple of months; but if my nephew should be allowed to visit you in my absence let me hope he will be welcome."

De Vlierbeck reiterated his professions of delight at the new acquaintance; Lenora was silent; and Denecker moved off toward the coach.

"But the parting glass, uncle!" exclaimed Gustave. "Let us go in for a moment and drink it."

"No, no," said Denecker, interrupting him tartly. "I believe we would never get hence at all if we listened to you. It is time to be off, and I can delay no longer. Adieu!"

Gustave and Lenora exchanged a long and anxious look, full of regret at separation and of hope for speedy reunion. In a moment the uncle and nephew were in the vehicle and the spirited horses in motion; but, as long as the group was in sight at the gate, a couple of white-gloved hands might have been seen waving farewells from the coach-window.

## CHAPTER IV.

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A few days after the departure of his uncle, Gustave paid a visit to Grinselhof. He was received by Monsieur De Vlierbeck and his daughter with their usual kindness, passed the greater part of an afternoon with them, and went home at nightfall to the *chateau* of Echelpoel full of delightful recollections and hopes. Either from a fear of disturbing the reserved habits of the old gentleman, or from a sense of politeness, Gustave did not at first repeat his visits too frequently; but after a couple of weeks the extreme cordiality of Vlierbeck dispelled all his scruples. The ardent youth no longer resisted an impulse that drew him toward the bewitching girl, nor did he allow a single day to roll by without passing the afternoon at Grinselhof. The happy hours flew rapidly on the wings of love. He strolled with Lenora through the shady walks of the old garden, listened to her father's observations on science and art, drank in the delicious notes of his loved one's voice as it was breathed forth in song, or, seated beneath the flowery and spreading catalpa, dreamed the dream of happiness that was in store for him with her who was probably soon to become his betrothed.

If the noble and beautiful face of the maiden had won his eye and enlisted his feelings the moment he first beheld her in the village churchyard, *now*, that he had become familiar with her character, his love grew so ardently absorbing that the world seemed sad and dead if she were not present to shed the light of her joyous spirit upon every thing around him. Neither religion nor poetry could conjure up an angel more fascinating than his beloved. Indeed, though God had endowed her person with all those feminine graces that adorned the first woman in Paradise, he had also lavished on her a heart whose crystalline purity was never clouded, and whose generosity burst forth with every emotion like a limpid spring.

But in all his interviews, Gustave had never yet been alone with Lenora. When he visited her she never left the apartment where she commonly sat with her father, unless the old gentleman expressed a wish that they should unite in a walk through the garden; and, of course, he had never enjoyed an opportunity to breathe the love that was rising to his lips. Still, he felt that it was altogether useless to express by words what was passing in their hearts; for the kindness, the respect, the affection, that shone in everybody's eyes, betokened the feeling which united them in a mingled sentiment of attachment and hope.

Though Gustave entertained profound veneration for Lenora's father and really loved him as a son, there was something which at times came like a cloud betwixt himself and the old gentleman. What he heard outside of Grinselhof of De Vlierbeck's extraordinary avarice had been fully realized since he became intimate at the house. No one ever offered him a glass of wine or beer; he never received an invitation to dinner or supper; and he frequently observed the trouble that was taken by the master of the house to disguise his inhospitable economy.

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Avarice is a passion which excites no other emotion than that of aversion or contempt, because it is natural to believe that when so degrading a vice takes possession of one's soul it destroys every spark of generosity and fills it with meanness. Accordingly, Gustave had a long and fearful conflict with himself in order to subdue this instinctive feeling and to convince his judgment that De Vlierbeck's conduct was only a caprice which did not detract from the native dignity of his character. And yet, had the young man known the truth, he would have seen that a pang was hidden beneath every smile that flitted over the old man's face, and that the nervous shudders which at times shook his frame were the results of a suppressed agony that almost destroyed him. As he gazed on the happy face of Lenora and steeped his soul in the intoxication of her love, he never dreamed that her father's life was a prolonged punishment; that, day and night, a terrible future opened its vista before him; and that each moment of his existence brought him nearer and nearer to a dreadful catastrophe. He had not heard the inexorable sentence of the notary:—"Four months more and your bond expires, when all you possess in this world will be sold by the officers of justice to satisfy your creditors!"

Two of those fatal months had already expired!

If Monsieur De Vlierbeck appeared to encourage the young man's love, it was not alone in consequence of his sympathy with his feelings. No: the *denouement* of his painful trial was to be developed within a defined period; and, if it proved inauspicious, there was nothing but dishonor and moral death for himself and child! Destiny was about to decide forever whether he was to come out victorious from this ten years' conflict with poverty, or whether he was to fall into the abyss of public contempt! These were the feelings that induced him to conceal his true position more carefully than ever, and, while he watched over the lovers like a guardian spirit, made him do nothing to check the rapid progress of their passion.

As the time of his uncle's return approached, the two months seemed to Gustave to have flown by like a pleasant dream; and, although he felt sure that his relative would not oppose the union, he foresaw that he would not be allowed hereafter to spend so much of his time away from business. Indeed, the very idea that he might be obliged to pass considerable periods without seeing Lenora made him look for his uncle's return with any thing but delight.

One day he contrived to whisper his fears and anticipations to Lenora, and, for the first time since their acquaintance, saw tears gathering in her eyes. The girl's emotion touched his heart so sensibly that he ventured timidly to take her hand, and held it in his for a long time without uttering a word. De Vlierbeck, who had overheard the remark, tried to comfort him, but his words did not seem to produce the desired

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effect; and, after a short time, Gustave rose abruptly and took leave, though his usual time of departure had not yet arrived. Lenora read in his expression that some sudden revolution had occurred in her lover's mind, for his eyes glistened with extraordinary animation. She strove eagerly to retain him by her side; but he resisted her appeal pleasantly, and declared that nothing should unveil his secret till the following day, when he would return to Grinselhof. De Vlierbeck, however, was more familiar with the world than his daughter; and, imagining that lie had penetrated the mystery of Gustave's conduct, many a pleasant dream hovered that night around his pillow.

As the usual hour of Gustave's visit approached next day, De Vlierbeck's heart beat high with hope; and when the visitor appeared, clad with unusual neatness and care, the old gentleman welcomed him with more than ordinary warmth. After the compliments of the day had been paid to his ladylove, Gustave expressed a desire for a few moments' conversation with her father, who led him into an adjoining cabinet and seated himself by his side.

"What is it you wish of me, my young friend?" said he, kindly.

Gustave was silent for a moment, as if endeavoring to rally his ideas, and then spoke out in a manly way:—

"I am about, my dear sir, to speak to you in regard to a matter that concerns my happiness; and, no matter what may be your decision, I am sure, from your kindness upon all occasions, that you will pardon my boldness. I can hardly imagine that the feeling—the irresistible feeling—I have entertained for Lenora from the first moment I saw her, has escaped your penetrating eye. I ought probably to have asked your consent long ago, before she obtained so complete a dominion over my heart; but I have always secretly encouraged the belief that you read my soul and wore not displeased with my motives."

Gustave was silent, awaiting the hoped-for words of encouragement; but De Vlierbeck only looked at him with a gentle smile, and gave no other indication of his pleasure. A motion of the hand, as if he wished the lover to go on with his conversation, was the only sign he made in reply,

Gustave's resolution began to ebb at this discouraging by-play; but, summoning all his energy for another attack, he continued:—

"Yes, sir, I have loved Lenora from my first sight of her; but what was then a spark is now a flame. Don't think it is her loveliness alone that bewitched me. She might indeed enchant the most insensible of mankind; but I found a far more glorious treasure in the angelic heart of your daughter. Her virtue, the immaculate purity of her soul, her gentle





and magnanimous sentiments,—in a word, the prodigal gifts of mind and body which God has lavished on her,—have increased my admiration to love, my love to absolute idolatry! How dare I conceal my emotion from you any longer? I cannot live without Lenora; the very thought of even a short temporary separation from her overwhelms me with despair. I long to be with her every day, every hour; I long to hear her voice and read my happiness in her eloquent eyes! I know not what may be your decision; but, believe me, if it shall be adverse to my hopes, I shall not long survive the blow. If your decree separate, me from my beloved Lenora, life will no longer have a charm for me!"

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Gustave uttered his romantic rhapsody—the rhapsody of most lovers—with that genuine emotion which bespoke his sincerity, and touched the heart of De Vlierbeck so deeply that he grasped his hand and implored him to be calm.

“Don’t tremble so, my young friend,” said the old gentleman. “I know very well that you love Lenora, and that she is not insensible to your affection for her. But what have you to propose to me?”

Gustave replied, dejectedly,—“If I still doubt your approval, after all the marks of esteem you have given me, it is because I fear you do not consider me worthy the happiness I have sought. I have no ancestral tree whose roots are buried in the past; the good deeds of my forefathers do not shine in history; the blood that runs in my veins comes from a common stock.”

“Do you think,” said De Vlierbeck, interrupting him, “that I was ignorant of all this from the first day of our acquaintance? No Gustave; no matter what your lineage may be, your own heart is generous and noble; and, had it not been so, I would never have esteemed and treated you as my son.”

“And so,” exclaimed Gustave, catching at the last words with a burst of joyous impatience, “you don’t refuse me Lenora’s hand?—you will interpose no objection, provided my uncle gives his consent?”

“No,” replied De Vlierbeck; “I shall not refuse it to you. On the contrary, it will give me unbounded happiness to intrust the fate of my only child to your keeping. And yet there is an obstacle of which you have no idea.”

“An obstacle!” exclaimed Gustave, growing pale;—“an obstacle between Lenora and me?”

“Be silent a moment,” said De Vlierbeck, “and listen to the explanation I shall give you. You think, Gustave, I suppose, that Grinselhof and all its dependencies belong to us? It is not so: we are penniless. We are poorer far than the peasant who rents our farming-land and lives yonder at the gate!”

Gustave looked doubtingly at De Vlierbeck, with so incredulous a smile that the poor gentleman blushed, and trembled like an aspen.

“I see you do not believe me,” continued he; “I see it in your smile and look. Like the rest of them, you think me a miser, hiding my wealth and starving my child and myself to amass riches,—a wretch who sacrifices every thing for money,—a vagabond whom all ought to fear and despise!”

“Oh, pardon me, pardon me, sir!” interrupted Gustave, moved by the excitement of the old man “I think nothing of the kind! My veneration for you is unbounded!”



“Nay, don’t be frightened at my words, young man,” continued De Vlierbeck, in a calmer tone. “I make no accusations against you, Gustave. I only saw in your incredulous smile that I had succeeded in masking my poverty even from you, and in making you suppose that my economy was avarice. But it is needless for me to give you any further explanation just now. Let it suffice you to know that what I say is strictly, honestly true. I possess nothing,—nothing!”

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“And now,” added he, after a moment’s silence on both sides, “let me give you a piece of advice. Go home to-day without seeing Lenora; examine your soul calmly, and see whether there are no secret emotions that may make you change your present views; let a night pass, and if, to-morrow, Lenora, poor as you now know her to be, is still dear to you,—if you still think you can be happy with her and can make her happy,—seek your uncle and ask his consent. Here is my hand: if the day shall ever come when I can offer it as a father’s, it will be the happiest of my life!”

Although the revelation made by Monsieur De Vlierbeck was astonishing to Gustave, the solemn tone in which he announced it convinced the lover of its truth. He was silent for a moment; but soon a spark of enthusiasm began to glisten in his eye and light up his face, as he exclaimed,—

“How can you ask me if I shall continue to love Lenora now that I know her to be poor? It will be happiness enough for me to receive her as a wife, to be bound to her by the eternal bonds of love, to be forever within her reach, and to receive my happiness from her look and voice! What delight it will be for me to protect her and know that I have the privilege of working for her! Palace or hovel; riches or poverty, all are equally indifferent to me, provided her presence animates the spot! A night’s reflection, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, cannot change my resolution. Grant me Lenora’s hand, and I will thank you on my knees for the priceless gift!”

“And suppose I do,” replied the old gentleman; “generosity and constancy are natural to the ardent character of youth:—but your uncle?”

“My uncle!” murmured Gustave, with evident grief; “that is true; I need his consent. All I possess or ever shall possess in the world depends on his affection for me. I am the orphan son of his brother. He adopted me as his child and has overwhelmed me with kindness. He has the right to decide my lot in life, and I must obey him.”

“And do you think that he, a merchant, who probably places a very high value on money, because experience has taught him its value, will say, like you, ‘Palace or hovel, poverty or wealth, it makes no difference’?”

“Alas! I know not, Monsieur De Vlierbeck,” said Gustave, droopingly. “But my uncle is so good to me—so extraordinarily good—that I may rightly hope for his consent. He will return to-morrow. When I embrace him I will declare all my wishes. I will say my comfort, my happiness, my life, depend on his consent. I know that he loves Lenora sincerely; for, before his departure, he even seemed to encourage my pretensions to her hand. Your disclosures will undoubtedly surprise him; but my prayers will conquer: believe it!”

Monsieur De Vlierbeck rose, to put an end to the conversation.



“Well, ask your uncle’s consent,” said he; “and, if your hopes are realized, let him come here and consult about the marriage. Whatever may be the issue of this affair, Gustave, you at least have always behaved toward us with the delicacy of a generous youth. My esteem and friendship shall always be yours. Go now; quit Grinselhof this time without seeing Lenora, for you ought not to meet her until this affair is settled. I will tell her myself whatever I think proper for her to know.”

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Half pleased, half sad,—his heart divided between joy and anxiety,—Gustave bade farewell to Lenora's father and returned to Echelpoel.

### CHAPTER V.

On the afternoon of the following day Monsieur De Vlierbeck was seated in his parlor, his head resting on his hand. He seemed plunged in profound thought, for his eyes were fixed on vacancy and his face exhibited by turns contentment and hope, inquietude and anxiety.

Occasionally Lenora came into the apartment, and, seeming unusually restless, wandered about from spot to spot, arranging and rearranging the little fancy articles upon the tables, looking out of the window into the garden, and at last running downstairs suddenly as if she were pursued. No one who saw her could doubt that she was nervously anxious about something; yet her expression was one of joy and hope. Had she been able to penetrate her father's mind and behold the various emotions that excited it, she would not perhaps have been so gay and blithesome; but poor De Vlierbeck restrained himself with his habitual care in her presence, and smiled at her impatience as if he too were confident of approaching happiness.

At length, tired of running about, Lenora seated herself by her father and fixed her clear and questioning gaze on his face.

"Don't be so excited, my good child," said he. "We shall know nothing to-day; but we may, perhaps, to-morrow. Moderate your joy, my daughter; if it please Heaven to decide against your hope in this matter your grief will be more easily conquered."

"Oh, no, father!" stammered Lenora; "God will grant my prayer; I feel it in my heart. Don't be astonished, father, that I am full of joy, for I think I see Gustave speaking to his uncle. I hear what he says, and Monsieur Denecker's replies; I see him embrace Gustave and give his consent! Who can doubt, father, that I ought to hope, when I know that Monsieur Denecker loved me and was always kind?"

"Would you be very happy, Lenora," asked De Vlierbeck, with a smile, "if Gustave were betrothed to you?"

"Never to leave him!" cried Lenora,—“to love him,—to be the happiness of his life, his consolation, his joy,—to enliven the solitude of Grinselhof by our love!—ah! that, father, would be delight indeed; for then there would be two of us to contribute to the pleasures of your life! Gustave would have more skill than I to chase away the grief that sometimes clouds your brow; you could walk, talk, or hunt with him; he would venerate and love you as a son and watch you with the tenderest care; his only thought on earth would be to make you happy, because he knows that your happiness is mine; and I—I,

father, will recompense him for his devotion by the gratitude of my heart, and love. Oh, yes, dear father! we shall live together in a paradise of contentment!"

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“Ingenuous girl!” exclaimed De Vlierbeck, with a sigh; “may the Lord hear your prayer! But the world, my child, is governed by laws and customs of which you are altogether ignorant. A wife must follow her husband wherever he goes. If Gustave shall select another residence you must follow him and console yourself gradually at the separation from your father. Under other circumstances, parting might be painful; but solitude will not sadden me if I know you are happy, my child.”

The startled maiden looked at her father with surprise as he uttered these words; and, as he finished, her head fell heavily on her breast and tears streamed silently from her eyes. Monsieur De Vlierbeck took her hand tenderly as he said, in faltering words,—

“I feared, Lenora, that I would make you sad; but you must become accustomed to the idea of our separation.”

Lenora raised her head quickly as she replied, in a firm and resolute manner, “What! could Gustave ever dream of our separation? To leave you at Grinselhof passing your days in seclusion while I and my husband were in the world in the midst of festivity? I should not have an instant’s rest, wherever I might be; conscience would cry aloud in my heart, ‘Ungrateful and insensible child, thy father is abandoned to suffering and solitude!’ Yes, I love Gustave; he is dearer to me than life itself, and I receive his hand as a blessing from God; but if he should say to me, ‘Abandon your father!’—if he left me no choice except you or him,—I would close my eyes and reject him! I should be sad; I should suffer; perhaps even I should die; but, father dear, I would die in your arms!”

She bent down her head for a moment as if oppressed by a dreadful thought; but, raising her large eyes, liquid with tears, she fixed them on her father, as she added,—

“You doubt Gustave’s affection for you; you imagine him capable of filling your life with sorrow,—of separating me from you! Oh, father, you do not know him; you do not know how much he respects and loves you; you do not comprehend the warmth of his generous and loving heart!”

De Vlierbeck bent over his child and impressed a kiss on her forehead, as he was about to utter some words of consolation, when suddenly Lenora sprang from his arms and pointed eagerly to the window, as if listening to approaching sounds.

The noise of wheels and the clatter of horses on the road soon gave Monsieur De Vlierbeck to understand why his daughter had been so startled. His face assumed a more animated expression, and, descending hurriedly, he reached the door as Monsieur Denecker alighted from his coach.

The merchant seemed in exceedingly good humor; he grasped De Vlierbeck’s hand, expressing his delight at seeing him once more. “How goes it with you, my old friend? It seems that rogue, my nephew, has taken advantage of my absence.” And, although



De Vlierbeck ushered him into the saloon with all the formality imaginable, Denecker slapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and continued,—

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"Well! well! we were good friends from the beginning; and now I understand we are to be regular gossips:—at least I hope so. That scamp hasn't bad taste, I must confess. He would have to make a long search before he found a handsomer or more amiable woman than Lenora. Look you, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, we must have a wedding frolic that people will talk of twenty years hence!"

By this time they had got into the saloon and taken their seats; but De Vlierbeck, nervous as he was, had considerable doubt as to the tone of Denecker's remarks, and whether he was jesting or serious.

"It seems," continued Denecker, assuming a graver tone, "that Gustave is madly impatient for this union, and begs me to hasten it. I have taken compassion on the young fellow and left all the business of our house topsy-turvy to-day to arrange matters with you. He tells me you have given your consent. That was kind of you, sir. I thought a great deal of this affair during my journey, for I had observed that Cupid's arrows had gone clean through and through the boy; yet I had fears about your consent. Inequality of blood, old-fashioned ideas, might perhaps interfere."

"And so Gustave told you that I consented to his marriage with Lenora?" said the old gentleman, paying no attention to Monsieur Denecker's remarks.

"Did he deceive me, sir?" said Denecker, with surprise.

"No; but did he communicate something else to you, which ought to strike you as of equal importance?"

Denecker threw back his head with a laugh, as he replied,—

"What nonsense you made him believe! But, between us two, that passes for nothing. He tells me that Grinselhof don't belong to you and that you are *poor*! I hope, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, you have too good an opinion of my sense to imagine I have the least faith in such a story?"

A shudder passed over the poor gentleman's frame. Denecker's good-humored familiarity had made him believe that he knew and credited all, and nevertheless responded to his nephew's hopes; but the last words he heard taught him that he must again go over the sad recital of his misfortunes.

"Monsieur Denecker," said he, "do not entertain the least doubt, I beg you, in regard to what I am about to say. I am willing instantly to consent that my daughter shall become your nephew's wife; but I solemnly declare that I am poor,—frightfully poor!"

"Come, come!" cried the merchant; "we knew long, long ago that you were mightily fond of your money; but when you marry your *only* child you must open your heart and your purse, my dear sir, and portion her according to your means. They say—pardon me for

repeating it—that you are a *miser*; but what a shame it would be to let your only daughter leave your house unprovided for!”

Poor De Vlierbeck writhed on his chair as Denecker poured forth his incredulous jokes. “For God’s sake, sir,” cried he, “spare me these bitter remarks. I declare, on the word of a gentleman, that I possess *nothing* in the world!”

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"Well!" cried the merchant, taking no heed of his remarks, and with a mocking smile, "come; let us cipher the matter out on the table. You suppose, perhaps, that I have come here to ask some great sacrifice of you: but no, De Vlierbeck, thank God, I have no occasion to be so close in my calculations. Yet a marriage is a thing to which there are always two parties, and it is just that each should bring something into the common stock."

"Oh, God! oh, God!" muttered the poor gentleman, as he clenched his hands convulsively.

"I propose to give my nephew one hundred thousand francs," continued Denecker; "and if he wants to continue in business my credit will be worth as much more to him. I have no wish that Lenora's portion shall equal his. Your high birth, and especially your character, will make up what is wanting in her fortune; but what say you to the half,—fifty thousand francs? You will consent to that, or I am much mistaken. What say you? Is it a bargain?"

Pale and trembling, De Vlierbeck sat riveted to his chair; but at last, in a low, melancholy voice,—

"Monsieur Denecker," said he, "this conversation kills me. I beg you to stop this infliction. I repeat that I possess *nothing*; and, since you force me to speak before you apprise me of your own intentions, know that Grinselhof and its dependencies are mortgaged beyond their value! It is useless to inform you of the origin of these debts. Let it suffice to repeat that I tell the truth; and I beg you, without going further, now that you are informed of the state of my affairs, to declare frankly what are your designs as to your nephew's marriage."

Although this declaration was made with that feverish energy which ought to have satisfied Denecker of its truth, it nevertheless failed to convince him. A degree of surprise displayed itself on the merchant's face; but he continued his observations in the same incredulous tone:—

"Pardon me, De Vlierbeck, but it is impossible to believe you. I did not think you were so hard in a bargain. Yet be it so: every man has his weakness; one is too miserly, another too prodigal. Now, for my part, I confess that I am extremely anxious to spare Gustave the anxiety of delay. Give your daughter twenty-five thousand francs, with the understanding that the amount of her portion is to remain a secret; for I don't want to be laughed at. Twenty-five thousand francs!—you cannot say it is too much;—in fact, it is a trifle that will hardly pay for their furniture. Be reasonable, my good sir, and let us shake hands on it!"

De Vlierbeck said nothing; but, rising abruptly from the table, opened a closet with a trembling hand, and, taking from it a package of papers, threw them on the table.

“There!” said he; “read; convince yourself.”

Denecker took up the papers and began to examine them. As he went on, the expression of his face gradually changed, and at times he raised his head and looked upward, as if in deep thought. After he had been engaged for some time in this disagreeable task, De Vlierbeck recommenced the conversation in a tone of cutting irony:—

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"Ah! you would not believe me, sir. Well, let your determination be founded on those papers alone. It is right you should know every thing; for I have determined never again to be tortured. Besides the evidences of debt which are before you, I owe a bill of exchange for four thousand francs, which I cannot pay! You see now, Monsieur Denecker, that I am worse than poor, for I have debts!"

"Alas! it is but too true," said the stupefied merchant; "you have indeed nothing! I see by these documents that my notary is also yours; and, although I spoke to him of your fortune, he left me unadvised, or, I should rather say, in error."

De Vlierbeck breathed more freely, for he felt as if a rock had fallen from his breast. His face resumed its ordinary calmness; and, seating himself, he continued:—

"Now, sir, if you have no longer any reason to doubt my poverty, let me ask what are your intentions."

"My intentions?" replied the merchant; "my intentions are that we shall remain as good friends as we were before; but, as to the marriage, that of course falls to the ground. We will speak no more about it. What were *your* calculations, Monsieur De Vlierbeck? I think I am just beginning to see a little clearly into this matter! You imagined, I suppose, that you would make a good business out of it and sell your merchandise as high as possible!"

"Sir," exclaimed De Vlierbeck, bounding from his chair in rage, "speak respectfully of my daughter! Poor or rich, do not dare to forget who she is!"

"Don't get angry! don't get angry! Monsieur De Vlierbeck. I have no desire to insult you. Far from it. Had your enterprise succeeded I would probably have admired you; but *finesse* against *finesse* always makes a bad game! Permit me to ask, since you are so touchy on the point of honor, if you have acted a very honorable part in courting my nephew and allowing his passion to absorb him?"

De Vlierbeck bowed his head to conceal the blush that suffused his aged cheeks; nor did he awake from his painful stupor till the merchant recalled him by the single word,—

"Well?"

"Ah!" stammered De Vlierbeck, "have mercy on me! Love for my child, probably, led me astray. God endowed her with all the gifts that can adorn a woman. I hoped that her beauty, the purity of her soul, the nobility of her blood, were treasures quite as precious as gold!"

"That is to say, for a gentleman, perhaps; but not for so common a person as a merchant," interrupted Monsieur Denecker, with a sneer.



“Don’t reproach me with having *courted* your nephew,” continued De Vlierbeck. “That is a word that wounds me deeply; for it is unjust. Their attachment was reciprocal and in every way unstudied. I thanked God daily in my prayers that he had cast in our path a savior for my child:—yes, a savior, I say; for Gustave is an honorable youth, who would have made her happy not so much by money as by his noble and generous character. Is it then so great a crime for a father who has unfortunately become poor to hope that his child should escape want?”

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"Certainly not," replied the merchant; "but every thing is in *success*; and in that respect, Monsieur De Vlierbeck, your enterprise has been unfortunate. I am a man who examines his goods twice before he buys, and it is difficult to pass apples on me for lemons!"

This heartless, trafficking slang tortured the unfortunate bankrupt to such a degree that he arose from his seat in a passion and began to pace the apartment.

"You have no consideration for my misfortunes, sir," said he. "You pretend that I designed deceiving you; but was it *you* who discovered my poverty? Are you not free to act as you please, after the disclosures that I have voluntarily given you? And let me remark, sir, that if I listen humbly to your reproaches—if I even acknowledge my fault—the sense of manhood is not dead in my soul. You talk of 'merchandise' and 'goods,' as if you came here to buy something! You allude to my Lenora, do you? All your wealth, sir, could not purchase her! and, if love is not powerful enough in your eyes to obliterate the pecuniary inequality between us, know that I am a De Vlierbeck, and that name, even in poverty, weighs more than all your money!"

During this explosion his face kindled with indignation and his eyes shot forth their fiery rays upon the merchant, who, alarmed by the loud words and animated gestures of De Vlierbeck, regarded him with an air of stupefaction from the other side of the apartment.

"Good God, sir," said he at last, "there is no need of so much violence and loud talk! Each of us remains where he is; each keeps what he has, and the affair is at an end. I have but one request to make of you, and it is that you will never again receive my nephew,—or else—"

"Or else?" interrupted De Vlierbeck, passionately; "do you *dare* to threaten me?" But, restraining himself almost instantly, he continued, with comparative calmness, "Enough! Shall I call Monsieur Denecker's carriage?"

"If you please," replied the merchant. "We cannot do business together, it seems; but that is no reason why we should become enemies."

"Well! well! we will stop short of that, sir. But this conversation annoys me; it must end!" And, so saying, he led Monsieur Denecker to the door and bade him farewell abruptly. De Vlierbeck returned to the parlor, fell into his chair and covered his brow with both hands, as a heavy groan burst from his breast, which heaved with almost hysterical emotion. For a long time he remained silent and motionless; but soon his hands fell heavily on his knees, a deathly paleness overspread his face, and the room whirled around the heart-broken man.

Suddenly he heard footsteps in the chamber above, and, rousing himself by a strong effort, "Oh, God! my poor child!" cried he; "my poor Lenora! She comes! my punishment



is not yet complete! I must break the heart of my own child; I must tear from it all its hopes, blot out its dream, behold it withered up with grief! Oh that I could escape this dreadful disclosure! Alas! What to say to her? how to explain it?"

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A bitter smile contracted his lips as he continued, with bitter irony:—"Ah! hide thy suffering, old man; rally thy strength; take courage! If thy heart is torn and bleeding,—if despair devours thy soul,—oh, smile, still smile! Yes! your life has been a continual farce! Yet, miserable abortion that thou art, what canst thou do but submit, yield without a fight, and bow thy neck to the yoke like a powerless slave? Begone, rebellious feeling! Be silent, and behold thy child!"

Lenora opened the door and ran to her father, her questioning eyes fixed on his with a look of hope. All of poor De Vlierbeck's efforts to disguise his suffering were unsuccessful, and Lenora soon read in his face that he was a prey to some overwhelming sorrow. As he still obstinately kept silence, she began to tremble, and asked, with feverish impatience,—

"Well, father,—well,—have you *nothing* to say to me?"

"Alas! my child," said he, sighing, "we are not happy. God tries us with heavy blows. Let us bow before the will of the Almighty."

"What do you mean? what is there to fear?" said Lenora, beside herself. "Speak, father! Has he *refused* his consent?"

"He has refused it, Lenora!"

"Oh, no! no!" cried the maiden; "it is impossible!"

"Refused it, because he possesses millions and we—nothing!"

"It is true, then? Gustave is hopelessly lost to me!—lost to me forever!"

"Hopelessly!" echoed the father.

A sharp cry escaped Lenora as she tottered to the table and fell on it, weeping bitterly.

De Vlierbeck arose and stood above his sobbing daughter, and, joining his uplifted hands, exclaimed, in suppliant tones,—

"Oh, pity me, pity me, Lenora! In that fatal interview I have suffered all the torments that could rack the heart of a parent; I have drunk the dregs of shame; I have emptied the cup of humiliation; but all, all are nothing in comparison with thy grief! Calm yourself, child of my love; let me see the sweet face I so love to look on; let me regain my lost strength in thy holy resignation! Lenora! my head swims; I shall die of despair!"

As he uttered these words he sank heavily into a chair, overpowered by emotion. The sound of his fall seemed instantly to recall Lenora to herself, and, dashing the tears

from her eyes, she leaned her head on his shoulder to listen and assure herself that he had not fainted.

“Never to see him more! to renounce his love forever! to lose the happiness I dreamed of! Alas! alas!”

“Lenora! Lenora!” exclaimed her father, entreatingly!

“Oh, beloved father,” sobbed the poor girl, “to lose Gustave *forever*! The dreadful thought overwhelms me! While I am near you I will bless God for his kindness; but my tears overpower me; oh! let me weep, let me weep, I beseech you!”

De Vlierbeck pressed his daughter more closely to his heart, and respected her affliction in silence.

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The stillness of death reigned throughout the apartment, while they remained locked in each other's arms until the very excess of grief relaxed their embrace and opened their hearts to mutual consolation.

### CHAPTER VI.

Four days after Denecker had refused his consent to the marriage, a hired carriage might have been seen drawing up carefully in a screen of wood that bordered a by-road about half a league from Grinselhof. A young man got out of it, and, giving directions to the coachman to await him at a neighboring inn, walked briskly across the moor toward the old *chateau*. As soon as Grinselhof began to loom up over the trees, he moved cautiously along behind the hedges and thickets, as if seeking to avoid observation; and then, stealing across the bridge, he opened the gate, passed through the dense copse that surrounded the house, and entered the garden.

The first object that greeted his sight was Lenora, seated at her table beneath the well-known catalpa, with her head resting on the board, evidently absorbed in sorrow. Her back was turned toward him as he approached; and, although he advanced with the utmost caution, the sound of his footsteps disturbed her in the intense silence of the spot, and she leaped to her feet, while the name of Gustave broke in surprised accents from her lips. She was evidently anxious to escape into the house; but her lover threw himself on his knees, and, grasping her hand, poured forth a passionate appeal:—

“Listen to me, Lenora! listen to me! If you fly and refuse me the consolation of telling you with my last farewell, all I have suffered and all I hope, I will either die here at your feet, or I will go hence forever, a broken-hearted wanderer over the face of the earth! Listen to me! listen to me! Listen to me, Lenora, my sister, my beloved, my betrothed! By our pure and holy love, I beseech you not to repulse me!”

Though Lenora trembled in every limb, her features assumed an expression of wounded pride, as she answered, with cold decision,—

“Your boldness surprises me, sir! You are indeed a daring man, to appear again at Grinselhof after your uncle's insulting conduct to my father! He is ill in bed; his soul is crushed by the outrage. Is this the reward of all my affection for you?”

“Oh, God! oh, God! Lenora, do I hear *you* accuse me? Alas! what have I done, and what could I prevent?”

“There is nothing, sir, any longer, in common between us,” said the girl. “If we are not as rich as you, the blood that runs in our veins cannot suffer by comparison. Arise! begone! I will see you no more!”

“Mercy! pity!” exclaimed Gustave, lifting his clasped hands toward her; “mercy, Lenora, for I am innocent!”

The maiden dashed away the tears that began to start in her eyes, and, turning her back on him, was about to depart.

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"Cruel, cruel!" exclaimed Gustave, in broken tones. "Can you leave me without a farewell?—without a word of consolation? Will you remain insensible to my grief and deaf to my prayers? 'Tis well; I will submit to my lot, for *you* have decided it! You, Lenora, my love, have sentenced me! I forgive you: be happy on earth without me, and farewell forever!"

As he uttered those words his strength seemed utterly to fail him, and, sinking into the chair which Lenora had quitted, his head and arms fell lifeless on the table.

The determined girl had made a few steps in her retreat to the house, when she suddenly halted on hearing the agonized tones of Gustave's farewell and the sudden sound of his fall on the table. As she glanced backward at the convulsed frame of her lover, a spasm that denoted the violent conflict between duty and affection passed over her beautiful face; and, as her heart appeared gradually to conquer in the fight, the tears began to pour in showers from her eyes. Step by step and slowly she retraced the path to the table, and leaning over the sufferer, took one of his hands tenderly in hers:—

"Are we not wretched, Gustave? Are we not wretched?"

At the touch of that gentle hand and the sound of that beloved voice, life seemed once more to stir in his veins, and, raising his eyes languidly to hers, he gazed mournfully into them as he half said, half sighed,—

"Lenora, dear Lenora, have you come back to me? Have you taken pity on my agony? You do not *hate* me, do you?" "Is a love like ours extinguished in a day?" returned Lenora, with a sigh.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Gustave aloud; "it is eternal! Is it not eternal, Lenora, and omnipotent against every ill as long as the hearts beat in our bosoms?"

Lenora bowed her head and cast down her eyes.

"Do not imagine, Gustave," said she, solemnly, "that our separation causes me less grief than it does you; and, if the assurance of my love can assuage the pangs of absence, let it strengthen and encourage you. My lonely heart will keep your image sacred in its holiest shrine; I will follow you in spirit wherever you go, and I will love you till death shall fill up the gulf that separates us. We shall meet again above, but never more on earth."

"You are mistaken, Lenora," cried Gustave, with a feeble expression of joy; "you are mistaken! There is still hope; my uncle is not inexorable, and his compassionate heart must yield to my despair."

"That may be," replied Lenora, in sad but resolute tones; "that may be, Gustave; but my father's honor is inflexible. Leave me, Gustave; I have already disobeyed my father's

orders too long, and slighted my duty in remaining with a man who cannot become my husband. Go now; for, if we should be surprised by some one, my poor, wretched father would die of shame and anger.”

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“One moment more, beloved Lenora! Hear what I have to tell you. My uncle refused me your hand; I wept, I besought him, but nothing could change his determination. In despair I was transported beyond myself; I rebelled against my benefactor; and, treating him like an ungrateful wretch, I said a thousand things for which I begged his pardon on my knees when reason resumed her empire over my excited soul. My uncle is goodness itself to me: he pardoned my sin; but he imposed the condition that I should instantly undertake a journey with him to Italy, which he has long designed making. He idly hopes that travel may obliterate your image from my mind; but think not, Lenora, that I can ever forget you! A sudden thought flashed through my fancy, and I accepted his terms with a secret joy. For months and months I will be alone with my uncle; and, watching him ever with the love and gratitude I feel for all his kindness, I will gradually wear away his objections, and, conquering his heart, return, my love, to place the bridal wreath upon your brow, and claim you, before the altar of God, as the companion of my choice!”

For an instant a gentle smile overspread the maiden’s face, and her clear, earnest gaze was full of rapture at the vision of future happiness; but the gleam disappeared almost as quickly as it arose, and she answered him, with bitter sadness,—

“Alas! my dear friend, it is cruel to destroy this last hope of your heart; and yet I must do it. Your uncle might consent; but my father—”

She faltered for an instant.

“Your father, Lenora? Your father would pardon all and receive me like a long-lost son.”

“No, no; believe it not, Gustave; for his honor has been too deeply wounded. As a Christian he might pardon it; but as a gentleman he will never forget the outrage.”

“Oh, Lenora, you are unjust to your father. If I return with my uncle’s consent, and say to him, ‘I will make your child happy; give her to me for my wife; I will surround her path with all the joys a husband has ever bestowed on woman;’—if I tell him this, think you he will deny me?”

Lenora cast down her eyes.

“You know his infinite goodness, Gustave,” said she. “My happiness is his only thought on earth; he will thank God and bless you.”

“Yes, yes; he *will* consent,” continued Gustave, with ardor; “and all is not lost. A blessed ray lightens our future, and let it rekindle your hope, beloved of my heart! Yield not to grief; let me go forth on this dreary journey, but let me bear along with me the assurance that you await my return with trust in God. Remember me in your prayers; utter my name as you stray through these lonely paths which witnessed the dawn of our love and



where for two months I drained the cup of perfect bliss. The knowledge that I am not forgotten by you will sustain my heart and enable me to endure the pangs of separation.”

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Lenora wept in silence. Her lover's eloquence had extinguished every spark of her pride; and the rebellious heart which so lately was ready to cast off its rosy fetters had no longer a place for any thing but love and sadness. Gustave saw that he had conquered.

"I go, Lenora," said he, "strong in your affection. I quit my country and my loved one with a confident hope. Whatever may happen to me, I will never be downcast. You will think of me daily, Lenora, will you not?"

"Alas! I have promised my father that I will forget you!" sobbed the maiden, as her hand trembled in his.

"*Forget me!*" exclaimed Gustave. "*Can you force yourself to forget me?*"

"No, Gustave; NO!" said she, firmly, fixing her large eyes on him with an intense and lingering gaze. "No: for the first time in my life I will disobey my father. I feel that I have not the strength to keep my idle word. I cannot forget you: till the last hour of my life I will love you; for it is my fate, and I cannot resist."

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand thanks, Lenora!" exclaimed Gustave, in a transport. "Thy tender love strengthens me against destiny. Beloved of my heart, rest here under the guardian eye of God. Thy image will follow me in my journey like a protecting angel; in joy and grief, by day and night, in health and sickness, thou, Lenora, wilt ever be present to me! This cruel separation wounds my heart beyond expression; but duty commands, and I must obey. Farewell, farewell!"

He wrung her hands convulsively, and was gone.

"Gustave!" sobbed the poor girl, as she sank on the chair and allowed the pent-up passion of her soul to burst forth in tears.

## CHAPTER VII.

Leonora secretly cherished in her heart the hope of a happy future; but she did not hesitate to inform her father of Gustave's visit. De Vlierbeck heard her listlessly, and gave no other reply but a bitter smile.

From that day Grinselhof became sadder and more solitary than ever. The old gentleman might generally be seen seated in an arm-chair, resting his forehead on his hand, while his eyes were fixed on the ground or on vacancy. The fatal day on which the bond fell due was perhaps always present to his mind; nor could he banish the thought of that frightful misery into which it would plunge his child and himself. Lenora carefully concealed her own sufferings in order not to increase her father's grief; and, although she fully sympathized with him, no effort was omitted on her part to cheer the

old man by apparent contentment. She did and said every thing that her tender heart could invent to arouse the sufferer from his reveries; but all her efforts were in vain: her father thanked her with a smile and caress; but the smile was sad, the caress constrained and feeble.

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If Lenora sometimes asked him, with tears, what was the cause of his depression, he adroitly managed to avoid all explanations. For days together he wandered about the loneliest paths of the garden, apparently anxious to escape the presence even of his daughter. If she caught a glimpse of him at a distance, a fierce look of irritation was perceptible on his face, while his arms were thrown about in rapid and convulsive gesticulations. If she approached him with marks of love and devotion, he scarcely replied to her affectionate words, but left the garden to bury himself in the solitude of the house.

An entire month—a month of bitter sadness and unexpressed suffering on both sides—passed in this way; and Lenora observed with increased anxiety the rapid emaciation and pallor of her father, and the suddenness with which his once-lively eye lost every spark of its wonted vivacity. It was about this time that a slight change in the old gentleman's conduct convinced her that a secret—and perhaps a terrible one—weighed on his heart. Every day or two he went to Antwerp in the *caleche*, without informing her or any one else of the object of his visit. He came back to Grinselhof late at night, seated himself at the supper-table silent and resigned, and, persuading Lenora to go to bed, soon went off to his own chamber. But his daughter was well aware that he did not retire to rest; for during long hours of wakefulness she heard the floor creak as he paced his apartment with restless steps.

Lenora was brave by nature, and her singular and solitary education had given her a latent force of character that was almost masculine. By degrees the resolution to make her father reveal his secret grew in her mind. And, although a feeling of instinctive respect made her hesitate, a restless devotion to the author of her being gradually overcame all scruples and emboldened her for the enterprise.

One day Monsieur De Vlierbeck set off very early for town. The morning wore away heavily; and, toward the afternoon, Lenora wandered wearily about the desolate house, with no companion but her sad reflections. At length she entered the apartment where her father usually studied or wrote, and, after a good deal of hesitation, in which her face and gestures displayed the anxiety of her purpose, opened the table-drawer, and saw in it, unrolled, a written document. The paleness of death overspread her countenance as she perused the paper and instantly closed the drawer. After this she left the apartment hastily, and, returning to her chamber, sat down with hands clasped on her knees and eyes fixed on the floor in a stare of wild surprise.

“*Sell Grinselhof!*” exclaimed she. “*Sell Grinselhof!* Why? Monsieur Denecker insulted my father because we were not rich enough for him. What is this secret? and what does it all mean? If it should be *true* that we are beggars! Oh, God! does a ray of light penetrate my mind? is this the solution of the enigma and the cause of my father's depression?”

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For a long time she remained motionless in her chair, absorbed in reverie; but gradually her face brightened, her lips moved, and her eyes glistened with resolution. As she was endeavoring to fight bravely against misfortune, she suddenly heard the wheels of her father's *caleche* returning to Grinselhof. She ran down instantly to meet him; and as he drew up at the door she perceived the poor sufferer buried in a corner of the vehicle, apparently deprived of all consciousness; and, when he descended from the vehicle and she saw his expression distinctly, the deadly pallor that covered his haggard cheeks almost made her sink to the earth with anxiety. Indeed, she had neither heart nor strength to utter a word to him; but, standing aside in silence, she allowed the old man to enter the house and bury himself as usual in his chamber.

For some minutes she stood on the door-sill, undecided as to what she should do; but by degrees her brow and cheeks began to redden, and the light of resolution shone in her moistened eyes.

"Ought the feeling of respect to restrain me longer?" said she to herself; "shall I let my father die without an effort? No! no! I must know all! I must tear the worm from his heart; I must save him by my love!"

Without a moment's further delay, she ran rapidly through three or four chambers, and came to the apartment where her father was seated with his elbows resting on the table and his head buried in his hands. Throwing herself on her knees at his feet, and with hands raised to him in supplication,—

"Have mercy on me, father!" exclaimed she; "have mercy on me, I beseech you on my knees; tell me what it is that distresses you! I must know why it is that my father buries himself in this solitude and seems to fly even from his child!"

"Lenora! thou last and only treasure that remainest to me on earth," replied De Vlierbeck, in a broken voice, with despair in his wild gaze,—*"thou hast suffered, dreadfully, my child, hast thou not? Rest thy poor head in my bosom. A terrible blow, my child, is about to fall on us!"*

Lenora did not seem to pay any attention to these remarks, but, disengaging herself from her father's embrace, replied, in firm and decided tones,—

"I have not come here, father, for consolation, but with the unalterable determination to learn the cause of your suffering. I will not go away without knowing what misfortune it is that has so long deprived me of your love. No matter how much I may venerate you and respect your silence, the sense of duty is greater even than veneration. I must—I *will*—know the secret of your grief!"

"Thou deprived of thy father's love?" exclaimed De Vlierbeck, reproachfully and with surprise;—love for thee, my adored child, is precisely the secret of my grief. For ten

years I have drained the bitter cup and prayed the Almighty to make you happy; but, alas! my prayers have always been unheard!"

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"Shall I be unhappy, then?" asked Lenora, without betraying the least emotion.

"Unhappy, because of the misery that awaits us," replied her father. "The blow that is about to fall on our house destroys all that we possess. We must leave Grinselhof."

The last words, which plainly confirmed her fears, seemed for a moment to appall the girl; but she repressed her feelings, and answered him, with increased courage,—

"You are not dying this slow death because ill-fortune has overtaken *you*, my father; I know the unconquerable force of your character too well for that. No! your heart is weak and yielding because *I* have to partake your poverty! Bless you, bless you, for your affection! But, tell me, father, if I were offered all the wealth of the world on condition that I would consent to see you suffer for a single day, what think you I would answer?"

Dumb with surprise, the poor man looked proudly at his daughter, and a gentle pressure of her hand was his sole reply.

"Ah!" continued she, "I would refuse all the treasures of earth and meet poverty without a sigh. And you, father,—if they offered you all the gold of America for your Lenora, what would you do?"

"How can you ask, child?" exclaimed her father; "do we sell our hearts' blood for gold?"

"And so," continued the girl, "our Maker has left us that which is dearest to us both in this world; why then should we mourn when we ought to be grateful for his compassionate care? Take heart once more, dear father; no matter what may be our future lot,—should we even be forced to take refuge in a hovel,—nothing can harm us as long as we are not separated!"

Smiles, astonishment, admiration, and love, by turns flitted over the wan features of the poor old man, who seemed altogether unnerved and disconcerted by the painful *denouement*. At length, after some moments of unbroken silence, he clasped his hands, and, gazing intensely into her eyes through his starting tears—

"Lenora, Lenora! my child!" he exclaimed, "thou art not of earth—thou art an angel! The unselfish grandeur of thy soul unmans me completely!"

She saw she had conquered. The light of courage was rekindled again in her father's eye, and his lofty brow was lifted once more under the sentiment of dignity and self-devotion that struggled for life in his suffering heart. Lenora looked at him with a heavenly smile, and exclaimed, rapturously,

"Up! up! father; come to my arms; away with grief! United in each other's love, fate itself is powerless in our presence!"

Father and daughter sprang into each other's arms, and for a long while remained speechless, wrapped in a tender embrace; then, seating themselves with their hands interlocked, they were silent and absorbed, as if the world and its misery were altogether forgotten.



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"A new life—a new and refreshing current of blood—seems to have been suddenly poured into my veins," said Monsieur De Vlierbeck. "Alas, Lenora, what a sinner I have been! how wrong I was not to divulge all! But you must pardon me, beloved child; you must pardon me. It was the fear of afflicting you—the hope of finding some means of rescue, of escape—that sealed my lips. I did not know you, my daughter; I did not know the inestimable treasure that God in his mercy had lavished on me! But *now* you shall know all; I will no longer hide the secret of my conduct and my grief. The fatal hour has come; the blow I desired to ward off is about to fall and cannot be turned aside! Are you prepared, dear child, to hear your father's story?"

Lenora, who was delighted to behold the calm and radiant smile that illuminated the face of her heart-broken parent, answered him instantly, in caressing tones,—

"Pour all your woes into my heart, dear father, and conceal nothing. The part I have to perform must be based on complete knowledge of every thing; and you will feel how much your confidence relieves your burdened soul."

"Take, then, your share of suffering, daughter," replied De Vlierbeck, "and help me to bear my cross! I will disguise nothing. What I am about to disclose is indeed lamentable; yet do not tremble and give way at the recital, for, if any thing should move you, it must be the story of a father's torture. You will learn now, my child, why Monsieur Denecker has had the hardihood to behave toward us as he has done."

He dropped her hand, but, without averting his eager gaze from her anxious eyes, continued:—

"You were very young, Lenora, but gentle and loving as at present, and your blessed mother found all her happiness centered in your care and comfort. We dwelt on the lands of our forefathers; nothing disturbed the even tenor of our simple lives; and, by proper economy, our moderate income sufficed to support us in a manner becoming our rank and name.

"I had a younger brother, who was endowed with an excellent heart, but generous to a fault and somewhat imprudent. He lived in town, and married a lady of noble family who was no richer than himself. She was showy in her tastes and habits, and, I fear, induced him to increase his revenue by adventurous means. There can be no doubt that he speculated largely in the public funds. But probably you do not understand what this means, my child. It is a species of *gambling*, by which a man may in a moment gain millions; and yet it is a game that may, with equal rapidity, plunge him into the depths of misery and reduce him as if by magic to the condition of a beggar.

"At first, my brother was remarkably successful, and established himself in town in a style of living that was the envy of our wealthiest citizens. He came to see us frequently, bringing you, who were his godchild, a thousand beautiful presents, and



lavished his affection with testimonials of kindness which were proportioned to his fortune. I spoke to him often about the dangerous character of his adventures, and endeavored to convince him that it was unbecoming a gentleman to risk his property upon the hazards of an hour; but, as continued success emboldened him more and more, the passion for gambling made him deaf to all my appeals, all my advice.

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“At last the evil hour came! The luck which had so long favored him became inconstant; he lost a considerable portion of his gains, and saw his fortune diminishing with every venture. Still, courage did not fail him; but, on the contrary, he seemed to fight madly against fate, with the idle hope of forcing fortune to turn once more in his favor. But, alas, it was a fatal delusion!

“One night—I tremble as I recall it—I was in my chamber and nearly ready to retire; you were already in bed, and your mother was saying her prayers on her knees beside your little couch. A tremendous storm raged without: hail beat in torrents against the windows, and the wind howled in the chimneys and swayed the trees as if it was about to blow down the house. The violence of the tempest began to make me somewhat anxious, when suddenly the door-bell was pulled and the sound of horses heard at the gate. In a moment the summons was answered by one of our servants,—for we kept two then,—and a female rushed into the room, throwing herself in tears at my feet. It was my brother’s wife!

“Trembling with fright, I of course hastened to raise her; but she clung to my knees, begging my assistance, imploring me, by every passionate appeal she could think of, to save her husband’s life, and convincing me by her sobs and distraction that some frightful calamity was impending over my brother!

“Your mother joined me eagerly in my efforts to calm the sufferer, and by degrees we managed to extract the cause of her singular conduct and unseasonable visit. My brother—alas!—had lost all he possessed, and even more! His wife’s story was heart-rending; but its conclusion filled us with more anxiety for her husband than his losses; for, overcome by the certainty of a dishonored name, haunted by the reflection that law and justice would soon overtake him, my poor brother had made an attempt upon his life! The hand of God had providentially guided his wife to the apartment, where she surprised him at the fatal moment and snatched the deadly instrument from his grasp! He was then locked up in a room; dumb, overcome, bowed down to the earth, and guarded by two faithful friends. If any one on earth could save him, it was surely his brother!

“Such was the wild appeal of my wretched sister-in-law, who, heedless of the stormy night, had thrown herself into a coach and fled to me, through the tempest, as her only hope for their salvation. There she was at my feet, bathed in tears, sobbing, screaming, beseeching me to accompany her to town. *Could I—did I—hesitate?* Your tender mother, who saw at once the frightful condition of the family, and sympathized as woman’s heart alone can do with human misery, eagerly implored me not to lose a moment. ‘Save him, save him!’ exclaimed she; ‘spare nothing: I will consent to every thing you may think proper to do or sacrifice!’

“We flew back to town through the storm and darkness. You grow pale, Lenora, at the very thought of it, for it was indeed frightful, and you can never know the impression it

made on me: these whitened hairs—whitened before their time—are the records of that terrible night! But let me continue.

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"It is needless to describe the wild despair in which I found my brother, or to tell you how long I had to wrestle with his spirit in order to force a ray of hope into his soul. There was but one means by which we could save his honor and life; but—oh God!—at what a sacrifice! I was obliged to pledge all my property as security for his debts. Nothing could be spared; our ancestral manor-lands, your mother's marriage-portion, your moderate dowry,—all were ventured with the certainty that the greater part would unquestionably be lost! On these hard conditions my brother's honor might be saved; and, if that could be rescued, he was willing to renounce the determination to escape shame by death. I must in justice say that it was not he who demanded the sacrifice from me: on the contrary, he did not suppose that I could or would make it; but I was satisfied in my mind that if I did not settle his affairs, at all hazards, he would execute his criminal project against his life. And yet—and yet, my child—*I hesitated!*"

"Father!" exclaimed Lenora, "*you did not refuse!*"

A happy smile beamed on his face as he met the questioning glance of his daughter and answered, firmly,—

"I loved my brother, Lenora; but I loved *you*, my only child, much more. The sacrifice demanded of me by his creditors insured misery for your mother and for you!"

"Oh, God! oh, God!" sobbed Lenora.

"On one side my heart was distracted by this dreadful thought, while on the other I was assailed by the despair that was present in the bankrupt's chamber; but generosity conquered in the awful trial, and at daylight I sought out the principal creditors and signed the documents that saved a brother's life and honor but gave up my wife and child to want."

"Thank God!" gasped Lenora, as if she had been relieved from a horrible nightmare. "Bless you, bless you, father, for your noble, generous conduct!"

She rose from her seat, and, passing her arms around his neck, gave him a glowing kiss with as much solemnity as if she had been anxious to endue this mark of love with all the fervor and sacredness of a benediction.

"Ah! but canst thou bless me, my child," said he, with eyes full of gratitude, "for an act that should implore thy pardon?"

"My pardon, father!" exclaimed Lenora, with surprise on all her features. "Oh, had you done otherwise, what would I not have suffered in doubting the goodness of my parent's heart! Now, now, I love you more than ever! *Pardon you*, father? Is it a crime to save a brother's life when it is in your keeping?"

“Alas, Lenora, the world does not reason thus, and never forgives us for the guilt of poverty. Reduced to that, we suffer humiliations which any one may observe in the lives of multitudes of our nobles. Yes; society regards poverty as a crime, and it treats us like outcasts. Our equals avoid us in order not to be confounded in our misery; while peasants and tradesmen laugh at our misfortune as if it was a sort of agreeable revenge. Happy, happy they to whom heaven has given an angel to pour comfort and consolation into their hearts in hours of want and dejection! But listen, my child!

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“My brother was saved, and I concealed most carefully the assistance I had been to him; he left the country and went with his wife to America, where, ever since, he has worked hard and gained hardly enough to support a miserable existence. His wife died during the voyage. And, as to ourselves, we no longer possess any thing; for Grinselhof and our other lands were mortgaged for more than they were worth. Besides this, I was forced to borrow from a gentleman of my acquaintance four thousand *francs* upon my bond.

“When your mother heard of the sacrifices to which I was forced to submit, she made no reproaches; at first she fully approved my conduct. But very soon we became necessarily subjected to privations under which your mother’s strength declined, till, without a sigh or complaint, she began to fade away slowly from earth. It was a dreadful situation; for, to conceal our ruin and save our ancestral name from contempt, we were forced to part with the last ounce of our silver to pay the interest on our debts. Gradually our horses and servants disappeared; the paths that led to our neighbors soon became grass-grown; and we declined all social invitations, so as to avoid the necessity of returning the compliment. A rumor about us began to spread through the village and among the noble families that had formerly been on terms of intimacy with us; and scandal declared that *avarice* had driven us to a life of meanness and isolation! We joyously accepted the imputation, and even the coldness with which our holiday friends accompanied it; it was a veil with which society thought proper to cover us, and beneath its folds our poverty was safe from scrutiny.

“But I am approaching scenes, my child, the recollection of which almost unnerves me. My story has reached the most painful moment of my life, and I beseech you to hear me calmly.

“Your poor mother wasted away to a skeleton; her sunken-eyes were hardly visible in their deep sockets; a livid pallor suffused her cheeks. As I saw her fading,—fading,—the wife whom I had loved more than life,—as I gazed on those death-struck features and saw the fatal evidences each day clearer and clearer,—I became nearly mad with despair and grief.”

Lenora shuddered with emotion as her breast heaved convulsively under the sobs she strove to repress. Her father stopped a moment, almost overcome by the recital; but, rallying his courage quickly, he forced himself to go on with his sad recollections:—

“Poor mother! she did nothing but weep! Every time she looked at her child—her dear little Lenora—tears filled her eyes. Thy name was always on her lips, as if she were forever addressing a prayer for thee to God in heaven! At last the dreadful hour arrived when she heard the Almighty’s voice summoning her above. The clergyman performed the services for the dying; and you, my child, had been taken from her arms and sent out of the house. It was midnight, and I was alone

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with her whose icy lips had already imprinted on mine their last sad kiss. My heart bled. Oh, God! how wretched—how wretched—were those parting hours! My beloved wife lay there before me as if already a corpse, while the tears yet trickled down her hollow cheeks and she strove to utter your name with her expiring breath. Kneeling beside her, I implored God's mercy for her passing hour, and kissed away the sweat of agony that stood upon her brow. Suddenly I thought I perceived an effort to speak, and, bending my ear to her lips, she called me by name, and said, 'It is over, my love, it is over; farewell! It has not pleased the Almighty to assuage my dying hour, and I go with the conviction that my child will suffer want and wretchedness on earth!'

"I know not what my love inspired me to say in that solemn moment; but I called God to witness that you *should* escape suffering, and that your life should be happy! A heavenly smile illuminated her eyes, and she believed my promise. With an effort, she lifted her thin hands once more round my neck and drew my lips to hers. But soon those wasted arms fell heavily on the bed;—my Margaret was gone;—thy mother was no more!"

De Vlierbeck's head fell on his breast. Lenora's bosom heaved convulsively as she took his hand without uttering a word; and, for a long time, nothing was heard in that sad confessional but the sobs of the maiden and the sighs of her heart-broken father.

"What I have yet to say," continued the poor gentleman, "is not so painful as what I have already told you: it concerns only myself. Perhaps it would be better if I said nothing about it; but I need a friend who possesses all my confidence and can sympathize with me thoroughly in all I have undergone for the last ten years.

"Listen, then, Lenora. Your mother was no more; she was gone;—she who was my last staff in life! I remained at Grinselhof alone with you, my child, and with my promise,—a promise made to God and to the dead! What should I do to fulfil it? Quit my hereditary estate? wander away seeking my fortune in foreign lands, and work for our mutual support? That would not do, for it would have devoted you at once to the chances of a wretched uncertainty. I could not think of such a course with any degree of satisfaction; nor was it till after long and anxious reflection that a ray of hope seemed to promise us both a happy future.

"I resolved to disguise our poverty more carefully than ever, and to devote my time to the most elaborate cultivation of your mind. God made you beautiful in face and person, Lenora; but your father was anxious to initiate you into the mysteries of science and art, and, while he endowed you with a knowledge of the world, to make you virtuous, pious, and modest. I desired to make you an accomplished woman, and I hoped that the nobility of your blood, the charms of your beauty, the treasures of your heart and intellect,



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would compensate in society for the portion that was denied you. Thus was it, my child, that I thought in time, you would make a suitable alliance which would restore you to the position you hold by birth. For ten years, Lenora, this has been my occupation and my hope. What I had forgotten or never learned, I studied at night to teach you next morning; I labored hard that I might not only instruct you wisely but that you might acquire easily; and, at the same time, I strove by every honest means to conceal from you every thing that could give a hint or cause a suspicion by which your life might be shadowed. Oh, Lenora,—shall I confess it?—I have suffered hunger and undergone the most cruel privations; I have passed half my nights mending my clothes, working in the garden, studying and practising in the dark, so as to hide our poverty from you and the world. But all that was nothing; in the silence of night I was not forced to blush before any one. By day I had to encounter all kinds of insults, and, with a bleeding heart, swallow affront and humiliation.”

Lenora looked at her father with eyes moistened by compassion. De Vlierbeck pressed her hand, and continued:—

“Be not sad, Lenora; if the Lord’s hand inflicted deep wounds with every blow, he bestowed a balm which cured them. One little smile of thy gentle face was sufficient to make me pour forth an ejaculation to Heaven: you, you at least were happy, and in your happiness I saw the fulfilment of my promise!

“At length I thought that God himself had thrown in our path one who would save you from threatening danger. A mutual inclination arose between Gustave and you, and a marriage seemed the natural consequence. Under these circumstances I apprized Monsieur Denecker, during his last visit, of the deplorable condition of my affairs; but no sooner did I make the disclosure than he peremptorily refused his consent to the union. As if this terrible blow, which withered all my hopes, had not been sufficient to overwhelm me, I learned, almost at the same time, that the friend who loaned me four thousand francs, with the right to renew my obligation to him every year, had died in Germany, and that his heirs demanded the payment of the debt! I ran all over town, rapped at every friendly door, ransacked heaven and earth in my despair, to escape this last ignominy; but all my efforts were fruitless. To-morrow, perhaps, a placard will be stuck on the door of Grinselhof, announcing the sale not only of our estate but also of our furniture and of every trifling object that memory and association have rendered dear to us. Honor requires that we shall surrender, to public sale, every thing of the least value to pay our debts. If fate were kind enough to allow us to satisfy every creditor it would be a great consolation, my child, in our misery. Does not this fatal history break your heart?”

“Is that all which makes you despond, father? Have you no other grief? Does your heart conceal no other secret from me?” asked Lenora.

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"None, my child. You know every thing."

"I can very well understand," replied Lenora, gravely, "that others would consider a blow like this as a frightful misfortune; but how can it affect us? You even appear calm. Why, father, do you, like me, appear indifferent to the inexorable decree of fate?"

"Because you have inspired me with courage and confidence, Lenora; because your love is restored to me fully after a long constraint; because you let me hope that you will not be unhappy. I know what you want to say, noble child, whom God has given me as a shield against every ill! Well, I will encounter ruin without bowing my head, and submit with resignation to the hand of God! Alas!" continued he, sadly, "who can tell what sufferings are yet in store for us? We may be forced to wander about the world,—to seek an asylum far from those we know and love,—to earn our daily bread by the labor of our hands! Oh, Lenora, you know not how bitter is the bread of misery,—of poverty!"

The maiden shuddered as she saw the cloud falling once more like a curtain over her father's face. She grasped his hand tenderly, and, fixing her gaze intently on his, said, in beseeching tones,—

"Oh, father! let not the happy smile that just now lighted your features depart from them again! Believe me, we shall still be happy. Fancy yourself in the position that awaits us: and what do you see in it so frightful? I have skill to do all that woman can do; and then your instructions have made me able to instruct others in the arts and sciences you have taught me. I shall be strong and active enough for both of us, and God will bless my labor. Behold us, father, peacefully at home, with tranquil hearts and always together in our neat apartment: we will love one another, set misfortune at defiance, and live together in the heaven that our common sacrifice has made! Oh, it seems to me, father, that the true happiness of our lives is only beginning! How can you still give yourself up to despair when pleasure is in store for us,—a pleasure such as few upon earth are permitted to enjoy?"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck looked at his daughter with rapture. Those enthusiastic but gentle tones had so touched his heart, that noble courage had inspired him with so much admiration, that tears of joy filled his eyes. With one hand he drew Lenora to his bosom, and, placing the other on her forehead, he looked to heaven with religious fervor. A silent prayer, a blessing on his child, an outpouring of thankfulness, arose from his heart, like the sacred flame from an altar, toward the throne of Him who had bestowed that angelic child!

## CHAPTER VIII.

A few days afterward, as De Vlierbeck had predicted, the public sale of all their property was inserted in the papers and placarded over the city and neighborhood. The affair made some noise, and every one was astonished at the ruin of a person whom they considered rich and miserly.

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As the sale was stated to be in consequence of his departure from the country, the gossips would have been unable to discover the genuine motive if the news had not come from Antwerp that De Vlierbeck had resolved to pay his debts and was wretchedly poor. The cause of his misfortune—that is to say, his liability for his brother—was known, though all the circumstances were not fully understood.

As soon as the publication was made, the poor old gentleman led, if possible, a more retired life than ever, in order to avoid explanations. Resigned to his fate, he quietly awaited the day of sale; and, although his feelings often strove to master his resolution, the constant care and encouragement of his noble-hearted daughter enabled him to encounter the fatal hour with a degree of pride.

In the mean while he received a letter from Gustave at Rome, containing a few lines for his child. The young man declared that absence from Lenora had only increased his affection, and that his only consolation was the hope of future union with her by the bonds of marriage. But in other respects the letter was not encouraging. He said with pain that all his efforts to change his uncle's determination had, up to that time, been fruitless. De Vlierbeck did not conceal from Lenora that he no longer had a hope of her union with Gustave, and that she ought to strive against this unhappy love in order to escape from greater disappointment. Indeed, since her father's poverty had become publicly known, Lenora was convinced that duty commanded her to renounce every hope; yet she could not help feeling pleased and strengthened by the thought that Gustave still loved her, and that he, whose memory filled her heart, dreamed of her in his distant home and mourned her absence.

She kept her promises to him faithfully. How often did she pronounce his name in the solitude of that garden! How often did she sigh beneath the catalpa, as if anxious to trust the winds with a message of love to other lands! In her lonely walks she repeated his tender words; and often did she stop musingly at some well-remembered spot where he had blessed her with a tender word or look.

But poor De Vlierbeck was obliged to undergo additional pain; for, as if every misfortune that could assail him was to be accumulated at that moment on his devoted head, he received from America the news of his brother's death! The unfortunate wanderer died of exhaustion in the wilderness near Hudson's Bay. The poor gentleman wept long and bitterly for the loss of a brother whom he tenderly loved; but he was soon and roughly turned aside to encounter the catastrophe of his own fate.

The day of sale arrived. Early in the morning Grinselhof was invaded by all sorts of people, who, moved by curiosity or a desire to purchase, overran every nook and corner of the house, examining the furniture and estimating its value.

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De Vlierbeck had caused every thing that was to be sold to be carried into the most spacious apartments, where, aided by his daughter, he passed the entire preceding night in dusting, cleaning, and polishing the various articles, so that they might prove more attractive to competitors. He had no personal interest in this labor; for, his funded property having been sold some days before at great loss, it was certain that the sale of all his remaining possessions would not exceed the amount of his debts. It was a noble sentiment of honor and probity that compelled him to sacrifice his rest for his creditors, so as to diminish as much as he could the amount of their losses. It was clear that De Vlierbeck did not intend to prolong his stay at Grinselhof after the sale; for among the articles to be offered were the only two bedsteads in the house, with their bedding, and a large quantity of clothes belonging to him and his daughter.

Very early in the day Lenora went to the farm-house, where she remained until all was over. At ten o'clock the saloon was full of people. Nobles and gentlefolks of both sexes were mixed up with brokers and second-hand dealers who had come to Grinselhof with the hope of getting bargains. Peasants might be seen talking together, in low voices, with surprise at Do Vlierbeck's ruin; and there were even some who laughed openly and joked as the auctioneer read the terms of sale!

As the salesman put up a very handsome wardrobe, De Vlierbeck himself entered the apartment and mingled with the bidders. His appearance caused a general movement in the crowd; heads went together and men began to whisper, while the bankrupt was stared at with insolent curiosity or with pity, but by the greater part with indifference or derision. Yet, whatever malicious feeling existed in the assembly, it did not last long; for the firm demeanor and imposing countenance of De Vlierbeck was never on any occasion more instinct with that dignity which inspires respect. He was poor; fortune had struck him a cruel blow; but in his manly look and calm features there beamed a brave and independent soul which misfortune itself had been unable to crush.

The auctioneer went on with the sale, assisted in his description of the various articles by Monsieur De Vlierbeck, who informed the bidders of their origin, antiquity, and value. Occasionally some gentleman of the neighborhood, who, in better days, had been on good terms with Lenora's father, approached him with words of sympathy; but he always managed to escape adroitly from these indiscreet attempts at consolation. Whenever it was necessary for him to speak, he showed so much self-command and composure that he was far above the idle *compassion* of that careless crowd; yet if his countenance was calm and dignified, his heart was weighed down by absorbing grief. All that had belonged to his ancestors—articles that were emblazoned with the arms of his family and

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had been religiously preserved as heirlooms for several centuries—were sold at contemptible rates and passed into the hands of brokers. As each historical relic was placed on the table or held up by the auctioneer, the links of his illustrious race seemed to break off and depart. When the sale was nearly over, the *portraits* of the eminent men who had borne the name of De Vlierbeck were taken down from the walls and placed upon the stand. The first—that of the hero of St. Quentin—was knocked off to a dealer for little more than three francs! In the sale of this portrait, and the laughable price it brought, there was so much bitter irony that, for the first time, the agony that had been so long torturing De Vlierbeck's heart began to exhibit its traces in his countenance. No sooner had the hammer fallen, than, with downcast eyes and a sigh that was inaudible even to his nearest neighbor, the stricken nobleman turned from the crowd and left the saloon, so as not to witness the final sacrifice of the remaining memorials that bound him to his race.

The sun was but an hour or two above the horizon. A deathlike silence had taken the place of the noise, bustle, and vulgarity that ruled at Grinselhof during the morning; the solitary garden-walks were deserted, the house-door and gate were closed, and a stranger might have supposed that nothing had occurred to disturb the usual quiet of the spot. Suddenly the door of the dwelling opened, and two persons appeared upon the sill; one, a man advanced in life, the other, a pale and serious woman. Each carried a small package and seemed ready for travel. Lenora was dressed in a simple dark gown and bonnet, her neck covered by a small square handkerchief. De Vlierbeck was buttoned up to the chin in a coarse black greatcoat, and wore a threadbare cap whose large visor nearly masked his features. Although it was evident that the homeless travellers had literally stripped themselves of all superfluities and had determined to go forth with the merest necessities of decency, there was something in the manner in which they wore their humble costumes that distinctly marked their birth and breeding. The old man's features were not changed; but it was difficult to say whether they expressed pleasure, pain, or indifference. Lenora seemed strong and resolute, although she was about to quit the place of her birth and separate herself, perhaps forever, from all she had loved from infancy,—from those aged groves beneath whose shadows the dawn of love first broke upon her heart,—from that remembered tree at whose feet the timid avowal of Gustave's passion had fallen on her ear. But a sense of duty possessed and ruled her heart. Reason in her was not overmastered by sensibility; and, when she saw her father tottering at her side, all her energy was rallied in the effort to sustain him.

They did not linger at the door, but, crossing the garden rapidly, directed their steps toward the farm-house, which they entered to bid its occupants farewell. Bess and her servant-maid were in the first apartment below.

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“Mother Bess,” said Monsieur De Vlierbeck, calmly, “we have come to bid you good-by.”

Bess stared a moment anxiously at the travellers, and, lifting her apron to her eyes, left the apartment; while the servant-maid leaned her head against the window-frame and began to sob as if her heart would break. In a short time Bess returned with her husband, whom she had found in the barn.

“Alas! is it true, sir,” said the farmer, in a stifled voice,—“is it true that you are going to leave Grinselhof, and that, perhaps, we shall never see you again?”

“Come, come, mother Bess,” said the poor bankrupt, as he took and pressed her hand; “don’t weep on that account; you see we bear our lot with resignation.”

Bess raised her head, threw her eyes once more over the humble dress of her old master, and began to cry so violently that she could not utter a word. Her husband strove manfully to repress his emotion; and, after an effort or two, addressed Monsieur De Vlierbeck in a manly way:—

“May I ask the favor of you, sir, to let me say a word or two to you in private?”

De Vlierbeck entered the adjoining room, where he was followed by the farmer, who shut the door carefully.

“I hardly dare, sir,” said he, “to mention my request; but will you pardon me if it displeases you?”

“Speak out frankly, my friend,” returned De Vlierbeck, with a smile.

“Look you, sir,” stammered the tender-hearted laborer. “Every thing that I have earned I owe to you. I had nothing when I married Bess; and yet, with your kindness, we have managed to succeed. God’s mercy and your favor have made us prosperous; while you, our benefactors, have become unfortunate and are forced to wander away from their home,—God knows where! You may be forced to suffer privations and want; but that must not be: I would reproach myself as long as I live. Oh, sir!” continued he, as his voice faltered and his eyes filled with tears, “all that I have on earth is at your service!”

De Vlierbeck pressed the hard hand of the rustic with a trembling grasp, as he replied,

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“You are a worthy man indeed, and I am, happy that it was once in my power to protect and serve you; but I cannot accept your offer, my friend: keep what you have earned by the sweat of your brow, and do not concern yourself for our future fate, for, with God’s help, we shall find means to live.”



“Oh, sir,” said the farmer, beseechingly, and clasping his hands in an attitude of entreaty, “do not reject the trifle I offer you;”—he opened a drawer and pointed to a small heap of silver.—“See!” said he; “that is not the hundredth part of the good you have done us. Grant me this favor, I beseech you: take this money, sir; and if it spare you a single suffering or trial I shall thank God for it on my knees!”

Tears streamed down the wan and wrinkled cheeks of the poor gentleman as he replied,

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"Thanks! thanks! my friend; but I must refuse it. All persuasion is useless. Let us leave this room!"

"But, sir," cried the farmer, in astonishment, "where do you intend to go? Tell me, for God's sake!"

"I cannot," replied Monsieur De Vlierbeck, "for I don't know myself; and, even if I did, prudence would make me silent."

Uttering these words, he returned to the other room, where he found everybody in tears. He saw at once that for his own sake as well as his daughter's he must end these trying scenes; and accordingly, in a firm voice, he told her it was time to be gone. There were a few more tender and eager pressures of hands, a few more farewells, a few last looks at the old homestead and its surroundings, and the bankrupt pair sallied forth with their bundles, and, passing the bridge just at sunset, departed on foot across the desolate moor.

It is hard to bid farewell and quit the spots with which, even in a summer's journey, we have formed agreeable associations: but harder far it is to bid adieu forever to the home of our ancestors and the haunts of our youth. This dreadful trial was passing in De Vlierbeck's heart. From a distant point on the road where the domain of Grinselhof was masked by thickets, the wanderer turned his eyes once more in the direction of the old *chateau*. Big tears stood in his eyes and slowly rolled down his hollow cheeks as he stood there, silent and motionless, with clasped hands, gazing into vacancy. But night was rapidly falling around the wayfarers; and, recalling him to consciousness with a kiss, Lenora gently drew her father from the spot till they disappeared in the windings of the wood.

## CHAPTER IX.

Monsieur De Vlierbeck had not been gone a week, when a letter addressed to him from Italy reached the village post-office. The carrier inquired of Farmer John where the old proprietor of Grinselhof had fixed his residence; but neither from him, the notary, nor any one else in the neighborhood, could he discover the bankrupt's retreat. The same fate awaited three or four other letters which followed the first from Italy; and, indeed, nobody bothered himself any more about the wanderers except the peasant, who every market-day pestered the country-folks from every quarter with questions about his old master. But no one had seen or heard of him.

Four months passed slowly by, when one morning a handsome post-chaise stopped at the door of our old acquaintance the notary and dropped a young gentleman in travelling-costume.

“Where’s your master?” said he impatiently to the servant, who excused the notary under the plea of his present engagement with other visitors, but invited the stranger to await his leisure in the parlor.

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The youth was evidently disconcerted by the delay; for he paced the apartment with rapid strides and seemed altogether absorbed by some anxiety or disappointment which made him extremely restless. The notary's visitors seemed to be either very tedious clients or engaged in very important business; for more than half an hour elapsed before that functionary made his appearance. He came into the room ceremoniously, prepared to measure his words and reception by his visitor's rank; but no sooner did he perceive who it was than his calculating features relaxed into a professional smile, and he advanced rapidly toward Gustave with outstretched hands.

"How are you, how are you, my dear sir?" said he. "I have been expecting you for several days, and I am really happy to see you at last. I am greatly flattered by the confidence you are disposed to place in me, and am ready, whenever you please, to devote myself to your affairs. By-the-way, I suppose there is a will?"

A shadow passed over Gustave's brow and his face became serious as he took a portfolio from his overcoat and drew forth a package of papers.

"I am pained, sir, at your loss," said the notary. "Your excellent uncle was my friend, and I deplore his death more than that of any one else. It pleased God that he should die far away from his home. But such, alas! is man's fate. We must console ourselves by the reflection that we are all mortal. Your uncle was very fond of you, and I suppose you have not been forgotten in his last moments?"

"You may see for yourself," said Gustave, as he placed the package on the table.

The notary ran his eyes over the papers, and, as he perused them, his face exhibited by turns surprise and satisfaction.

"Permit me," said he, "to congratulate you, Monsieur Gustave; these documents are all in order and unassailable. Heir of all his fortune! Do you know, sir, that you are more than a *millionaire*?"

"We will speak of that another time," said Gustave, interrupting him rather sharply. "I called on you to-day to ask a favor."

"You have but to name it, sir."

"You were the notary of Monsieur De Vlierbeck?"

"I was."

"I heard from my uncle that Monsieur De Vlierbeck had become very poor. I have reasons for desiring that his misfortunes may not be prolonged."



“Sir,” said the notary, “I presume that you intend to do him an act of kindness; and, in truth, it could not be bestowed on a worthier man, for I know the cause of his ruin and sufferings. He was a victim of generosity and honor. He may have carried these virtues to imprudence and even to madness; but he deserved a better fate.”

“And now, sir,” said Gustave, “I want you to let me know, with the least amount of details possible, what I can do to assist De Vlierbeck without wounding his pride. I know the condition of his affairs; for my uncle told me all about them. Among other debts there was a bond for four thousand francs, which belongs to the heirs of Hoogebaen: I want that bond *immediately*, even if I have to pay four times as much as it is worth.”

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The notary stared at Gustave without replying.

"You seem disconcerted by my demand," said Gustave, somewhat anxiously.

"Not exactly," returned the notary; "but I do not altogether understand your emotion, although I fear the news I must impart will affect you painfully. If my anticipations are correct I have cause to be sorry for you, sir!"

"Explain yourself," cried Gustave, alarmed; "explain yourself, sir! Has death been at Grinselhof? Is my last hope destroyed?"

"No, no," replied the notary, quickly; "don't tremble so; they both live, but they have been stricken by a great misfortune."

"Well? well?" exclaimed Gustave, with questioning eagerness, rising from his chair.

"Be calm, be calm, sir," said the notary, soothingly; "sit down and listen; it is not so terrible as you may perhaps think, since fortune enables you to soften their misery."

"Oh, God be thanked!" cried Gustave. "But let me beg you to hasten your disclosures, for your slowness racks me!"

"Know, then," continued the notary, "that during your absence the bond in question fell due. For many months De Vlierbeck made unavailing efforts to find money to honor it at maturity; but all his property was mortgaged, and no one would assist him. In order to escape the mortification of a forced sale, De Vlierbeck offered every thing at public auction, even down to his furniture and clothes! The sale produced about enough to pay his debts, and everybody was satisfied by the honorable conduct of De Vlierbeck, who plunged himself into absolute beggary to save his name."

"And so he lives in the *chateau* of his family only as a tenant?"

"No; he has left it."

"And where does he reside, then? I want to see him instantly."

"I do not know."

"How?—you do not know?"

"Nobody knows where he dwells: he left the province without informing any one of his designs."

“Alas!” cried Gustave, with profound emotion, “and is it so? Shall I be forced to live longer without them?—without knowing what has become of them? Can you give me no hint or clue to their residence? Does nobody, nobody know where they are?”

“Nobody,” replied the notary. “The evening after their sale De Vlierbeck left Grinselhof on foot and crossed the moor by some unknown road: I made efforts to discover his retreat, but always without success.”

As this sad news was imparted to Gustave he grew deadly pale, trembled violently, and covered his forehead with his clasped hands, as if striving to conceal the big tears that ran from his eyes. What the notary first told him of De Vlierbeck’s misfortunes had wounded his sensibility, though he was less struck by that recital, because he had already become partially aware of the poor gentleman’s embarrassment; but the certainty that he could not *immediately* discover his beloved Lenora and snatch her from want overwhelmed him with the bitterest anguish.

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The notary fixed his eyes on the young man, shrugged his shoulders, and regarded him with an expression of pity.

“You are young, sir,” said he, “and, like most men at your time of life, exaggerate both pain and pleasure. Your despair is unfounded; for it is easy in our time to discover people whom we want to find. With a little money and diligence we may be sure, in a few days, to discover Monsieur De Vlierbeck’s retreat, even if he has gone abroad to a foreign country. If you are willing to charge me with the pursuit I will spare neither time nor trouble to bring you satisfactory news.”

Gustave stared hopefully at the notary as he grasped his hand and replied, with a smile of gratitude,—

“Oh, render me that inestimable service, sir! Spare no money; ransack heaven and earth if it is necessary; but, in God’s name, let me know, and let me know *soon*, where De Vlierbeck and his daughter are hidden. It is impossible for me to describe the sufferings of my heart or the ardor of my desire to find them. Let me assure you that the first good news you bring will be more grateful to my soul than if you had restored me to life.”

“Fear nothing, sir,” answered the notary. “My clerks shall write letters of inquiry this very night in every direction. To-morrow morning early I will be off to Brussels and secure assistance from the public offices. If you authorize me to spare no expense the secret will disclose itself.”

“And I,” said Gustave,—“I will put the numerous correspondents of our house under contribution, and nothing shall be omitted to detect their refuge, even if I have to travel over Europe.”

“Be of good cheer, then, Monsieur Gustave,” said the notary; “for I doubt not we shall soon attain our end. And, now that you are assured of my best services, I will be gratified if you allow me to speak to you a moment quietly and seriously. I have no right to ask what are your intentions, and still less the right to suppose that those intentions can be any thing else than proper in every respect. May I inquire if it is your design to marry Mademoiselle Lenora?”

“That is my irrevocable determination,” replied the young man.

“Irrevocable?” said the notary. “Be it so! The confidence which your venerable uncle was always pleased to repose in me, and my position as notary of the family, impose on me the duty of setting before you coolly what you are about to do. You are a *millionaire*; you have a name which in commerce alone represents an immense capital. Monsieur De Vlierbeck is penniless; his ruin is generally known; and the world, justly or unjustly,

looks askance at a ruined man. With your fortune, with your youth and person, you may obtain the hand of an heiress and double your income!"

Gustave listened to the first words of this calculating essay with evident impatience; but he soon turned away his eyes and began to fold up the papers and put them in his portfolio. As the notary finished, he answered, quickly,—



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"Well, well, I suppose you have done your duty, and I thank you; but we have had enough of that. Tell me who owns Grinselhof now?"

The man of business appeared considerably disconcerted by the contemptuous interruption of his visitor; yet he strove to conceal his mortification by a sorry smile, as he replied,—

"I see, sir, that you have taken a firm stand and will do as you please. Grinselhof was bought in by the mortgagees, for the price offered was below its value."

"Who lives there?"

"It is uninhabited. No one goes to the country in winter."

"Can it be bought from its present proprietor?"

"Certainly. I am authorized to offer it to any one for the amount of the mortgages."

"Then Grinselhof belongs to *me!* Be kind enough to inform the owners of it at once!"

"Very well, sir. Consider Grinselhof as your property from this moment. If you wish to visit it you will find the keys at the tenant's house."

Gustave took his hat and made ready to go, and, as he did so, pressed the notary's hand with evident cordiality:—

"I am tired and need repose, for I feel somewhat overcome by the sad news you have given me. May God help you in your efforts to fulfil your promises! My gratitude will surpass all you can imagine. Farewell till to-morrow!"

## CHAPTER X.

Spring, gentle spring, had thrown aside the funeral garb of winter, and earth awoke again to vigorous life. Grinselhof reappeared in all the splendor of its wild, natural scenery; its majestic oaks displayed their verdant domes, its roses bloomed as sweetly as of old, elder-blossoms filled the air with delicious odor, butterflies fluttered through the garden, and every thicket was vocal with the song of birds.

Nothing seemed changed at Grinselhof: its roads, its paths, were still deserted, and sad was the silence that reigned in its shadows. Yet immediately around the house there was more life and movement than formerly. At the coach-house two grooms were busy washing and polishing a new and fashionable coach; while the neigh of horses resounded from the stable. A trim waiting-maid stood on the door-sill laughing and joking with the lackeys, and a respectable old butler looked knowingly on the group.

Suddenly the clear silvery ring of a bell was heard from the parlor, and the waiting-maid ran in, exclaiming, "Good Heavens! there's Monsieur ringing for his breakfast, and it is not ready yet!"

A few moments afterward she was seen mounting the staircase with a rich silver salver covered with breakfast-things; and, entering the parlor, she placed them silently on a table before a young gentleman who seemed entirely absorbed by his own thoughts, and then instantly left the room without a word.

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The young man began his meal with a careless, indifferent air, as if he either had no appetite or did not know what he was about. The furniture of the apartment in which he sat presented odd and striking contrasts to an observer. While some of the articles were remarkable for the richness and elegance of their modern style, there were chairs, tables, and cabinets whose sombre hue and elaborate carving denoted an antiquity of several centuries. On the walls were numerous pictures, dimmed by smoke and time, encased in frames that had lost half their ornaments and gilding. These were portraits of warriors, statesmen, priests, and prelates. In the dim corners of the canvas armorial bearings of the house of De Vlierbeck might be seen, and many of the articles of furniture were embellished with the same blazonry.

We were told a while ago that a public sale at Grinselhof had dispersed among a crowd of competitors every thing that belonged to Monsieur De Vlierbeck. How has it come to pass that these portraits have returned to their old nails on walls which they seemed to have abandoned forever?

The listless youth rose from the table, walked slowly about the room, stopped, looked mournfully at the portraits, recommenced his walk, and approached an antique casket placed on a bracket in the corner. He opened it with apparent indifference and took out some simple jewelry,—a pair of ear-rings and a coral necklace. He gazed long at these objects as he held them in his hand; a few tears fell on them, a deep sigh escaped from his bosom, and he then replaced the jewels in their casket.

Quitting the room, he descended to the court. Waiters and servant-maids saluted as he passed: he acknowledged their civility by a silent nod and went forth to the most secluded parts of the garden. Stopping at the foot of a wild chestnut-tree, he threw himself on the ground, where he sat long in moody reverie until aroused by the ringing voice of Bess, who approached him with a book in her hand:—

“Here, sir, is a book which Mademoiselle Lenora used to read. My goodman went yesterday to market, where he found the farmer who bought it at the sale. After market was over John accompanied the peasant home, and would not leave him till he had bought the book back again. I suppose it is an excellent book, as Mademoiselle used to love it so; and neither gold nor silver could ever get it from me if it wasn't for you, sir. Husband says it is called LUCIFER'!”

While she was running on, Gustave seized the book eagerly and ran over its pages without paying attention to what she said. “Thank you, thank you for your kind attention, mother Bess!” said he. “You can't think how happy I am whenever I find any thing that belonged to your mistress. Be assured that I will never forget your goodness.” After offering this expression of his thanks to the farmer's wife he opened the book again and began to read without heeding her further. But the good woman did not go away, and soon interrupted him with a question:—

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"May I ask, sir, if you have any news yet of our young lady?"

Gustave shook his head. "Not the least scrap of news, mother Bess. My search has been fruitless."

"That is unlucky, sir. God knows where she may be and what she is suffering. She told me before she went away that she meant to work for her father; but one must have learned to work very early in life to earn a living by one's hands. My heart almost breaks when I think of it. Perhaps that good, sweet young lady is reduced to work for other people and labors like a slave to get a mouthful of bread! I have been a servant, sir, and I know what it is to work from morning until night for others. And she,—she who is so beautiful, so clever, so kind! Oh, sir, it is terrible! I can't help crying like a child, thinking of her miserable life!"

Gustave was overcome by the simple eloquence of the poor woman, and remained silent.

"And then to think," continued Bess, "she might now be so happy! that she might again become mistress of Grinselhof, where she was born and grew up! that her father might pass his old days in quietness, and that they are now wandering about the world poor, sick, abandoned outcasts! Oh, sir, it is sad to know that our benefactors are unhappy, and to be able to do nothing for them but pray to God and hope for his mercy!"

The simple-minded woman, without meaning it, had touched some tender strings in Gustave's heart; and, as she saw the silent tears coursing their way down his cheeks, she said, entreatingly,—

"Oh, pardon me, sir, for having grieved you so by my talk! but my heart is full, and my feelings force their way without knowing it. If I have done wrong, I am sure you are too kind to be angry with me for loving our young lady so much and bemoaning her misfortune. Have you no orders for me to-day, sir?"

She was about to go, as Gustave raised his downcast eyes and, restraining his tears, exclaimed,—

"I—angry with you, mother Bess?—and angry, too, because you show affection for our poor Lenora? Oh, no, no! On the contrary, I bless you for it with all my heart! The tears you betrayed from my heart have done me good; for I am very unhappy. Life is a burden; and if God, in his mercy, would take me away from earth, I would gladly die. All hope of seeing her again in this world is gone. Perhaps she is awaiting me in the next!"

"Oh, sir! sir! how you talk!" cried the peasant-woman, in alarm. "No! no! that cannot be!"

"You grieve, my good woman, and shed tears for her," continued Gustave, without heeding the interruption; "but don't you see how *my* soul must be consumed with

despair? Alas! for months and months I have implored God for the happiness of seeing her once more! I overcame all obstacles to our marriage, and I became almost mad with joy and impatience as I flew like lightning to the home where I left her; and then my only recompense, my only consolation,

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was to find her *gone* and the house of her fathers a wilderness!—to know, alas! that she is poor, and, perhaps, languishing in want!—to know that my noble-hearted and beloved Lenora sinks under the weight of misfortune, and yet to be able to do nothing to relieve her!—to be condemned to count in powerless despair her days of affliction, and not even to be sure that suffering has not killed her!”

A profound silence followed this complaining outburst, and the peasant-woman, with her head bent to the earth, sympathized with him truly, till, after a few moments, she attempted to console the sufferer in her simple way:—

“Oh, sir, I understand only too well how much you endure! And yet why despair? Who knows but we may receive some news of our dear young lady when we least expect it? God is good; he will hear our prayers; and our joy for her return will make us forget all our grief!”

“Oh that your prophecy might be realized, my good woman! But seven months have already gone since they departed. During three of them a hundred persons have been employed in seeking the wanderers. They have been sought for in every direction, and not the slightest intelligence has been obtained; not a trace, not the least sign that they are even alive! My reason tells me not to despair; but my heart magnifies my ills and cries aloud that I have lost her!—lost her forever!”

He was about quitting the garden, when a noise attracted his attention as he pointed toward the road leading to the *chateau*.

“Listen! Don’t you hear something?” cried he.

“It is the gallop of a horse,” answered Bess, without comprehending why the noise so much startled her master.

“Poor fool!” said the young man to himself; “why am I so startled by the passing of a horseman?”

“But see! see! he is coming into the avenue!” cried Bess, with increasing interest. “Oh, God! I am sure it is a messenger with news! Heaven grant it may be good!”

As she said this the rider passed through the gate at full gallop, and, drawing rein at the door they had just reached, took a letter from his pocket and handed it to the master of Grinselhof:—

“I come,” said he, “from your notary, who ordered me to deliver you this letter without a moment’s delay.”

Gustave broke the seal with a trembling hand, while Bess, smiling with hope, followed all her master's movements with staring eyes.

As he read the first lines the anxious youth grew pale; but as he went on a tremor ran through all his limbs, till with a hysterical laugh and clasped hands he exclaimed,—

“Thanks! thanks! Oh, God! she is restored to me!”

“Oh, sir, sir,” cried Bess, “is it good news?”

“Yes! yes! rejoice with me! Lenora lives! I know where she is!” answered Gustave, half mad with delight, running into the house and calling all the servants. “Quick! quick! Have out the travelling-carriage and the English horses! My trunk! my cloak! Quick! fly!”

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He carried forth with his own hands a number of things that were necessary for the journey. His fleetest horses were attached to the vehicle; and, although they strained their bits and pawed the ground as if impatient for the road, the postillion lashed them fiercely as they dashed through the gateway.

In a moment, and almost as if by magic, the coach was on the road to Antwerp and hidden from the staring crowd by a cloud of dust.

### CHAPTER XI.

Suppose that we too take a trip in fancy to Nancy, in France, in search of poor De Vlierbeck and his daughter. Let us wind through an immense number of narrow streets in the quarter known as the Old Town and at last halt at the door of an humble cobbler. This is the place. Pass through the shop, mount the staircase; another story yet; open that door, and here we are.

Every thing indicates poverty; but order and neatness preside over the room. The curtains of the little bed are white as snow, the stove is polished with black-lead till it shines, and the floor is sanded in Flemish style. Mignonette and violets bloom in a box on the window-sill, and a bird chirps in its cage above them. A young woman sits in front of the window; but she is so intent on the linen she is sewing that no other sound is heard in the silent room but that made by the motion of her hands as they guide the needle. She is dressed in the plainest garments; yet they are cut and put on so gracefully that one may declare at a glance she is a lady.

Poor Lenora! And this was what fate had in store for thee! To hide thy noble birth under the humble roof of a mechanic; to seek a refuge from insult and contempt far from thy childhood's home; to work without relaxation; to fight against privation and want, and to sink at last into shame and poverty, heart-broken by despair! Misery, doubtless, has cast a yellow tinge upon thy cheeks and stolen its radiance from thy glance. But no! thank God, it is not so! Thy heroic blood has strengthened thee against fate, and thy beauty is even more ravishing than of old! If a cloistered life has chastened thy roses, their tender bloom has only become more touching. Thy brow has grown loftier and purer; thine eyes still glisten beneath their sweeping lashes; and that well-remembered smile still hovers around thy coral lips!

Suddenly Lenora stopped working. Her hands rested on the work in her lap, her head bent forward, her eyes were riveted dreamily on the ground, and her soul, wandering perhaps to other lands, seemed to abandon itself on the current of a happy reverie. After a while she placed the linen she had been sewing on a chair and got up slowly. Leaning languidly on the window-frame, she gathered a few violets, played with them a while, and then looked abroad at the sky over the roof-tops, as if longing to breathe once more the fresh air and enjoy the spring. Soon her eyes fixed themselves



compassionately on the bird that hopped about its cage and ever and anon struck its bill against the wires as if striving to get out.

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"Why dost thou want to leave us, dear little bird?" said she, softly. "Why dost thou wish to be gone, dear comforter of our sadness? Sing gayly to-day; father is well again, and life is once more a pleasure. What is it makes thee flutter about so wildly and pant in thy cage? Ah! is it not hard, dear little one, to be captive when we know there are joy and freedom in the open air?—when we are born in the fields and woods?—when we know that *there* alone are independence and liberty. Like thee, poor bird, I am a child of nature; I too have been torn from my birthplace; I too bemoan the solitudes where my childhood was passed! But has a friend or lover been snatched from thee—as from me—forever? Dost thou grieve for something more than space and freedom? Yet why do I ask? Thy love-season has come round again, has it not? and love is the greatest blessing of thy little life! I understand thee, poor bird! I will no longer be thy fate! Fly away, and God help you! Begone, and enjoy the two greatest blessings of life! Ah, how thou singest as thy wings bear thee away,—away to the sky and woods! Farewell! farewell!" As she uttered these last words Lenora opened the cage-door and released the bird, which darted away like an arrow. After this she resumed her work and sewed on with the same zeal as before, till aroused by the sound of footsteps on the staircase.

"It is father! God grant he may have been lucky to-day!"

Monsieur De Vlierbeck entered the room with a roll of paper in his hand, and, throwing himself languidly into a chair, seemed altogether worn out with fatigue. He had become very thin; his eyes were sunk in their sockets, his cheeks were pale, and his whole expression was changed and broken. It was very evident that sickness or depression, or perhaps both, had made fearful ravages on his body as well as spirits.

The poor old gentleman was wretchedly clad. It was evident that he had striven as formerly to conceal his indigence, for there was not a stain or grain of dust on his garments; but the stuff was threadbare and patched, and all his garments were too large for his shrunken limbs.

Lenora looked at him a moment anxiously. "You do not feel ill, father, do you?"

"No, Lenora," replied he; "but I am very wretched."

Lenora said nothing, but embraced him tenderly and then knelt down with his hand in hers.

"Father," said she, "it is hardly a week since you were ill in bed: we prayed to God for your restoration, and he listened to our prayers; you are cured, dear father, and yet you give way anew at the first disappointment. You have not been successful to-day, father? I see it in your face. Well, what of it? Why should it interfere with our happiness? We have long learned how to fight against fate. Let us be strong and look misery in the face with heads up: courage is wealth; and so, father dear, forget your disappointment. Look at me. Am I sad? do I allow myself to be downcast and

despairing? I suffered and wept enough when you were ill; but, now that you are well again, come what may, your Lenora will always thank God for his goodness!"

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The poor old man smiled feebly at the courageous excitement of his daughter.

“Poor child!” said he; “I understand very well how you strive to appear strong in order to keep me up. May heaven repay your love, dear angel whom God has given me! your word and smile control me so completely that I may say a part of your soul passes with them into mine. I came home just now quite heart-broken and half crazy with despair; but you, my child, have restored me to myself again.”

“That’s right, father,” said she, rising from her knees and sitting down on a chair close beside him; “come, father, tell me now all your adventures to-day, and afterward I will tell you something that will make you laugh.”

“Alas, my child! I went to Monsieur Roncevaux’s academy to resume my English lessons; but during my sickness an Englishman was put in my place: we have lost our best bit of bread.”

“Well, how is it about Mademoiselle Pauline’s German lesson?”

“Mademoiselle Pauline has gone to Strasburg and will not come back again. You see, Lenora, that we are losing every thing at once; so, have I not cause to be anxious and downcast? This news seems to overcome you, my child, strong as you are!”

In truth, Lenora was somewhat appalled by the dejecting words; but her father’s remark restored her self-possession, and she replied, with a forced smile,—

“I was thinking, father, of the pain these dismissals gave you, and they really annoyed me Yet there are some things that ought to make me happy to-day. Yes, father, I have some good news for you!”

“Indeed? You astonish me!”

Lenora pointed to the chair.

“Do you see that linen?” said she. “I have a dozen fine shirts to make out of it; and when they are done there are as many more waiting for me. They pay me good wages, and I think, from what they say, that in time there will be something better in store for me. But as yet that is only a hope,—only a hope.”

De Vlierbeck seemed particularly struck by the last remark of his daughter, as he looked at her anxiously.

“Well! well! what is it that makes you so happy and hopeful?” said he.

Lenora took up her sewing again and went busily to work.

“You wouldn’t guess it in a week, father! Do you know who gave me this work? It is the rich lady who lives in the house with a court-yard, at the corner of our street. She sent for me this morning, and I went to her while you were abroad. You are surprised, father; are you not?”

“I am, indeed, Lenora. You are speaking of Madame De Royan, for whom you were employed to embroider those handsome collars. How does she come to know you?”

“I really don’t know. Perhaps the person who gave me her collars to embroider told her who worked them: she must have spoken to her about your illness and our poverty, for Madame De Royan knows more of us than you imagine.’

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“Heavens! She does not know—”

“No! she knows nothing about our *name* or from whence we came.”

“Go on, Lenora; you excite my curiosity. I see you want to tease me to-day!”

“Well, father, if you are tired I will cut my story short. Madame De Royan received me with great kindness, complimented me on my embroidery, asked me some questions about our misfortunes, and consoled and encouraged me generously. ‘Go, my child!’ said she, as she gave me the linen; ‘work with a good will and be prudent: I will protect you. I have a great deal of sewing to do,—enough for two months at least. But that would not be enough; I mean to recommend you to all my friends, and I mean to see that you are paid for your work in such a way that your father and yourself shall be above want.’ I took her hand and kissed it, for I was touched by the delicacy with which she give me *work* and not *alms*! Madame De Royan understood me, and, laying her hand kindly on my shoulder, ‘Keep up your spirits, Lenora,’ said she; ‘the time will come when you must take apprentices to help you, and so by degrees you will become mistress of a shop.’ Yes, father, that’s what she said; I know her words by heart.”

With this she sprang to her father, embraced him, and added, with considerable emotion,—

“What say you to it, father? Is it not good news? Who knows what may come to pass? Apprentices,—a shop,—a store,—a servant: you will keep the books and buy our goods, I will sit in the room and superintend the workwomen! How sweet it is to be happy and to know that we owe all to the work of our hands! Then, father, your promise will indeed be fulfilled, and then you may pass your old days happily.”

There was a look of such extreme serenity in Monsieur De Vlierbeck’s face, an expression of such vivid happiness was reflected from his wrinkled cheeks, that it was evident he had allowed his daughter’s story to bewitch him into entire forgetfulness. But he soon found it out, and shook his head mournfully at the enchantress:—

“Oh! Lenora, Lenora, you witch! how easily have you managed to seduce me! I followed your words like a child, and I really believed in the happiness you promised. But let us be serious. The shoemaker spoke to me again about the rent, and asked me to pay it. We still owe him twenty francs, do we not?”

“Yes, twenty francs for rent, and about twelve francs to the grocer: that’s all. When the shirts are done we will give my wages on account to the shoemaker, and I know he will be satisfied. The grocer is willing to give us longer credit. I received two francs and a half for my last work. You see very well, father, that we are still quite rich, and before a month is over will be out of debt entirely.”

Poor De Vlierbeck seemed quite consoled; and a gleam of fortitude shone in his black eyes as he approached the table, unrolling the paper he had brought with him on his return.

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"I have something to do too, Lenora. Professor Delsaux gave me some pieces of music to copy for his pupils, which will give me four francs in a couple of days. And now be quiet a while, my dear child; my nerves are so shattered that if we talk I shall make mistakes and spoil the paper."

"I may sing, father; may I not?"

"Oh, yes; that won't annoy me: your song will please my ear without distracting my attention."

The old gentleman went on writing, while Lenora, with a rich and joyous voice, repeated all her songs and poured forth her heart in melody. She sewed meanwhile diligently, and, from time to time, glanced at her father to see whether the cloud had fallen again over his face and spirit.

They had been a considerable time engaged with their several occupations, when the parish clock struck; and, putting down her work hastily, Lenora took a basket from behind the stove and prepared to go out. Her father looked up with surprise as he said,

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"What! *already*, Lenora?"

"It has just struck half-past eleven, father."

Without making any other remark, De Vlierbeck bent his head again over the music-paper and continued his task.

Lenora soon returned from her walk with her basket full of potatoes and something else tied up in a paper, which she hid beneath a napkin. Then, pouring some water in a pot which she placed beside her chair, she began to sing, and threw in the potatoes as she peeled them. After this she kindled a fire in the stove and set the pot of potatoes to boil. After the fire burned well she put a skillet, with a little butter and a good deal of vinegar, over the coals.

Up to this moment her father had not looked up nor intermitted his work; he saw her getting dinner ready every day, and it was seldom that any variety of food appeared on their table. But, hardly had the potatoes begun to boil, when an agreeable perfume was diffused through the chamber. De Vlierbeck glanced up from his writing, a little reproachfully, as he exclaimed,—

"What! meat on Friday, my child? you know very well we must be economical."

"Don't be angry, father," answered Lenora; "the doctor ordered it."

"You are trying to deceive me, are you not?"



“No, no; the doctor said you required meat at least three times a week, if we could get it; it will do you more good than any thing else in restoring your strength.”

“And yet we are in debt, Lenora!”

“Come, come, father, let our debts alone, everybody will be paid and satisfied. Don’t trouble yourself about them any more: I’ll answer for them all. And now be so good as to take your papers off of the table, so that I can lay the cloth.”

De Vlierbeck got up and did as he was asked. Lenora covered the deal-boards with a snowy napkin and placed on it two plates and a dish of potatoes. It was indeed an humble table, at which all was extremely common; yet every thing was so neat, fresh, and savory, that a rich man might have sat down to it with appetite. They took their places and asked a blessing on the meal; but, before the prayer was finished, Lenora started suddenly and interrupted her father. With eyes staring toward the door and head leaned forward, she listened eagerly, motioning her father with her hand to be silent.

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There was a sound of footsteps and voices on the staircase, and, as they approached, Lenora thought she recognised the tones. She bounded to the door with a sharp cry, and, closing it, leaned against the boards to prevent any one from entering.

“For God’s sake, child, what are you afraid of?” cried her father.

“GUSTAVE! GUSTAVE!” whispered Lenora, with pale and quivering lips. “He is there! he is there! I hear him. Take away that table quickly. Of all the world he is the last who should see our misery!”

De Vlierbeck’s face grew dark, his head became erect and fierce, and his eyes flashed with their ancient fire. Advancing silently to his daughter, he drew her from the door. Lenora fled to a corner of the room, and covered her face, which was red with mortification.

Suddenly the door opened, and a young man rushed into the chamber with an exclamation of joy as he advanced, open-armed, toward the trembling girl, whom he would have pressed to his breast had not the hand and look of her father arrested his steps.

For a moment he stood like one stupefied, glancing from the wretched board to the miserable dress of the old man and his daughter. The sight affected the intruder, for he covered his eyes as he exclaimed, in subdued and despairing tones, “Oh, God! has it come to this?”

But he did not allow himself to remain long under the influence either of his feelings or of her father, and, advancing anew to Lenora, seized and pressed both her hands ardently.

“Oh! look at me, Lenora! Let me see if thy heart has preserved the memory of our love!”

Lenora’s eyes met his at once and with affection. It was a look that completely revealed her pure and constant soul.

“Oh, happiness!” cried Gustave, enthusiastically; “thou art still my dear and tender Lenora! Thank God, no power on earth can ever separate me again from my betrothed! Receive, receive the kiss of our union!”

He stretched his arms toward her. Lenora, trembling with agony and happiness, stood downcast and blushing, as if awaiting the solemn kiss; but, before Gustave could accomplish the act, De Vlierbeck was by his side, and, grasping his hand, held him motionless.

“Monsieur Denecker,” said her father, severely, “have the goodness to moderate your transports. We are certainly glad to see you once more; but neither you nor I can forget what we are. Respect our poverty!”

“What do you say?” cried Gustave. “*What you are!* You are my friend,—my father. Lenora is my betrothed! Oh heaven! why look at me so reproachfully?”

He seized the hand of Lenora again, and, drawing her toward her father, rapidly continued:—

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"Listen! My uncle died in Italy and left me heir of all his property. He commanded me on his death-bed to marry Lenora. I have searched heaven and earth to find you. I have suffered for many months all the torture that a nature like mine can endure; and at length I have discovered you! I have come, sir, to ask the reward of my suffering. I lay my fortune, heart, and life at your feet; and, in exchange, I implore the happiness of leading Lenora to the altar. Grant me that favor, O my *father*! Grinselhof awaits you. I bought it for you. Every thing is there again. The portraits of your ancestors are in their places on the wall, and every thing that was dear to you is restored. Come! let me watch your old days, your declining years, with the veneration of a son! let me make you happy again;—oh, how happy!"

The old man's expression did not change, yet a tear moistened his eye.

"Ah!" continued Gustave, "nothing on earth can again separate me from her,—not even a father's power; for I feel that God himself has given her to me! Yet pardon me, father, for my rashness, and bestow your benediction!"

De Vlierbeck seemed to have utterly forgotten the young man and his transports; for he stood with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven, as if addressing his Maker in fervent prayer. At length his words began to be heard distinctly:—

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret! rejoice on the bosom of God. My promise is fulfilled;—thy child will be happy!"

Gustave and Lenora stood before him hand in hand; and, as he threw his arms around the young man,—

"May Heaven bless you for your love!" continued he. "Make my child happy. She is your wife!"

"Gustave, Gustave,—*my husband!*" exclaimed Lenora, as they threw themselves into each other's arms, and the first kiss of love—the first consecrated kiss—was exchanged on the breast of that happy father, who wept over and blessed his children.

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And now, gentle reader, I must inform you that I have had my own reasons for concealing the situation and even the true name of the *chateau* of DE VLIERBECK. None of you will, therefore, ever know where Gustave and Lenora dwell. I know Monsieur and Madame Denecker intimately, and have taken many a walk around Grinselhof with two charming little children and their venerable *grandfather*. I have often beheld the beautiful picture of peace, love, and domestic happiness that is seen in that old house beneath the grim ancestral portraits or in the fresh air under the trees. I will not say who told me the story of this family. Let it suffice that I know all the persons who

have played a part in it, and that I have often chatted with Farmer John and Dame Bess while they poured forth their gossip about “The Poor Gentleman” and his trials.